

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



BIG BROTHER

Myanmar Internet Project warns of enhanced surveillance via new IMEI registration system

+ Middle East war fallout

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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.

BUILDING A DYSTOPIAN SURVEILLANCE STATE

The steady expansion of surveillance in Myanmar under the military junta increasingly evokes the dystopian warnings imagined by George Orwell. In his famous novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell described a world in which the state monitored every aspect of life through the ever-present figure of Big Brother. While Myanmar's reality is not identical to Orwell's fiction, the direction of the country's governance since the 2021 Myanmar military coup raises deeply troubling parallels about how modern technology can be used to entrench authoritarian power.

Since seizing control, the junta has pursued an increasingly sophisticated system of digital and physical monitoring. Telecommunications networks have been brought under tighter control, with authorities requiring telecom operators to enable interception capabilities. Internet shutdowns, data tracking, and forced SIM card registration have become common tools. These measures allow the state not only to disrupt communication during protests but also to trace individuals who share dissenting opinions online.

Equally concerning is the growing use of advanced surveillance technologies. Reports from rights groups indicate that the military has sought access to facial recognition software, spyware, and mass data monitoring systems capable of identifying activists in real time. In urban centres such as Yangon and Mandalay, the expansion of CCTV networks combined with facial recognition raises the possibility of automated tracking of citizens' movements. When these systems are placed in the hands of an unaccountable regime, they become tools not of public safety but of political control.

The danger lies not merely in the presence of surveillance but in the political context in which it operates. Democracies often employ surveillance

technologies under legal constraints and oversight mechanisms. In Myanmar, however, the judiciary has been weakened, independent media suppressed, and civil liberties curtailed. Under such conditions, surveillance infrastructure can easily evolve into a mechanism for intimidation. Citizens may begin to assume that their phone calls, messages, and movements are constantly monitored, creating a climate of self-censorship even without direct intervention by the authorities.

This psychological dimension mirrors the central warning of Orwell's *Big Brother* - control does not require constant punishment if the population internalizes the fear of being watched. When people believe that any criticism of the regime might be recorded and punished, public discourse shrinks. Activism becomes more dangerous, and ordinary social interactions acquire a layer of anxiety. The surveillance state thus reshapes society not only through technology but through the quiet erosion of trust and freedom.

For Myanmar, the long-term implications are profound. A deeply entrenched surveillance apparatus could outlast the current political crisis, embedding itself into institutions and governance structures for decades. Even if political change eventually arrives - freeing Myanmar from the grip of military dictatorship - dismantling such systems is notoriously difficult once they are integrated into the machinery of the state.

The specter of a digital Big Brother in Myanmar therefore represents more than a technological shift. It signals the potential consolidation of authoritarian rule in which control is exercised through data, algorithms, and fear - precisely the kind of future Orwell warned the world about generations ago.

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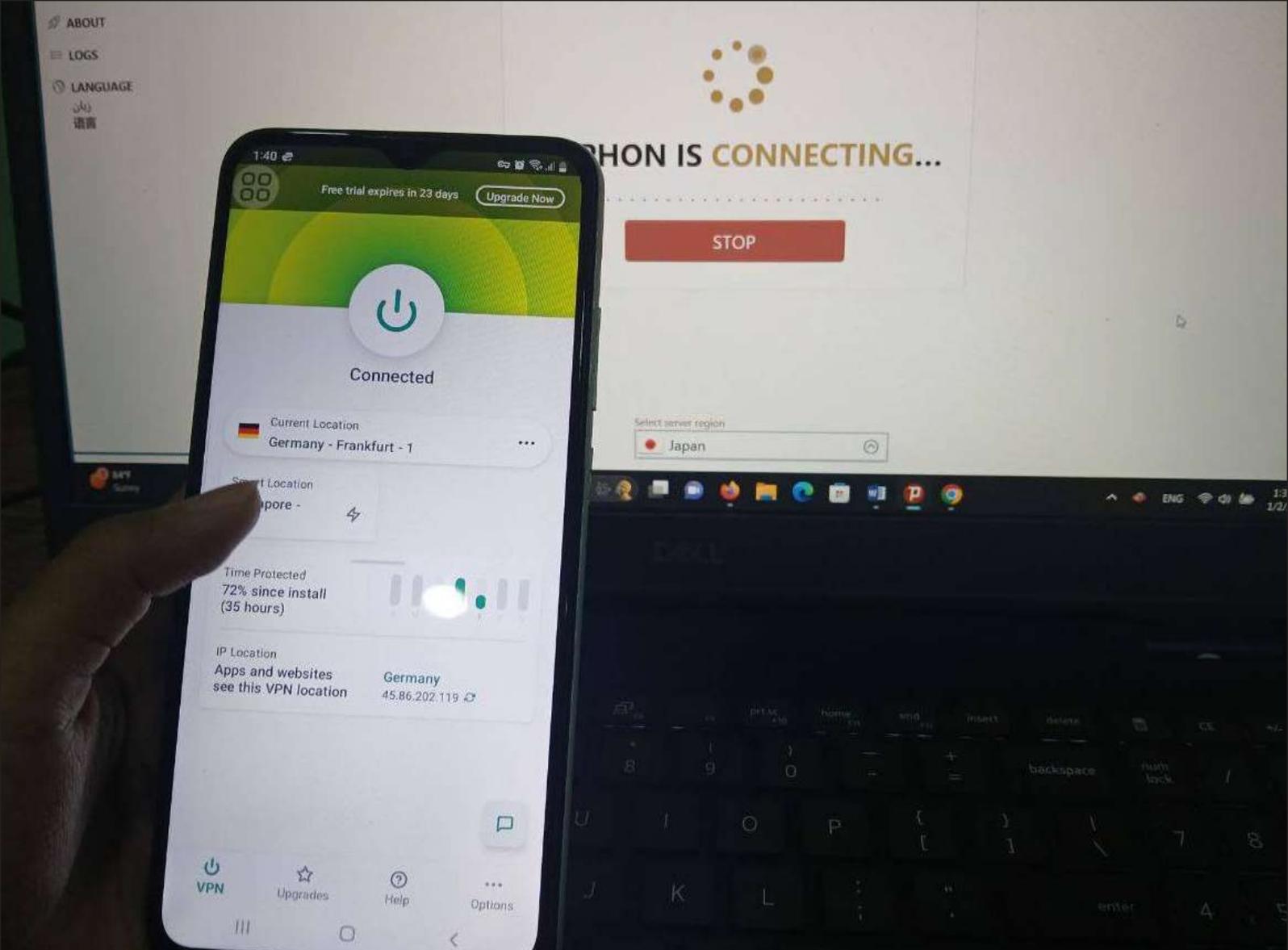
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Cover photo of monks in Yangon
by AFP



BIG BROTHER

MYANMAR INTERNET PROJECT

WARNS OF ENHANCED

SURVEILLANCE VIA NEW IMEI

REGISTRATION SYSTEM

The Myanmar Internet Project (MIP) has issued an urgent security warning following the military junta's announcement that it will begin mandatory International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) registration through its new Central Equipment Identity Register (CEIR) system.

Starting the first week of March 2026, the program aims to link every mobile device to its user's national ID and SIM card, a move that digital rights researchers say significantly upgrades the junta's mass surveillance capabilities. While the junta claims the CEIR system is a standard measure to curb illegal imports and ensure tax compliance, the MIP warns that it provides the state with the tools to precisely track user locations, remotely control devices, and target individuals for communication blocks.

"The junta has been implementing and using digital surveillance methods for quite some time. This new program is an additional upgrade to their digital surveillance mechanisms," said Ko Thit Nyan, a digital freedom researcher from MIP, speaking to Mizzima.

"What we can recommend is for people to remain aware of security risks and improve their digital literacy," he added.

According to MIP's statement, the junta has already obtained biometric data of many citizens through the electronic identification (E-ID) process. SIM card registrations have also previously been conducted using citizens' national registration numbers. With the new IMEI registration, the SIM card, national ID number, and IMEI will be linked together, making it possible to precisely identify who is using a particular device.

The statement also noted that a SIM card usually connects to at least three nearby cell towers, which will significantly increase the ability to track the approximate location of users.

Therefore, MIP recommended that users avoid making direct phone calls through SIM cards whenever

possible and instead use encrypted messaging applications such as Signal through Wi-Fi connections. It also advised storing important information in secure cloud storage rather than directly on phones, using Airplane Mode when necessary to temporarily disconnect from mobile towers, and for greater security, wrapping phones in aluminium foil to block signals between the device and cell towers.

In addition, MIP suggested that users connect devices without registered IMEI numbers to trusted Wi-Fi networks without inserting SIM cards, avoid granting unnecessary location permissions to applications, and use more secure two-factor authentication (2FA) methods such as Google Authenticator instead of SMS-based verification.

MIP also advised users to transfer important data from their phones to secure storage and delete it completely before IMEI registration. Android users should check whether their phones are encrypted and enable encryption if not already done. It further recommended always using a lock screen and consistently using reliable VPN services.

However, the junta stated that the system is intended to ensure that mobile phone users in the country can safely use devices that meet official standards and have paid the required taxes.

Authorities also said that mobile phones currently in use by the public will be automatically added to the CEIR whitelist. To ensure inclusion in the list, users must insert and activate SIM cards from mobile operators (MPT, ATOM, U9, and Mytel) in their devices by 31 March.

Starting from 1 April, devices not included in the approved list will only be allowed temporary access to mobile networks for 30 days from the time they first connect. Within that period, users must pay the required taxes and penalties in order to continue using the devices.



Myanmar is becoming a surveillance state. Photo: AFP

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



IDPs in Karen State

THE MYANMAR IDP CRISIS WORSENS

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), more than 3.6 million people are currently estimated to be internally displaced across Myanmar. However, the challenges faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) vary widely depending on the region and which forces control the area.

In the central regions of the country, particularly in the heartland areas, IDPs often cannot establish camps in one location for long periods. Junta military columns frequently conduct operations that target civilian communities, forcing displaced people to flee repeatedly. As a result, many IDPs are forced to move from place to place to avoid military raids and attacks.

Even in areas controlled by revolutionary forces, stability remains fragile. IDP camps in these territories must often relocate whenever reports emerge of junta troop movements approaching nearby areas. This constant displacement places severe pressure on vulnerable groups, especially elderly people. Several elderly IDPs have reportedly died due to a combination of food shortages, lack of medical care, and the physical strain of moving frequently under harsh weather conditions.

Water shortages have also become a major concern in many displacement areas. Limited access to clean water has led to poor personal hygiene conditions in camps, contributing to the spread of skin diseases and other health problems among displaced communities.

Humanitarian access remains another serious challenge. Due to strict restrictions imposed by junta authorities on aid deliveries to areas outside their control, many IDPs across the country are facing shortages of basic necessities, including food and medicines.

Women and girls are facing additional hardships in displacement sites. According to a statement from the Women for Justice (WJ) organization, women IDPs in Chin State and Sagaing Region are struggling with a lack of basic hygiene supplies, including sanitary pads. Living conditions in many camps are also highly crowded, with families sharing sleeping areas, toilets, and bathing spaces without proper separation.

These conditions have increased the risk of gender-based violence. Women in some camps have reported experiencing sexual harassment and verbal sexual abuse. In February alone, seven cases of violence against women were reported in Chin State and Sagaing Region, including two cases of domestic violence and one rape case. However, victims often cannot report these crimes formally due to security concerns and the absence of functioning legal systems in displacement areas.

Fuel shortages have further complicated the humanitarian situation. As the military prioritizes domestic fuel supplies amid global tensions, including conflicts in the Middle East, fuel availability has tightened across Myanmar. Long queues have formed at gas stations in urban areas, while fuel prices in revolutionary-controlled regions have risen sharply, severely affecting transportation and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to displaced communities.

Worsening humanitarian aid problems

Cuts to funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have forced the suspension of essential medical services in Myanmar's Chin State, according to the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), highlighting the growing humanitarian strain on communities displaced by the country's ongoing conflict.

CHRO reported that emergency mobile medical teams serving remote areas of Chin State have halted operations following the funding reduction. The cuts have also disrupted the supply of medicines, support for medical staff, and transportation for healthcare



Humanitarian aid in Myanmar. Photo: TBC

delivery, leaving many communities without access to basic medical care.

The impact is not limited to Chin State. Internally displaced people (IDPs) across Myanmar are facing similar challenges as humanitarian organizations struggle with shrinking resources. Reduced funding has weakened already fragile support systems for displaced populations who rely on aid for food, shelter, and healthcare.

In Shwebo Township in Sagaing Region, different groups of IDPs have taken refuge in various locations. These include people sheltering in junta-controlled towns, those who fled from pro-junta militia villages, and others displaced from different regions of the country. Local People's Administrative Forces (PAFs) are attempting to provide assistance where possible.

For example, the Shwebo PAF helps establish temporary shelters, arrange emergency accommodation, and coordinate basic food distribution with humanitarian aid providers. They also assist IDPs in relocating when military operations intensify, working together with revolutionary military units and local civilian administrations to move displaced families away from areas facing indiscriminate attacks by junta troops.

Humanitarian access remains a major obstacle. The junta has imposed tight restrictions on aid deliveries to areas controlled by revolutionary forces, including territories administered by ethnic armed organizations (EROs). These limitations have prevented many displaced communities from receiving assistance, even from domestic donors.



Refugee children in a camp in Thailand.
Photo: AFP

In some areas, local resistance groups have stepped in to provide limited services. In Salin Township, for instance, security concerns prevent rural residents and IDPs from traveling to urban hospitals. Medics from the Salin People's Defense Force (PDF) operate two teams providing basic healthcare, including childbirth assistance, to both villagers and displaced families.

Opportunities and difficulties for refugees

Japan has pledged more than 90 million baht in support of refugees along the Thai-Myanmar border, aiming to ease pressure on local healthcare systems strained by recent international aid cuts. The funding, provided by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) through the World Health Organization (WHO), will support a medical service promotion project focused on strengthening healthcare access for refugees living in camps along the border.

According to project details, the funds will be used to improve medical service centres, strengthen sanitation systems, provide essential medical supplies, and support training programmes for healthcare workers. The approved budget will also help upgrade five hospitals in Thailand's Tak Province - Mae Sot, Tha Song Yang, Phop Phra, Umphang, and Mae Ramat hospitals - which serve refugee camps located along the Thai-Myanmar border. These facilities have long been a critical healthcare lifeline for displaced populations from Myanmar.

Refugee camps along the Thai side of the border have existed for more than five decades, with some families now spanning three generations in displacement. Despite the long presence of these communities, refugees have historically faced strict restrictions on movement and employment, leaving them largely dependent on international humanitarian assistance.

Thai authorities have recently begun allowing some refugees to work outside the camps under a regulated scheme. A spokesperson for the Thai prime minister said that permitting refugees to work could benefit both the refugees and the Thai economy, suggesting that their participation in the labour market could contribute to national GDP while enabling refugees to become more self-reliant.

However, labour activists have expressed concerns that Myanmar migrant workers who already possess proper documents but remain unemployed could face increased competition. Despite these concerns, many activists have welcomed the Thai government's decision to allow refugees to work, particularly as international humanitarian funding cuts have significantly affected aid programmes supporting refugee communities.

According to a refugee camp leader speaking to Myanmar Now, around 200 refugees have begun working in plantations and orchards across Thailand, including in Sisaket, Chanthaburi, Bangkok, and Ayutthaya. The programme reportedly began on October 1.

Under the arrangement, employers must register with Thai labor authorities and specify which refugee camps their workers will come from. Once approved, employers can collect workers directly from the camps, allowing them to live and work outside for up to one year. Employers must also report to camp leaders about the workers' status twice a year, or at least once annually if the workplace is far from the camp.

While refugees have high hopes for the scheme, participation remains limited. Past experiences of wage exploitation and lack of workplace protections have made some refugees hesitant to leave the camps for work. For example, fewer than 10 refugees from Noe Phoe camp have joined the programme so far. Overall, just over 100 people from two camps - out of more than 2,000 eligible workers - are currently working outside. Among them, about 30 have already returned to the camps after finding their jobs unsuitable.



MYANMAR JUNTA FORMS MAJOR GENERAL-LED TASK FORCE TO LAUNCH GLOBAL PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE AND DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN

The Myanmar military junta has established a high-level 12-member task force, led by Major General Aung Myo Thant, to intensify information operations and counter-narratives against revolutionary forces and international media, Myanmar Gazette reported on 27 February.

Officially titled the "Information Sheet Publication and Counter-Information Dissemination Group," the body was formed in late January 2026 and began its mandate to conduct psychological warfare against armed insurgent groups while refuting unfavourable reports from independent media outlets.

The group is headed by Major General Aung Myo Thant, the junta's Deputy Minister of Defence, with Brigadier General Soe Nyunt, Deputy Chief of the Training Depot, serving as secretary, and Police Major General Win Bo, Deputy Chief 1 of the Myanmar Police Force, appointed joint secretary.

The 12-member body includes its chair, Major General Aung Myo Thant, along with Major General Aung Khin Thein, Vice Judge Advocate General from the Office of the Judge Advocate General; Brigadier General San Nyo Win, Deputy Director of the Public Relations and Psychological Warfare Directorate; U Aye Kwal, Director-General at the Ministry of Information; and Dr. Thida Tin, Director-General of the Media Development

Department.

The statement said the group's mandate is to "conduct information operations against insurgent organizations that are fighting against the state government through armed means."

The statement also said the group will publish morale-boosting news aimed at officers and their families, as well as civil servants serving in ministries under the junta.

The statement added that key policy-related reports from state-run daily newspapers will be published in Myanmar, English, Russian and Chinese and distributed to embassies and military attaché offices at home and abroad.

The statement further said the group will use various social media platforms to disseminate information about the Myanmar junta to both domestic and international audiences, and will respond promptly to and refute reports issued by organizations and media outlets opposed to the junta.

Since mid-2025, the junta has also established a body known as the Community Development Committee, tasked with rallying public support for the military while denouncing revolutionary forces through coordinated propaganda efforts.



UK TELLS UNHRC MYANMAR ELECTIONS NOT A SOLUTION TO CRISIS

On 2 March, the UK addressed the UN Human Rights Council, expressing concern over escalating violence in Myanmar, urging the junta to stop hostilities, allow aid access, and release arbitrarily detained individuals.

The statement by UK Human Rights Ambassador Eleanor Sanders is as follows.

We remain deeply concerned by the worsening human rights situation in Myanmar. Violence continues to escalate, including through indiscriminate attacks on civilians, punitive village burnings and forced recruitment.

The military's obstruction of humanitarian assistance has pushed communities to the brink of catastrophe. Severe shortages of medicine and food place millions at risk. Rohingya, Rakhine and other minority groups bear the brunt of these actions.

Since 2017, the UK has provided over £115m in assistance to communities in Rakhine. But this support alone is not enough. We call on the military to allow rapid, full, safe, and unimpeded humanitarian access to alleviate the dire situation, particularly in Rakhine.

Madam Vice President, the recent military-run elections were neither free nor fair. They do not present a solution to the crisis. We reiterate our support to the ASEAN Five Point Consensus, and the work of the ASEAN and UN Special Envoys. We urge all parties, especially the Myanmar military, to cease hostilities, respect international law, protect civilians, and release all those arbitrarily detained.

As penholder at the UN Security Council, the UK is committed to maintaining a spotlight on the crisis and to pressing for accountability in all UN fora.



NGO CALLS FOR UK TO TAKE A NEW APPROACH ON MYANMAR AT THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

Burma Campaign UK released a statement on 6 March calling for the UK government to adopt a new approach on the crisis in Myanmar at the UN Security Council with a stronger focus on human rights.

The text of the Burma Campaign UK statement is as follows.

As the UK today convenes a meeting on the crisis in Burma at the United Nations Security Council, Burma Campaign UK called on the British government to change its approach with a stronger focus on human rights, and a focus on how the Burmese military is violating numerous UN Security Council Resolutions.

The UK is 'penholder' on Burma at the UN Security Council, which means it leads on the crisis at the Council.

The UNSC meeting today will be addressed by Julie Bishop, the controversial UN Special Envoy on Myanmar, and Ma. Theresa P. Lazaro, Foreign Secretary

of the Philippines, in her capacity as the Special Envoy on Myanmar of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The meeting will once again be held in private, meaning that once again the people of Burma will not be allowed to know what is being said about their situation.

"In the five years since the coup, the UN Security Council has failed to have any impact. Time is long overdue to try new approaches," said Anna Roberts, Executive Director at Burma Campaign UK. "All the problems at the Security Council cannot be blamed on obstruction by Russia and China. The UK has taken a narrow and cautious approach which just isn't working. Simply convening a meeting isn't progress, it's process."

There has always been a disconnect whereby what may be seen as a significant success in diplomatic circles, such as the soft non-binding resolution passed in 2022, is not seen as significant by the Burmese military and has no impact on the ground.

The main approach of the British government has been to invite envoys and speakers from the humanitarian side of the UN, rather than speakers from the human rights side of the UN. Most of those meetings are held in private. More speakers from Myanmar civil society should also be invited.

The British government has also refused to convene a meeting on the Burmese military failing to implement the provisional measures to prevent genocide which were ordered by the International Court of Justice.

Following his official visit to the UK in December 2025, Tom Andrews, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, called out the British government regarding its approach at the UN Security Council, stating:

"While I recognize UK's efforts to keep Myanmar on the Security Council's agenda through a series of meetings-mainly private-I believe that more can be done to use this platform to make the crisis more visible. I urge the UK government to consider options for doing so, such as convening a session to discuss the junta's failure to implement provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice in the Rohingya genocide case. The UK has intervened in this landmark case in support of justice for the Rohingya. I have also recommended that a stronger human rights lens be integrated into Security Council engagement, including by inviting UN human rights representatives to address the Council at an Arria-formula public meeting."

Burma Campaign UK has also been calling on the British government to convene a series of meetings specifically on past Resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and how the Burmese military are violating them.

Examples of such meetings could be:

Resolution 2417 on starving civilians as a method of warfare.

Resolution 2669 on Burma, and lack of progress in implementing its demands.

Resolution 1265 on protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Resolution 1296 on protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Resolution 2286 on attacks on medical facilities and workers.

Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

The Burmese military is violating these and other UN Security Council Resolutions with impunity.

An approach of convening a series of meetings on specific resolutions and Burma, rather than the current approach of more general briefings, would draw attention to how the Burmese military are violating numerous UN Security Council Resolutions and have a cumulative diplomatic impact with potential allies on the Council while also focusing on an area, UNSC Resolutions, about which the Burmese military is very sensitive.

"The UN Security Council is allowing the Burmese military to violate its own Resolutions and the orders of the top United Nations court, and not even discussing it, let alone acting on it," said Anna Roberts. "That has to change."



UK Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood.
Photo: AFP

UK STOPS ISSUING STUDENT VISAS FOR MYANMAR AND THREE OTHER COUNTRIES

On 4 March, the UK government announced an "emergency brake" on visas for nationals from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar, and the Sudan due to a surge in asylum claims. The Home Office has halted sponsored study visas and skilled worker visas for Afghans.

The statement from the UK government is as follows.

Asylum applications by students from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan rocketed by over 470% between 2021 and 2025 – making them among the most likely nationalities to claim.

Meanwhile the number of Afghans on work visas claiming asylum is now outstripping the number of visas issued.

In an unprecedented step, the Home Office will end sponsored study visas from all 4 countries and skilled worker visas for Afghan nationals.

Tough action is required as asylum claims from legal routes have more than trebled since 2021, making up 39% of the 100,000 people who applied last year. In total, 133,760 people have claimed asylum after arriving legally in the past 5 years.

Many are then accommodated at taxpayer expense, with an above average proportion of people from these 4 countries claiming destitution. Asylum support is currently costing more than £4 billion a year – with nearly 16,000 nationals from the 4 countries currently supported at public expense, including over 6,000 in hotels.

The government is clamping down on visa abuse like this so we can maintain our ability and proud tradition of helping those genuinely in need.

The move comes as Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood will introduce new legislation this week to restore order and control to our borders. She will make a speech on Thursday at the IPPR think tank outlining how these reforms are in line with British values.

Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said:

“Britain will always provide refuge to people fleeing war and persecution, but our visa system must not be abused.

That is why I am taking the unprecedented decision to refuse visas for those nationals seeking to exploit our generosity.

I will restore order and control to our borders.”

The measures also follow the Prime Minister’s decision to adopt a more hard-edged approach to diplomacy to ensure our rules are always respected and the migration system is based on fairness.

Between 2021 and the year ending September 2025, the proportion of Afghan asylum claims to study visas issued was 95%, while applications by students from Myanmar soared sixteen-fold over the same period.

Claims by students from Cameroon and Sudan spiked by more than 330%, posing an unsustainable threat to the UK’s asylum system.

While the government has successfully reduced student asylum claims by 20% over the course of 2025,

further action is needed as those arriving on study visas still make up 13% of all claims in the system.

Since coming to office, the government has also slashed £1 billion from the asylum support bill.

The announcement comes days after the government confirmed protection for refugees will be halved to 30 months from 2 March to reduce the pull factors driving dangerous small boat crossings.

In November, the Home Secretary threatened to shut down all UK visas for Angola, Namibia and the Democratic of Congo unless their governments agreed to take back illegal migrants.

Four months later and cooperation has been secured with all 3 countries. Flights are off the ground and illegal migrants and foreign national offenders are being returned.

The government has also pledged to open new capped safe and legal routes as an alternative to dangerous small boat crossings once order has been restored to the asylum system.

Britain has offered sanctuary to over 37,000 Afghans via its 2 resettlement schemes since 2021, while 190,000 visas were granted on humanitarian routes in 2025.

Between 2010 and 2025 the UK has resettled the sixth largest number of refugees referred by the UNCHR in the world, demonstrating this government’s commitment to helping those genuinely in need.

The visa brake will be introduced via an Immigration Rules change on 5 March 2026 and come into force on 26 March 2026.

UK STUDENT VISA BAN SLAMMED BY BURMA CAMPAIGN UK

Burma Campaign UK labelled UK Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood as "exceptionally cruel and shortsighted" in a 4 March statement condemning her institution of a ban on student visas for people from Myanmar.

The text of the statement is as follows.

"The opportunity to come to the UK to study is life-changing for the individual student but also an investment in the future of Myanmar, as people will use new skills to help their country in the future," said Zoya Phan, Programme Director of Burma Campaign UK. "Instead of smashing the hopes and dreams of young people from Myanmar seeking a better future for themselves and their country."

Zoya Phan claimed asylum 20 years ago while on a student visa, after death threats from the Burmese military because of her advocacy for human rights meant it was unsafe to return home.

The announcement of the student visa ban adds to a string of betrayals by the British government, which cut aid after the 2021 military coup in Burma despite a growing humanitarian crisis, and has not brought in any new sanctions against the Burmese military since 2024.

Following the 2021 coup the British Home Office, unlike in many western countries, refused to establish

any special programme to enable human rights activists to escape and seek safety in the UK. The British Home Office also refused to establish any form of temporary protected status for students and other people from Burma who were in the UK at the time. With passports and visas expiring, and it being unsafe to return home, the lack of temporary protected status forced students to claim asylum.

Shabana Mahmood says, "Britain will always provide refuge to people fleeing war and persecution". We invite media to ask Shabana Mahmood to provide details of the legal routes people from Burma can use to seek asylum and safety in the UK, and to publish these details in English and Burmese on the social media of the British Embassy in Yangon.

The UK student ban on people from Burma creates additional dangers because of the role of the UK on Burma internationally. Britain is the 'penholder' (lead country) on Burma at the United Nations Security Council. It is a former colonial power which has, although not so much recently, led the international community in responding to the crisis in Burma. What the UK does on Burma has implications internationally with other countries following.

"Shabana Mahmood is being exceptionally cruel and shortsighted in banning students from Myanmar," said Zoya Phan. "Shabana Mahmood has decided to sacrifice opportunities for students from Myanmar for the sake of one day of media headlines."



Photo: EPA

MHF PRIORITIZES WOMEN AND GIRLS IN MYANMAR'S DEEPENING CRISIS

On 5 March, UNOCHA highlighted the work of the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund (MHF) in supporting displaced women and girls in Karenni (Kayah) and Shan States with dignity kits containing sanitary and hygiene supplies and safety items to protect their health and dignity during ongoing conflict.

The statement is as follows.

Families displaced by conflict are often pushed to make impossible choices, with many skipping meals, taking dangerous journeys and exposing themselves to serious risks simply to survive.

To keep their families afloat, women are often the ones forced to make difficult choices that prioritize the needs and well-being of their families over their own.

Mothers like Ma Khin and Daw Ei are often the first to make personal sacrifices, cutting back on much-needed essential items for women's health and well-being so their families can get by.

With support from the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund (MHF), a local partner distributed carefully curated packages containing sanitary products, hygiene supplies and other items such as flashlights, to displaced women and girls in conflict-affected communities in Kayah and Shan.

"The dignity kit has made things so much easier for me and my daughter. Every item is useful in our daily life," said Ma Khin, a 43-year-old single mother displaced in Kayah State.

"The hand-crank flashlight is truly a blessing for me and my baby girl at night," said Daw Ei, a 35-year-old mother of two displaced in northern Shan. "It has made us feel so much safer."

These tailored packages of support empower mothers to protect their safety and dignity during the incredibly difficult experience of being displaced from their homes and communities.

For resource-constrained families, the MHF-funded support allows households to direct limited income toward food, school fees and other essentials without forcing women and girls to sacrifice their health, safety and dignity.

These kits provide more than just material support. "They show women that their needs are recognized and that they are not alone," said a local staff member of the MHF partner.

The MHF continues to prioritize the distinct vulnerabilities of women and girls affected by the compounding crisis in Myanmar, ensuring they are not left behind.



Photo: Supplied

DRONE STRIKE ON MYINGYAN MONASTERY KILLS FOUR DISPLACED CIVILIANS AS 10,000 FLEE ARSON ATTACKS

A targeted drone strike by military junta forces on the Magyikan Monastery killed four civilians, including two elderly women and a young child, on the afternoon of 4 March. The monastery, located in northern Myingyan Township, Mandalay Region, was serving as a temporary shelter for hundreds of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had fled recent military incursions in the region.

"These are IDPs staying at the monastery because they have nowhere else to go. It seems the military just drops bombs whenever they see a crowd. There are four deaths, and others were injured," a local man said.

According to locals, the deceased include two elderly women over the age of 70, a 35-year-old mother, and her seven-year-old daughter from Nabu-aing village. Four others were also severely injured in the incident.

The Military Commission column, consisting of about 80 soldiers, arrived at Nabu-aing village via Hnap-cho-taw village. They have been stationed there for over a week and are currently reportedly burning and destroying homes.

"They've been stationed in the village for over a week. This morning, they started setting fire to the houses. Plumes of smoke can be seen rising above the village. All the villagers have fled and are now displaced," a local man said on 5 March.

Due to the operations of this Military Commission column, approximately 10,000 local residents from villages in northern Myingyan Township including Nabu-aing, Myin-thar, and Bon Ywar, have been forced to flee, facing significant hardships regarding drinking water and shelter.



Internally displaced people. Photo: AFP

URGENT AID REQUIRED FOR WOMEN IN CHIN AND SAGAING IDP CAMPS AMID RISING VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

The advocacy group Women for Justice (WJ) issued an urgent appeal on 5 March for sanitary products and essential medicines to support women and girls currently living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps across Chin State and the Sagaing Region.

The organization highlighted a dire shortage of prenatal vitamins, contraceptives, painkillers, and traditional uterine tonics, noting that the breakdown of basic healthcare services in these conflict-affected areas has left thousands of displaced women at critical risk.

The crisis is exacerbated by overcrowded and insecure living conditions within the camps.

According to WJ, the lack of gender-segregated toilets, bathrooms, and sleeping quarters has led to a significant increase in sexual harassment and verbal abuse directed at women. In February alone, WJ documented seven specific cases of violence against women in these regions, including domestic abuse, rape, and sexual deception. However, with the formal justice system effectively collapsed following the military coup, victims face severe security threats when attempting to report these crimes or seek legal recourse.

In February, the Military Commission troops' airstrikes in Chin and Sagaing killed 24 people,

including 10 men and 14 unidentified by gender and as well as wounded three men, three women, and 42 individuals of unidentified gender.

Data from WJ also shows that heavy weaponry used by the Military Commission killed two men and two women, while injuring two men, one woman, and three unidentified individuals. Furthermore, one man was killed by a landmine.

During February, WJ documented seven cases of violence against women in the Sagaing and Chin regions, including two cases of domestic violence, one case of sexual deception, two cases of bigamy (violating monogamy), and one rape case.

The organization stated that they are providing psychological counseling and necessary support to the victims of these crimes.

However, due to the breakdown of the rule of law following the military coup, victims are facing security concerns when attempting to seek justice through the courts for violence committed against them.

As the number of displaced persons grows due to military columns, airstrikes, and the burning of homes by the Military Commission, IDP camps in these areas continue to lack basic healthcare services.



RESIDENTS OF TAUNGGYI URGED TO HEIGHTEN VIGILANCE AS FORCED CONSCRIPTION AND ARBITRARY ARRESTS INTENSIFY

Residents in the Shan State capital of Taunggyi are being advised to avoid nighttime travel and exercise extreme caution as military junta forces and the pro-regime Pa-O National Organization/Army (PNO/PNA) escalate forced recruitment drives.

Local sources report that since late February 2026, authorities have shifted from a "negotiable" system where families could previously pay bribes or find substitutes to a policy of immediate arrest for those appearing on military service lists.

This crackdown has extended into municipal staff housing and urban wards, where working-class residents who cannot afford "ransom" payments are being taken directly into custody for military training.

"Since the conscription law was enacted, there have been calls for military service through ward offices. The Township General Administration Department leads the arrests and forced conscription, while the PNO/PNA also conducts recruitment. Since martial law is effectively in full force, they have total control," said a local source in Taunggyi.

Taunggyi, which is fully controlled by the military junta, consists of 22 wards. Previously, those on the conscription list could negotiate through payments or find substitutes. However, since late February, authorities have reportedly begun arresting and taking away those listed on the conscription roster.

"Before, if you were on the list, you could negotiate, either serve or pay. If you could afford to pay, you could avoid service. But that's no longer this situation. Now, they arrest people on the list immediately to keep them from running away," a Taunggyi resident said.

Similarly, forced conscription persists in several wards across Taunggyi, with residents reporting that some individuals have had to be ransomed back with money.

"Many locals in Taunggyi find it hard to accept the reality of forced conscription. Those with money try to settle it quietly if they get caught. Recently, there were even arrests inside municipal staff housing. Since many people there are from the working class and cannot afford to pay, they end up being taken for military service," the resident said.

In recent days, rumours have also circulated locally regarding the forced conscription of women along the road to Shwe Bone Pwint Pagoda in Taunggyi.

While there is a junta security outpost on the hill road to the pagoda, an official from TGI Support Revolution, a group reporting on Taunggyi news stated they have yet to confirm the reports of women being forcibly taken for military service.

"Last month, people going up the hill reported being harassed by police who used threats as an excuse to demand money. There is a military outpost there, and they tend to extort visitors when they see an opportunity. However, we haven't received any direct reports about women being forcibly conscripted," the official said.

Residents added that forced conscription has been ongoing in both urban Taunggyi and surrounding villages since the junta enacted the military service law, though the exact number of those detained remains unknown.

Taunggyi residents are being advised to avoid traveling at night and to live cautiously to escape being caught in forced recruitment drives.

As the capital of Shan State, Taunggyi has been under tight security since the coup, controlled by a combination of junta troops and local pro-military militias.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR MILITARY ARSON RAIDS DESTROY OVER 100 HOMES IN KYAUKPADAUNG, IDP FATALLY SHOT

More than 100 homes were destroyed when Myanmar junta forces raided at least three villages in Kyaukpadaung Township, Nyaung-U District, Mandalay Region, and set them ablaze.

According to the Kyaukpadaung Youth Network, a joint column of junta troops and Pyu Saw Htee militia members torched 40 houses in Seittain North village in the Popa area, another 40 houses in Seittain South village, and eight farm huts near Ku Taw village.

In addition to torching homes, junta troops also set fire to onion warehouses and storage sheds containing bean pods.

According to the Kyaukpadaung Youth Network, at around 6:20 am on 4 March, the same column burned five farm huts near Saing Gaung village and fatally shot an internally displaced person (IDP).

Local residents told Mizzima that the Military Commission column first entered Ku Taw Village on 1 March, shelling the area with heavy artillery before setting houses on fire.

“Nearly 30 houses, including my own home, were either burned by the military commission troops or struck by heavy weapons. One unexploded artillery shell remains inside the village,” said a local resident of Ku Taw Village.

Because of the continued raids and arson attacks carried out by junta forces, villagers have not been able to return home and are still hiding in safer locations.



COMMUNIST PARTY OF BURMA WARNS REVOLUTIONARY FACTIONS AGAINST INFIGHTING AS TERRITORIAL DISPUTES ESCALATE

The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) issued a formal statement on 2 March condemning recent armed clashes between allied revolutionary forces and warning that internal friction only serves to prolong the lifespan of the military dictatorship.

Reflecting on the history of the armed struggle since 1948, the CPB characterized current tensions as "conflicts between allies" that must not be resolved through military means, urging all resistance groups to refocus their weapons on the "Three Military Evils" – the junta, its administration, and its bureaucratic apparatus.

This intervention comes amid a volatile period for the resistance, marked by significant territorial disputes in northern Shan State between members of the Brotherhood Alliance – specifically the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) – as well as ongoing friction between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and TNLA over tax collection and recruitment in overlapping regions.

The statement cautioned that diverting attention from the real enemy and pointing weapons at one another only serves to benefit the military dictatorship.

The CPB also stressed that at a time of global uncertainty driven by the dominance of major world powers, it is crucial for Myanmar's revolution not to create a "second enemy," but instead to forge stronger unity than ever before.

According to the party, the diversity of revolutionary organizations reflects the strength of the revolution. It said the successes currently being secured on various battlefields form the essential foundation for building a "Great Nationwide United Front." At the same time, the CPB warned that any organization or individual who surrenders to the military junta would be regarded as a disgrace to the revolution.

After the 2021 military coup, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) restructured its armed wing, the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Since then, the PLA is active in Sagaing Region and northern Shan State. It took part in the offensives to seize the towns of Hseni and Kutkai during Operation 1027. They are currently striving to gain a foothold as far as the Tanintharyi Region.

The CPB concluded its statement by reaffirming its commitment to promoting equality, mutual support, and unity among all revolutionary organizations.



MIZORAM INTENSIFIES CRACKDOWN ON MYANMAR BETEL NUT SMUGGLING TO PROTECT LOCAL FARMERS

Mizoram's Home Minister K. Sapdanga announced during a legislative assembly session on 2 March that the state will scale up enforcement against the illegal import of areca nuts (betel nuts) from Myanmar.

The minister emphasized that these untaxed goods, imported in violation of the Customs Act of 1962, have caused significant economic distress by undercutting local market prices and fuelling the circulation of "black money."

Official data revealed that 468 cases of areca nut smuggling were registered between 2019 and 2025, leading to 292 arrests, with the crackdown reportedly contributing to a recent rise in prices for locally grown produce.

"In the past, goods from Myanmar were imported without payment of official duties and were 'settled' with the customs department. Now, betel nut producers are unhappy that Myanmar's produce is being sold at prices lower than their own," a Myanmar trader in Mizoram told Mizzima.

He added that smuggling betel nuts lets consumers buy them at cheaper prices, and because betel nuts are bulky, such operations are difficult without the cooperation of local residents.

The Minister informed the Parliament that the accused are being prosecuted under the Indian Penal Code (IPC/BNSS), and those apprehended under the Customs Act are also facing charges under the same law.

Meanwhile, Myanmar refugees in Mizoram are officially restricted from moving freely according to their own plans, but authorities say enforcing this rule in practice remains challenging.

"We have heard that they are living comfortably in government-provided shelters and in the homes of their relatives. Some refugees are engaged in business, but the government has not recognized them and has prohibited such activities," the Minister continued.

The Minister said that such businessmen are under investigation and some have been arrested in serious cases, but he did not specify which businesses were involved or the number of people taken into custody.

According to the state Home Affairs Ministry, Mizoram is home to 28,355 Myanmar nationals, though obtaining an accurate population count is challenging due to daily arrivals and departures influenced by the situation in Myanmar.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA ARTILLERY AND DRONE STRIKES DISPLACE 3,000 IN AUNGLAN TOWNSHIP DURING THREE-DAY ASSAULT

Approximately 3,000 residents from seven villages in southwestern Aunglan Township, Magway Region, have been forced to flee their homes following a relentless three-day bombardment through artillery shelling and drone surveillance by military junta forces from 1 to 3 March.

The offensive began on the morning of 1 March when troops stationed on Hman Pya Taung Hill fired 27 artillery rounds toward Dazan village, destroying 27 houses and a monastery dining hall. Residents managed to take shelter after initial rounds landed outside the village perimeter.

“Since the artillery shells initially landed outside the village, residents had time to take shelter,” a responsible official from the Aunglan Public Organization said.

However, residents of Dazan village no longer feel safe remaining in their homes and have fled to safer locations.

The attacks escalated on 2 March with shelling from artillery near Bukgyi Bridge targeting the vicinity of Dazan and Si villages, followed by an operation on 3

March where junta forces used reconnaissance drones to coordinate eight artillery strikes on Kanzuninn village.

According to the Aunglan Public Organization, the displaced population which includes residents from Dazan, Si, Sintoke, Chingongyi, Indawthar, Innywargyi, and Kyauksaung is in urgent need of food, clean drinking water, and tarpaulins for temporary shelter as they remain in hiding.

Local resistance groups have warned that the use of surveillance drones may signal an impending ground offensive, urging the remaining population to stay vigilant as the military continues to reposition its heavy weaponry.

This latest surge in violence follows a pattern of intensifying aerial and artillery attacks in Magway Region, including a 1 March airstrike on a nearby trading junction in Mindon Township that killed over two dozen people, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in central Myanmar.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA SHELLING DESTROYS DOZENS OF HOMES IN AUNG LAN TOWNSHIP AS RESIDENTS FLEE TO SAFETY

The Myanmar military launched a series of artillery attacks on Dar San and Si villages in Aung Lan Township, Magway Region, on 1 and 2 March, causing significant property damage despite no active clashes in the area.

According to the Aung Lan People's Group, junta troops positioned on Myan Pya Taung Pagoda Hill fired heavy weapons on 1 March that destroyed 27 residential homes and an alms house belonging to a local monastery in Dar San village. The shelling began at approximately 10 am, but no civilian casualties were reported as the initial rounds landed outside the village, providing residents enough time to seek cover or evacuate.

"Two shells struck the southeast side of the village. The first explosions occurred outside the village, giving residents time to take cover. No civilians were injured," an official from the Aung Lan People's Group said.

Junta troops stationed artillery near Buk Gyi Bridge at the southern entrance to the town and fired

five rounds toward Si village this afternoon, the group reported.

"Residents of Si village fled to safety after troops fired on them from the bridge, following their repositioning from Myan Pya Taung Pagoda Hill," an official from the Aung Lan Community Organization said.

The full extent of the damage in Si village remains unclear as residents continue to flee, he added.

Residents from nearby villages, including Dar San and Si, are currently fleeing the area amid ongoing shelling and military activity.

Although no clashes have been reported in Aung Lan Township, the junta has continued targeting villages with heavy weapons, while revolutionary forces have urged residents to remain vigilant.



Prisoners being released. Photo: AFP

PROMINENT ACTIVISTS AND FILMMAKER RELEASED IN MASS AMNESTY AS JUNTA PARDONS OVER 10,000 TO MARK PEASANTS' DAY

The Myanmar junta has granted amnesty to a total of 10,162 prisoners comprising 7,337 individuals detained on political charges and 2,825 serving sentences for other crimes to commemorate Peasants' Day on 2 March.

The amnesty specifically targeted 7,337 individuals convicted under Sections 50(j) and 52(a) of the Counter-Terrorism Law and dropped charges against 12,487 others who were facing trial or listed as fugitives. Despite these releases, the move is widely viewed as a strategic gesture ahead of the new parliament's first session, especially as State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi remains in detention.

"We don't know the full details yet. We have to keep monitoring the situation. Regarding the release of those under Sections 52(a) and 50(j), there are nearly 10,000 political prisoners in jail facing such charges. Therefore, our initial expectation is that at least over 2,000 political prisoners held under these specific sections will be included in this release," Ko Thaik Tun Oo, founder of the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM) said.

Among those confirmed to have been freed are award-winning documentary filmmaker Shin Daewe, who was previously serving a life sentence, and student union leaders Ma Su Yee Lin and Ko Htet Paing Soe.

While the Political Prisoners Network-Myanmar (PPNM) has documented at least 324 political prisoners released from ten different regional prisons

as of Monday afternoon, many more are expected to be processed from major facilities like Insein and Obo prisons.

"This is only a preliminary list of those released. More prisoners are still being freed, so this should not yet be considered a final confirmed list. It is based on initial data that still needs verification. The figures reflect information collected up to 1 pm, and we are continuing to compile additional lists," said Ko Thike Htun Oo, a member of the PPNM steering committee.

The PPNM noted that those released include 80 prisoners from Pakokku, 61 from Thaton, and 46 from Maubin, among others. Under Section 401(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, all released prisoners have been warned that if they commit a new offense, they will be forced to serve the remainder of their original sentence in addition to any new penalties.

While the release of well-known figures like Shin Daewe and various student activists has been welcomed by their families, human rights groups emphasize that thousands of political detainees still remain in custody.

This mass clearance of cases and prison terms comes just two weeks before the junta-led government is expected to formally take office, serving as a tactical effort to project a sense of transition while maintaining strict control over the country's primary political opposition.

POLITICAL PRISONER ADVOCATES DISPUTE MYANMAR JUNTA'S "INFLATED" AMNESTY FIGURES AS THOUSANDS REMAIN BEHIND BARS

Rights groups and monitoring organizations are raising serious questions regarding the military junta's Peasants' Day amnesty, alleging that the actual number of political prisoners released is far lower than the official figures announced on 2 March.

While the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) claimed it would pardon 7,337 individuals convicted under the Counter-Terrorism Law as part of a 10,162-person release, the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM) reports that only 3,613 political detainees from 31 prisons had been verified as free by the afternoon of 3 March.

"Although the military claimed over 7,000, there are only a little over 3,000 so far. We are seeing cases where those charged under Sections 52(a) and 50(j) have not been released. In fact, while the military uses large numbers to grab public attention, the truth is that political prisoners are not actually being freed as claimed," said Ko Thaik Tun Oo, a member of the PPNM leading committee.

According to the list confirmed by PPNM as of 1:00 pm on 3 March, only 3,613 political prisoners from 31 prisons have been released so far.

PPNM noted that those detained under Sections 50(j) and 52(a) have not yet been released from most prisons, including Daik-U, Myingyan, Paungde, Maubin, Obo, and Insein. Additionally, no prisoners have been released from Bhamo Prison, where fighting is currently taking place.

"I want to say that this situation clearly shows the military's true underlying intentions. The military needs to proceed with releasing those under Sections 52(a)

and 50(j), as well as working towards the freedom of all political prisoners held under other charges. Since the military announces inflated figures to gain attention while failing to release people in reality, the international community needs to question them more and exert more pressure," Ko Thaik Tun Oo said.

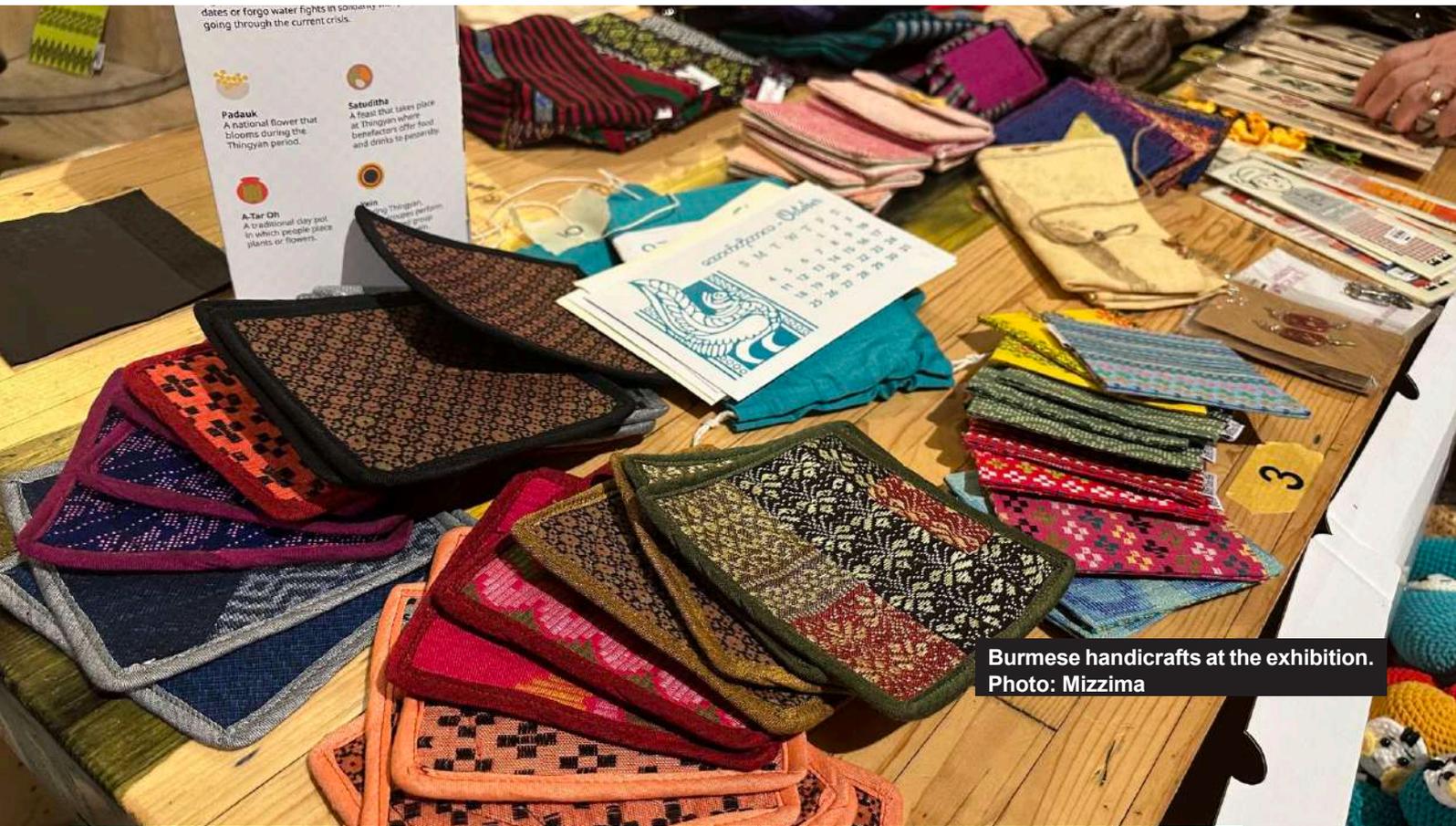
He further mentioned that PPNM is still investigating and confirming the list of political prisoners released under the junta's amnesty but estimates the total will likely only reach between 4,000 and 5,000 at most.

Similarly, investigations are ongoing regarding reports of some political prisoners being re-arrested at the prison gates immediately after their release.

"We know so far that instances where prisoners are simply not being released at all are more than re-arrests after release. We are finding more situations where they are not even allowed to step outside the prison," he said.

It is reported that those released on 2 March included the Naypyidaw Mayor from the NLD era, the Yangon Minister for Immigration and Population, some leaders of the University Students' Union, '88 Generation Peace and Open Society member U Zaw Win Maung, and several journalists.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) released a statement on the night of 2 March, confirming the names of 104 out of the 246 political prisoners reported to have been released under the Myanmar junta's amnesty.



Burmese handicrafts at the exhibition.
Photo: Mizzima

BRUSSELS HOSTS MYANMAR PRE-THINGYAN EVENING OF SOLIDARITY AND CULTURE

The main event of the Myanmar Pre-Thingyan series was held on 2 March in Brussels, bringing together EU representatives, academics, artists and members of the Burmese diaspora across Europe for an evening of solidarity, culture and dialogue.

Organised as part of the European Union's Myanmar Pre-Thingyan, Food & Culture Week at the Wolf Sharing Food Market, the event marked five years since the military coup in Myanmar.

Amid ongoing political, economic and humanitarian crises, the evening reaffirmed the European Union's commitment to stand by the people of Myanmar and support their resilience and aspirations for a better future.

Among the distinguished EU representatives attending were Peteris Ustubs, Director for Asia, Central Asia and the Pacific at the Directorate-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission; and Erik Kurzweil, Managing Director for

Asia and the Pacific at the European External Action Service.

The evening Tea Talk discussion on "What's happening in Myanmar: Challenges and Opportunities ahead" was moderated by podcaster Nyein Chan May, and featured Ambassador Marc Fiedrich, Head of Delegation of the European Union to Myanmar; Vicky Bowman, Senior Adviser at the Institute for Human Rights and Business and former Director of Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business; and Thinzar Shunlei Yi, Programme Director of Sisters2Sisters.

The evening, which opened at 18:00, created a space to connect through stories, artistic performances, dialogue and Myanmar cuisine. Participants reflected on the challenges facing the country while paying tribute to the resilience of its people.

The main event formed part of a week-long programme from 27 February to 4 March celebrating the spirit of Thingyan, Myanmar's traditional New Year

festival in April – a time symbolising renewal, hope and the washing away of past hardships. Through tea talks, performances, film screenings, cooking shows and the sharing of Burmese tea, snacks and local dishes, the European Union brought the essence of Thingyan preparations to Brussels, highlighting Myanmar's rich tea shop culture and the enduring strength of its communities.

Well-known Myanmar chef Yin Mon curated the evening's reception, inspired by Myanmar's regional diversity and featuring products sourced from Myanmar, including from farmers and producers supported through European Union-funded projects in the country.

Highlighting Myanmar's tea shop culture, Tea Talk-style discussions will be held on 3 March 2026. Vicky Bowman will speak on "Doing business in Myanmar: Can it be responsible?," while Soe Myint, Managing Director and Editor-in-Chief of Mizzima Media and Soe Win Than, Editor, BBC Burmese, will address "Narratives and the role of the media in Myanmar".

Tea and traditional Myanmar snacks will be prepared by Chef Wai Wai, who is also running the Myanmar pop-up restaurant open daily from 12:00 to 22:00 between 27 February and 4 March as part of the celebrations.



Burmese handicrafts and food at the exhibition. Photos: Mizzima



One of the Myanmar discussion panels.
Photo: Mizzima

BRUSSELS MARKS FIVE YEARS OF THE DEVASTATING MYANMAR MILITARY COUP

The Myanmar Pre-Thingyan series was held on 2 March in Brussels, bringing together EU representatives, academics, artists and members of the Burmese diaspora across Europe for an evening of solidarity, culture and dialogue, five years since the military coup in Myanmar.

Organised as part of the European Union's Myanmar Pre-Thingyan, Food & Culture Week at the Wolf Sharing Food Market, speakers stressed the importance of remembering the crisis in Myanmar.

Peteris Ustubs, Director for Asia, Central Asia and Pacific at the Directorate General for International Partnerships at the European Commission, said it was a privilege and honour to be at the event.

"And I want to say thank you for being with us and with the Myanmar community here for listening, understanding and sharing what's going on in the country. Because I think it is a good occasion as an event, and specifically in broader Myanmar, we think the week of activities dedicated to Myanmar, which forms part of public policy, public policy of engaging and talking to each other, as well as bringing Myanmar as a country, as a story, as a situation to attention of

policy makers, as well as decision makers, and at the end also by the public.

Mr Ustubs noted the problems concerning the recent Myanmar election.

"The European Union has been clear that conditions were not met for a free, fair and transparent inclusive (election) process to align for international standards for both directions. In the context of our guiding principles, as there remains a constant and European Union support, we must directly benefit from our support to the people of Myanmar. Since 2021, the European Union has stood by Myanmar, and our bilateral development as well as humanitarian assistance jointly accounts for 710 million euros dedicated to the country.

"Together with continued humanitarian support, the European Union is the largest donor in the country. In line with February 2021 Council conclusions, we have adopted our programmes to support the people of Myanmar, and still we continue to build the societal resilience. We work together with civil society organisations, NGOs and international partners, focusing on peace, governance, education and sustainable livelihoods."

Mr Ustubs stressed the importance of defending human rights in Myanmar.

"Our peace and governance support seeks to prevent and mitigate conflict and strengthen humanity, justice and social cohesion, empower local peace actors and defend human rights and independent media in combating gender-based violence. You might ask about results, and I would like to mention a few. In education, we have ensured that half a million children to re-engage in learning through 350 community schools and learning centres.

"We support schooling of more than 400,000 indigenous children in conflict-affected areas. We provide vocational training to thousands of young people and create opportunities for access to higher education in ASEAN as well as in Europe. In doing so, we are helping to protect and further support engagements and support for the generations to come.

"To support livelihoods, we are strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities. We work with micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in agriculture to create more resilient value chains, sustainable jobs, promote responsible businesses, practises and expand access to renewable energy efficiency technologies in Myanmar where we can do so. Across all those sectors, we are at an urgent need while supporting the long-term resilience in peace building.

"Needless to say, our support is also dedicated in situations where the situations are affected by an earthquake which shook the country very recently (March 2025). In an extremely fragile and politically complex setting, with other development partners and models, it is not feasible to use other models. We take a practical approach that prioritises local ownership and we stand strong in partnership with civil society and encourage our partners in order to support the groundwork where it is drawn."

Don't forget Myanmar, Mr Ustubs said.

"Myanmar risks becoming one of the world's forgotten crises in the global environment, marked by multiple conflicts and shrinking attention space. Therefore, I think the event today, and not only today but for the entire week, is an extremely good occasion to remind us of the crisis and the impact it has on so many in the country. Therefore, through the public diplomacy efforts, we aim to ensure that European citizens and policymakers remain aware of the realities facing the people of Myanmar.

"Therefore, cultural diplomacy plays an important role here. Therefore, tonight's food and music and everyday stories created will create an empathy and will demonstrate what it means and what is the story behind the action."



Peteris Ustubs, Director for Asia, Central Asia and Pacific at the Directorate General for International Partnerships at the European Commission

Erik Kurzweil, Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific at the European External Action Service (EEAS), stressed the importance about keeping up to date with what is happening in Myanmar,

“It was so important to give information about Myanmar as it is, not only to people in Myanmar but also in the region and here to us in Europe. How important the courage was became also clear again during the recent ‘sham elections’ that were pushed ahead by the military authorities. As you know, the European Union does not consider these elections to be free, fair or credible.”

Opposition unity is important, Mr Kurzweil said.

“We will not recognise or legitimise a process that lacked all aspects of democratic legitimacy. But unity across democratic forces remains essential. Fragmentation weakens the credibility of a democratic alternative.

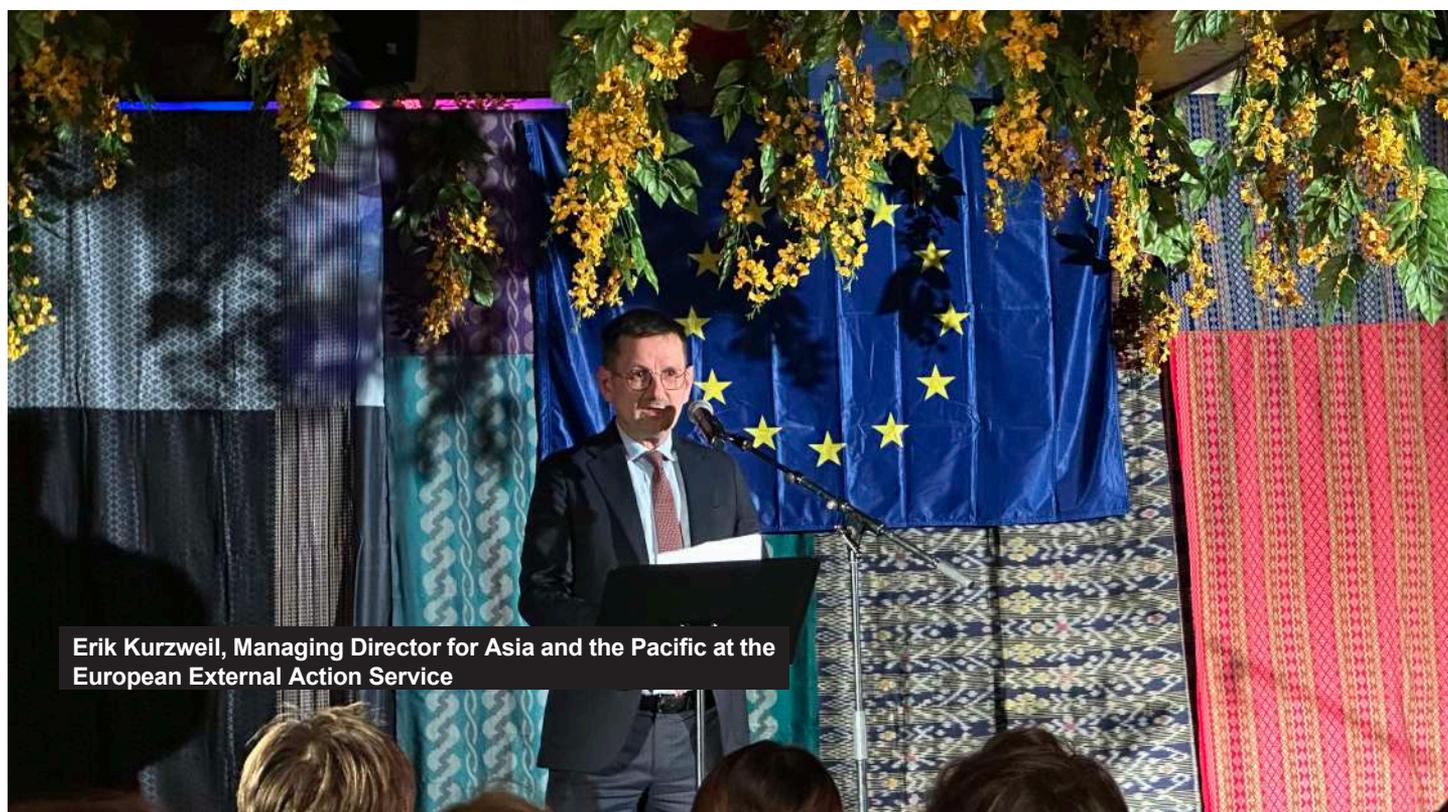
“A shared inclusive political vision is indispensable for Myanmar’s future as a federal democratic state. Therefore, to the members of the Myanmar diaspora who are here today, your voice does matter. You have ensured that Myanmar remains visible in Europe.”

Mr Kurzweil also highlighted the importance and the work of independent media in Myanmar in his remarks.

“You strengthen our understanding and you remind us why sustained engagement is necessary and remains necessary and why we should pursue it and why we should vouch for it and advocate for it with members of the European Parliament who may be here today and with politicians across member states as well. We will remain by your side and we will continue to stand with you and with the people of Myanmar in your pursuit of peace, democracy, human rights and, most of all, dignity. But on a lighter note, the spirit of Thingyan reminds us once again of the joy that it can also be in life next to resilience and dignity of the people of Myanmar.

Mr Kurzweil stressed the need for solidarity.

“It reminds us that renewal is and remains possible even in very difficult times, even in the darkest of circumstances. And that solidarity, compassion and dialogue remain essential foundations for a more peaceful future. So on this occasion, I extend our heartfelt wishes from the EEAS for peace, safety and well-being in the year ahead.”



Erik Kurzweil, Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific at the European External Action Service



MYANMAR IMPLEMENTS "ODD-EVEN" LICENSE PLATE RULE TO MANAGE GROWING FUEL CRISIS

The National Defense and Security Council (NDSC) has announced a nationwide fuel rationing system, introducing an "odd-even" driving schedule for private vehicles to manage an escalating energy crisis.

The new regulations, officially issued on 3 March, 2026, took effect on 7 March as a direct response to global geopolitical instability and military conflicts in the Middle East that have disrupted maritime shipping routes and hampered fuel imports.

Under the new mandate, private vehicle access to roads will be determined by the license plate number, where vehicles with odd-numbered plates are permitted to drive only on odd-numbered days, and those with even-numbered plates are restricted to even-numbered days.

To minimize economic disruption, the NDSC has exempted several categories from the rationing schedule, including public transport buses, taxis, fuel tankers, cargo trucks, construction vehicles, and emergency services such as ambulances and garbage trucks. Notably, electric vehicles (EVs) and EV motorcycles are also exempt and may continue to operate daily.

The announcement included a stern warning against the hoarding or reselling of fuel at inflated prices, stating that violators will face prosecution under existing laws. These measures will remain in place indefinitely until further notice as the authorities monitor the security of the country's fuel supply.



People queue for fuel. Photo: AFP

FUEL SHORTAGES PARALYZE MYAWADDY AND TACHILEK AS THAI EXPORT BAN AND GLOBAL ENERGY CRISIS CONVERGE

Fuel stations in the strategic border towns of Myawaddy and Tachilek halted operations on 3 March, as a Thai government ban on petroleum exports and surging global oil prices triggered a severe supply crunch.

In Myawaddy, all major stations including PTT, Denko, and City closed by midday after a morning rush where some residents reportedly spent up to 30,000 baht (US\$947) to secure remaining stocks.

“Myawaddy is taking advantage of the situation. Early this morning, people lined up at PTT to buy up to 30,000-baht worth of fuel, but now all the stations are closed. Roadside fuel shops were already shut down last month,” a Myawaddy resident told Mizzima.

The price of 92-octane gasoline in Myawaddy had been 4,850 kyats (US\$2.31) per litre but increased to 5,390 kyats (US\$2.57) per litre on 2 March. As of today, residents say it is no longer possible to refuel. Authorities confiscated fuel cans sold at roadside stalls last month, and those stalls are no longer selling fuel.

In Tachilek, another Thai border town, residents have also been queuing at petrol stations since the evening of 2 March.

“At the gas stations, people were still able to fill up until this morning. The queues are very long.

Motorcycles are being filled, but they are not allowing fuel to be purchased in cans,” a Tachilek resident said.

Another resident said he was forced to buy fuel from a roadside seller because he could not endure the long wait at petrol stations. A Coca-Cola bottle filled with fuel, which previously cost 35 baht (US\$1.10), rose to 60 baht (US\$1.89) on morning of 2 March and 100 baht (US\$3.16) by evening.

Residents believe the price increases are linked to Thailand’s ban on fuel exports to Myanmar.

“Thailand has closed fuel exports, and existing supplies are not being sold in sufficient quantities. I think some stations are holding back sales to drive up prices. Not all stations are doing this. I’m not sure how long it will last. The last time this happened, it continued for about seven days,” a Tachilek resident said.

Meanwhile, global oil prices have risen following the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz amid the Israel-US-Iran conflict, contributing to higher fuel prices.

There are growing concerns that a prolonged conflict in the Middle East could further disrupt global oil markets, potentially leading to regional fuel shortages and continued price increases.



Photo: AFP

FUEL SCRAMBLE GRIPS NAYPYIDAW AS MILITARY-OWNED STATIONS CLOSE AMID NATIONAL RATIONING PANIC

Long vehicle queues have paralyzed the administrative capital as residents scramble for fuel following the military junta's announcement of a nationwide rationing system.

On 4 March the military-owned Myawaddy fuel station near Myoma Market was forced to close, while neighbouring private stations like Denko in Zabuthiri Township were overwhelmed by thick crowds of motorists waiting hours for supply.

"We have to queue for fuel. I didn't join the line myself, but the smaller, ordinary shops are closed. The little home-based shops, most of them are shut down," a Pyinmana resident said on the morning of 4 March.

Another Pyinmana resident said, "The small neighbourhood shops selling certain fuel bottles used to cost over 2,000 Kyats per one [bottle]. Now its price jumped to 4,000. It's 4,000, 4,500, or even 5,000 Kyats. The prices vary."

The rush to buy fuel in Naypyidaw began yesterday. A resident from Zabuthiri Township noted this morning that prices at major stations rose slightly from 2,445 Kyats to 2,495 Kyats per litre of 92 Octane, though buyers were still able to get the amount they needed at that time.

He further stated that crowds are thick in front of the Denko station near Myoma Market in Zabuthiri, while the nearby military-owned Myawaddy station is closed today. Long queues are also being reported in Dekkhina Thiri Township.

Similar scenes are unfolding in major cities like Yangon, Mandalay, and Taunggyi, where large numbers of people are queuing and some stations are limiting sales. In Thai-Myanmar border towns, residents are also scrambling to buy fuel due to fears of a total shortage.

On the night of 3 March, the Myanmar junta issued a statement urging the public to conserve fuel. They cited global political tensions and military conflicts in the Middle East, which have caused blockades and obstacles along the shipping routes used by fuel tankers.

Public criticism is also mounting over a junta directive stating that, effective 7 March, private vehicles (excluding EVs) must follow an "odd-even" driving schedule meaning cars with even-numbered plates can only drive on even dates, and vice versa.



Iran has hit many sites in the Middle East.
Photo: AFP

IRAN THREATENS PROLONGED WAR AS TRUMP SAYS IT IS NEAR DEFEAT

Iran warned it could wage a prolonged war with the United States and Israel that would "destroy" the world economy, even as US President Donald Trump said late on 11 March the Islamic republic was facing imminent defeat.

The defiance from Tehran came as fighting around the strategic Strait of Hormuz -- the waterway carrying a fifth of the world's oil -- sent shock waves through energy markets, prompting emergency releases from global reserves and a limited draw on US stockpiles.

Oil prices have surged since February 28, when the United States and Israel launched air strikes on Iran that killed its supreme leader and plunged the Middle East into conflict.

Retaliatory Iranian missile strikes and drone attacks have brought shipping through the strait almost to a halt, forcing governments to scramble to contain the fallout, while Trump said Iran was "pretty much at the end of the line."

"Doesn't mean we're going to end it immediately, but they are," Trump told reporters.

He said Iran's navy and air force had been destroyed, that it was close to running out of missiles and that US forces could knock out the electricity supply "within one hour" -- leaving the country with a reconstruction that could take a generation.

But the US leader indicated that he would rather show restraint than take actions that would make it "almost impossible for them to rebuild their country."

The president had earlier said the United States must "finish the job" in Iran, adding that US forces had struck 28 Iranian mine-laying vessels.

He said Washington would tap US strategic reserves "a little" to help stabilise markets roiled by the war, and his administration later announced that he had authorized the release of 172 million barrels, beginning next week.

The International Energy Agency agreed to release a record 400 million barrels.

Israel's military, however, signalled the campaign was far from finished, and that it still had "a broad bank of targets."

Economic shock

With the conflict in its 12th day, Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) warned Wednesday they would strike "economic centres and banks" linked to US and Israeli interests, prompting more international firms to evacuate staff from Dubai.

The United States and Israel "must consider the possibility that they will be engaged in a long-term war of attrition that will destroy the entire American economy and the world economy," Ali Fadavi, an adviser to the Guards' commander-in-chief, told state television.

Iran said it targeted two commercial vessels in the Gulf after they entered the Strait of Hormuz "after ignoring the warnings" of its navy.

Analysts warn that a prolonged disruption to shipping through the strait -- which also carries roughly a third of the fertiliser used in global food production -- would deliver a severe economic shock, particularly in Asia and Europe.

The UN Security Council passed a resolution demanding Iran halt attacks on Gulf states, prompting the Islamic republic's ambassador to the United Nations to accuse it of a "blatant misuse" of its mandate.

The conflict has already disrupted two pillars of the Gulf economy -- energy production and commercial aviation.

On Wednesday, drones fell near Dubai airport, injuring four people, authorities said. Others struck fuel tanks at Oman's Salalah port, according to the Oman News Agency.

'Wave of strikes'

In an apparent first since the war began, Israeli drones also struck targets in Tehran on Wednesday evening, killing members of the security forces, Iran's Fars news agency reported.

The Israeli military later said it was carrying out a "wide-scale wave of strikes" after the IRGC announced just after midnight on Thursday it had carried out a joint missile operation with Hezbollah against targets in Israel.

Pentagon officials have meanwhile briefed US lawmakers that the cost of the war exceeded \$11.3 billion in its first six days, The New York Times reported, citing people familiar with the classified briefing.

The conflict has continued to spill across the region.

One crew member was killed and 38 rescued in an attack on oil tankers near Iraq, Iraqi state television reported -- without specifying their nationalities or providing details on who was behind the attack.

And an Iranian drone struck a tower in Dubai, Iranian state media reported on Thursday.

Lebanon said the death toll from ten days of fighting between Israel and Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah had reached more than 630, while more than 800,000 people have registered as displaced.

Lebanon was pulled into the war last week when Hezbollah attacked Israel following the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Israel later launched strikes in response to Hezbollah rocket fire. Lebanon's health ministry said eight people were killed in an Israeli strike in the country's east.

'Satan himself'

The US-Israeli assault began only weeks after Iranian authorities crushed mass protests, though the allies insist regime change is not necessarily their goal.

Iran's new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, has yet to appear in public, and officials said Wednesday he had been wounded but was "safe".

Iran's health ministry said on March 8 that more than 1,200 people had been killed in US and Israeli strikes. AFP could not independently verify the figure.

Thousands of mourners gathered in Tehran to commemorate commanders killed in the attacks, the largest public gathering since the war began, held under a heavy security presence.

Yahya Rahim Safavi, a senior adviser to the new supreme leader, also struck a defiant tone, calling Trump the "most corrupt and stupid American president" and "Satan himself."

AFP



Photo: AFP

US COURT CONVICTS JAPANESE YAKUZA FOR TRAFFICKING NUCLEAR MATERIAL

A member of Japan's yakuza crime group was sentenced to 20 years in prison by a New York court on Tuesday after being convicted of trafficking nuclear material as well as drugs and weapons.

Takeshi Ebisawa, 61, has been jailed since April 2022 on the drug and weapons charges, along with his Thai co-defendant Somphop Singhasiri, following years of investigations by the US Drug Enforcement Administration.

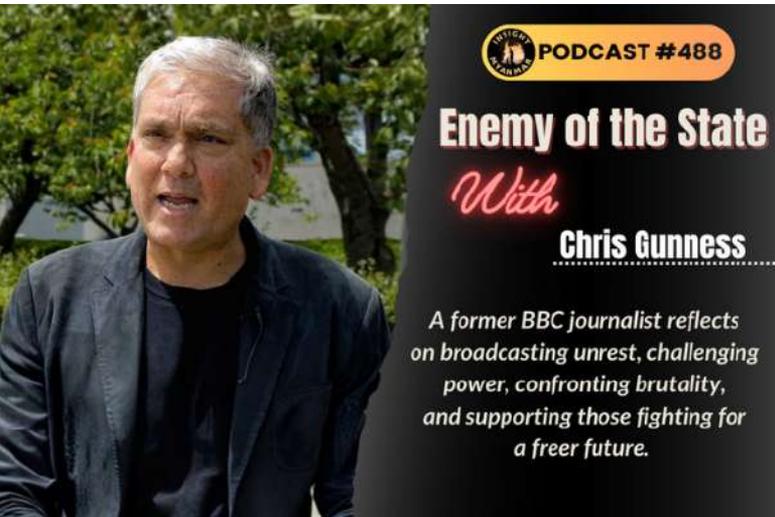
In February 2024, he was also accused of trying to sell military-grade nuclear material, along with narcotics including heroin and methamphetamine,

to buy weapons including surface-to-air missiles for armed groups in Myanmar.

He pleaded guilty to a total of six charges in January 2025.

"Takeshi Ebisawa has been held accountable for his crimes, including an attempt to sell weapons-grade plutonium to Iran and to flood New York with deadly narcotics," said John Eisenberg, the assistant attorney general for national security.

AFP



ENEMY OF THE STATE

“It is an extraordinarily fascinating country in and of itself,” says veteran journalist and human rights advocate Chris Guinness, about his lifelong connection to Myanmar, first as a journalist and then as head of an organization dedicated to pursuing justice for victims of government atrocities. As Guinness goes on to tell, his background with the country is anything but a new endeavor.

As a young BBC reporter many decades ago, he followed events in the country from afar in London in the mid-1980s; he saw a nation shaped by unresolved legacies of British rule, deep ethnic fragmentation and decades of civil war, yet so closed that even major crises passed without international notice. He calls the Myanmar of that time an “information black hole.” The country’s political complexity— while being largely ignored by the rest of the world— intrigued him as a journalist. By 1986, Myanmar had become the focus of his reporting, and he began tracking the country’s growing economic and political instability.

By late 1987, Myanmar reached a breaking point. General Ne Win abruptly demonetized several major currency notes, wiping out people’s life savings overnight. Anger spread quickly. For the first time in decades,

murmurs of spontaneous protest began circulating openly, as public discontent swelled to its highest levels since Ne Win’s 1962 coup cemented military rule.

Small clashes soon escalated into violence near Rangoon University, and the regime crushed the unrest with familiar brutality. Diplomatic circles in Yangon began whispering that Ne Win might finally resign, and many sensed that something irreversible had begun. Among them was Chris Guinness. His BBC editor, Nick Nugent, urged him to get into the country fast—even if it meant entering under tourist cover. It was the only way any reporter could hope to witness what was unfolding behind Myanmar’s sealed borders.

Guinness arrived with a seven-day visa, intending only to observe quietly. But within twenty-four hours, Ne Win suddenly announced his resignation on state television, promising multiparty politics and economic reform. The Cold War’s rigid alignments appeared to be shifting in Southeast Asia—this was years before similar changes occurred in Europe. Nugent instructed Guinness to break cover and begin filing reports openly, despite his inexperience. Guinness remembers the mixture of fear and duty as he delivered his first on-the-record dispatch from a dilapidated hotel. As far as he knows, no other foreign journalists were present at that time.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here: <https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/2/17/episode-488-enemy-of-the-state>



JUNTA PREDICTS 3.4 PERCENT ECONOMIC GROWTH FOR MYANMAR IN 2026-27

Junta officials project Myanmar's economy will grow 3.4 percent in 2026–2027, state media report, as the national budget is prepared amid ongoing political and economic turmoil.

At a Financial Commission meeting in Naypyidaw, junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing painted an ambitious picture with Myanmar's GDP projected to hit 195,032 billion kyats (about US\$60 billion, official rate) in the new fiscal year.

The meeting focused on reviewing and approving the proposed Union budget and the Union Budget Bill for the 2026–2027 fiscal year, including projected revenues and expenditures.

Min Aung Hlaing, who serves as acting Myanmar president and chairman of the Financial Commission, said priority spending would focus on agriculture, livestock, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), education, health services, and the repair and expansion of infrastructure damaged by natural disasters or other hazards.

According to the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar, the junta leader urged strict oversight of public spending, encouraging officials to keep projects on schedule and prevent any waste or mismanagement of funds.

The government has also pledged to expand infrastructure development in rural areas, including roads, bridges, irrigation systems, and electricity access, which officials say will help raise household incomes and reduce poverty.

Junta officials involved in drafting the budget said allocations had been scrutinised across multiple levels of government. This includes provisions for unforeseen events such as natural disasters and allowances for government staff.

State media reported that the current administration had already laid the groundwork for future development through what it described as “constructive measures and achievements” and urged the incoming government to maintain continuity in economic policies.

Myanmar's economy has been disrupted since the military takeover in February 2021, resulting in instability, armed conflict, and international sanctions that have affected investment, trade, and domestic production.



The centre of Yangon. Photo: AFP

ONLINE CRITICISM GROWS AS MYANMAR JUNTA INTRODUCES ODD–EVEN DRIVING RULE FOR FUEL WORRIES

Fuel rationing has sparked public criticism as Myanmar's military authorities implement an odd-even vehicle rule amid growing fuel concerns across the country.

Under this new policy, private vehicles will be required to operate based on their license plate numbers—odd numbers on certain days and even numbers on others. However, taxis, buses, emergency vehicles, and electric vehicles are exempt from this regulation.

The announcement has generated significant debate online, with many Facebook users questioning the government's reasoning. They noted the long queues at petrol stations in various cities. Some users expressed frustration, suggesting that the policy indicates the fuel situation is more dire than authorities are admitting. One user commented, "If there is really enough fuel, why do they need to control which cars can drive?"

Others voiced concerns about the impact on daily life and work. "How can people go to work if their car's number doesn't match the date?" asked one commenter. Another added, "Fuel problems, electricity cuts, and high prices—people are facing too many issues."

Additionally, some social media users raised alarms about the potential for corruption, worrying that drivers might be pressured to pay bribes if they violate the new restrictions.

In response, military spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun dismissed claims of a fuel shortage, asserting that the country currently has enough fuel reserves for about 40 days. He explained that the measure is merely a precaution to ensure systematic fuel usage.

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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