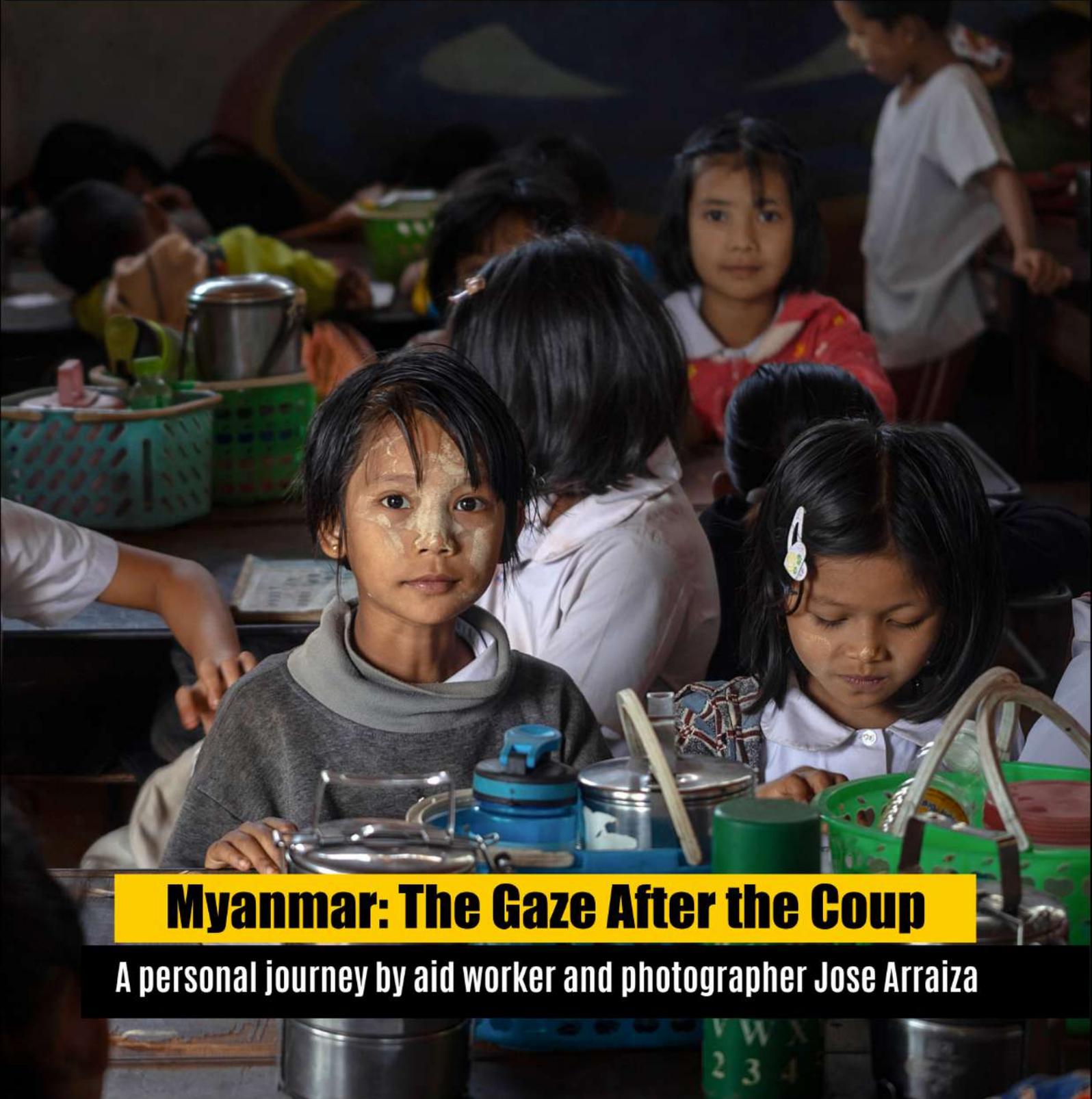


ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



Myanmar: The Gaze After the Coup

A personal journey by aid worker and photographer Jose Arraiza

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.

MYANMAR'S POOR FEEL THE HEAT FROM THE MIDDLE EAST WAR

The widening war in the Middle East is already reshaping global energy markets, but its most painful consequences will not necessarily be felt in the countries launching missiles or conducting airstrikes. Instead, the heaviest burden may fall on poorer, import-dependent nations such as Myanmar, where fragile supply chains and widespread poverty magnify every shock in global fuel and food prices.

Recent attacks on Iranian energy infrastructure and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz - one of the world's most critical oil chokepoints - have triggered the largest supply disruption in modern oil markets, with millions of barrels per day temporarily removed from global circulation. Oil prices have surged as shipping routes are threatened and tankers struggle to move through the region. The strait alone normally carries about one-fifth of the world's oil supply, meaning any sustained closure or disruption immediately reverberates through the global economy.

For wealthy economies, such volatility means higher fuel bills and rising inflation. For Myanmar, it risks something far more severe: outright shortages. The country imports roughly 90 percent of its fuel and already operates with a fragile supply system shaped by civil conflict, sanctions, and weak infrastructure. As global prices spike and shipments slow, queues have formed at petrol stations across major cities, and authorities have begun rationing fuel to conserve dwindling supplies.

The implications extend far beyond the inconvenience of limited transport. Fuel is the backbone of Myanmar's economy, powering trucks that carry food from rural farms to urban markets and generators that provide electricity where grid supply is unreliable. When diesel prices rise or supplies tighten,

transportation costs surge and supply chains falter. In a country where many households already spend a large share of their income on food, even modest price increases can push millions closer to hunger.

Agriculture is also vulnerable to energy shocks. Rising fuel prices increase the cost of irrigation, machinery, and fertiliser production, all of which depend heavily on energy inputs. Globally, the conflict is already pushing fertiliser prices higher due to disrupted shipping and soaring energy costs. For farmers in Myanmar - many of whom operate at subsistence levels - these increases can mean planting less, harvesting less, and ultimately selling less food into local markets. This means higher food prices.

The cruel irony is that the people most affected by these developments have the least connection to the geopolitical struggles driving them. A villager in rural Sagaing or Chin State has no influence over naval confrontations in the Persian Gulf or diplomatic calculations in Washington, Tehran, or Tel Aviv. Yet when global oil markets tighten, it is that villager who pays more for rice, cooking fuel, and transport - or find supplies almost dry up.

Wars in distant regions often appear abstract until their economic consequences ripple across borders. In the case of Myanmar, those ripples could deepen an already severe humanitarian crisis, given so many people live in poverty, and the millions of internally displaced. If the Middle East conflict drags on and continues to disrupt energy supplies and push up global prices, the poorest households in one of Asia's most vulnerable countries may once again bear the heaviest cost of a war fought thousands of kilometres away.

EDITORIAL

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Managing Director and Editor In-Chief
Soe Myint

Managing Editor
Thaw Zin Tun

Network Engineer
Wai Min Han

Video and Graphics Editor
Wai Yan Shein Zaw

General Manager
No No Lin

Mizzima Weekly is published by
Mizzima s.r.o

Address:
Salvatorska 931/8,
Stare Mesto, 11000,
Praha 1, Czech Republic

Contact email:
sm@mizzima.com

Phone/Signal/WhatsApp
+420 608 616688

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Cover photo of Myanmar refugee children in Mae Sot, Thailand 2025 by Jose M. Arraiza



Child on the Dala ferry, Yangon 2025.
Photo: Jose M. Arraiza

MYANMAR: THE GAZE AFTER THE COUP

A PERSONAL JOURNEY BY AID

*WORKER AND PHOTOGRAPHER JOSE
M. ARRAIZA*

Historical memory and conflict

Ten years ago, I set out for a small paradise that today endures a nightmare. I arrived in the town of Dawei, in Myanmar's Tanintharyi Region, on a sweltering May day in 2015. My mission, as a humanitarian worker with an international humanitarian organisation, was to help the local Karen communities register for legal identity documentation—papers that would allow them, among other rights, to vote in the November elections, where many expected the triumph of the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of the army's founder and national hero, General Aung San.

Tanintharyi bewitched me. Life there felt like a fragment of paradise. I lived on Mingalar Street, beside a small pagoda and a Buddhist prayer hall where chants rose each night. There was a café baking nan, a school, a noodle shop, and a leather workshop whose workers' shouts woke me at dawn. Every full moon brought a festival in honor of Buddha. Hindu, Muslim, and cultural Chinese celebrations added to the rhythm of daily life.

Historical memory and conflict

I traveled by 4x4, boat, and on foot through Tanintharyi and into the Karen, Kayah, and Mon states. In Bamar-majority areas, portraits of Aung San Suu Kyi and General Aung San, along with the red crest of the NLD and its peacock, were everywhere. Optimism filled the air. I slept outdoors in villages along the Thai border, where mistrust lingered among the Karen and other minorities. Tens of thousands of Karen refugees still lived in camps across the border. Yet war stories seemed consigned to the past, part of history. I did not know then that the worst was yet to come.

Immigration officers often accompanied me, setting up mobile offices to issue identity documents.

They were enforcing the notorious 1982 Citizenship Law, which discriminates against anyone with roots in India or neighboring countries. The Rohingya remain stateless because of this law and the nativism behind it. Indeed, even during the attempted transition which took place before the coup (2011–2021), the Myanmar state was already merciless toward some minorities.

I debated endlessly and in vain with many officials, some of whom made me think of the “banality of evil” as described by Hannah Arendt. Administrative violence was widespread then and continues to be even more so now. Indeed, now it is taking the form of an India-supported Digital ID project which will replicate existing discrimination and create more opportunities for surveillance and repression.

To find respite, I spent long afternoons on Maungmagan beach, photographing fishermen as the community pushed their boats into the surf or dragged them back under monsoon rains.

A premonition

On one journey to Palauk, a former soldier turned local administrator invited us to a Karen village where he was inaugurating a “peace bridge” built under military oversight. As we moved upriver in a small boat, this heavysset man in Rambo-style sunglasses shouted: “Democracy? I laugh at democracy!” I dismissed him as a relic of the past, the old guard. But I was wrong—he was a harbinger. Palauk has since been shelled repeatedly from the sea.

My work with the international humanitarian organisation expanded across Myanmar, assisting with land restitution and fighting displacement caused by land grabs. I made dozens of trips, sometimes flying in small planes to ethnic states—Rakhine, Kachin, Shan, Chin. In Maungdaw, Rakhine, I met Rohingya who angrily di-



Refugee child from Burma in Mae Sot, Thailand.
Photo: Jose M. Arraiza

splayed their old identity papers, demanding equality. In remote Chin, I photographed elderly women with tattooed faces. I sailed to the Myeik Archipelago, home of the Moken, the “sea gypsies.”

The coup

Then came the tragedies. First, the Rohingya exodus of 2017. Maungdaw was burned to the ground; those I had spoken with—if they survived—are now refugees in Bangladesh. Then the Covid-19 pandemic struck, and I left Myanmar. On February 1, 2021, General Min Aung Hlaing staged a coup, toppling the elected government. Aung San Suu Kyi was jailed once again; thousands were killed, opposition leaders executed after sham trials. In the streets of Dawei, brutalized police officers would mercilessly shoot at teenagers on bicycles simply for violating the curfew. Dormant ethnic conflicts exploded, plunging the country into a humanitarian crisis with 3.6 million displaced people—a living hell for the most vulnerable.

Post-COVID, I worked remotely for a UN agency in Myanmar, my life defined by a strange paradox. My mornings were consumed by calls with Burmese colleagues and NGOs detailing bombings and persecution; my afternoons were spent stepping into the quiet streets of a different world, one preoccupied with trivial complaints. During this time, I also held many discussions with international expats working for donors, the UN, and various global humanitarian and development

agencies.

I was disappointed to realize that for many, the primary concern was not the impact of their work, but rather securing funding and the survival of their own small establishments. Their focus remained fixed on institutional preservation, seemingly detached from a desperate population yearning for peace and a federal democracy—a population already reeling from the infamous aid budget cuts of the Trump era and beyond. Worse still, some of these international actors looked down on local civil society organizations, treating them as partners in name only. They viewed them primarily as mere subcontractors, frequently occupying the very spaces those local groups should be leading. By now, many of these foreigners have likely moved on to other crises, having already forgotten about Myanmar. Meanwhile, civil society organizations remain in place—and at risk—still demanding the quality funding they deserve.

In 2023, I finally returned to Yangon—the only area then accessible to foreigners without special clearance. Dawei, once my preferred destination for its natural beauty, had become a battlefield where the military fired indiscriminately, even at children, echoing the tragedies of Gaza or Ukraine. I found myself newly curious about Yangon, a city I had once bypassed. Its downtown, steeped in colonial remnants and a rich tapestry of Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist heritage, struck



Thanaka seller in Yangon.
Photo: Jose M. Arraiza



The blessed street food seller in Yangon.
Photo: Jose M. Arraiza

me with its raw, unexpected beauty.

I wandered through Dala, the neighborhood across the river, mesmerized by its village-like energy and the endless flow of people on bicycles, rickshaws, and tuk-tuks. Returning to the jetty, I met the gaze of a woman holding a sleeping infant, fresh off the wooden ferry. Her smile was warm, yet her vulnerability haunted me. What future awaited them both?

Later, I traveled to Mae Sot, Thailand, to reunite with old colleagues. They were refugees once again, hiding from Thai police who extorted them with threats of deportation. I visited orphanages run by the Spanish NGO Colabora Birmania and saw communities abandoned by the world. Along the roadsides, families endure disempowered lives in makeshift settlements, lacking even the most basic sanitation and remaining entirely overlooked by aid efforts. It was these realities that led me to co-author the book *Before a Democracy Died* with Scott Leckie, documenting the devastating scourge of land grabbing.

The Gaze After the Coup

More than ten years after I first arrived in Myanmar, the world has fundamentally changed. Brexit, COVID-19, and the war in Ukraine were only the beginning. Now, the devastation in Gaza and the widening conflict in Iran signal the dawn of a more lawless world—one with even less room for democracy and peace. The racist, nativist philosophy of Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship

Law no longer seems like an obsolete relic; instead, it feels like a grim precursor of what may come to other nations. Yet, despite this darkening landscape, hope remains. Hope is itself a form of resistance.

In the new images I captured in Mae Sot and Yangon's neighborhoods, I sensed something had shifted since those luminous days of 2015. Had the gaze itself changed after the coup? To explore this, I organized the exhibition "The Gaze After the Coup," juxtaposing twenty images from before the takeover with twenty captured since February 2021. It was then that I realized what the 2021 coup had altered was not the face of the tea seller, nor the rickshaw driver dozing in the sun. It was my own gaze.

And so I asked myself: to whom does a gaze belong? To the one who looks, or the one observed? To both? Perhaps photography gives birth to a third look—the perspective of the public, and its silent communion. That is yours: a gaze after the coup.

Please do not look away.

The itinerant exhibition "Myanmar: The Gaze After the Coup" is on display in different cities in Spain. For info & announcements follow instagram: @chemaarraiza. All the pictures can be seen [here](#).



ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

WHAT NEXT FOR JUNTA LEADER MIN AUNG HLAING?

After proceeding with what critics describe as a staged or “sham” electoral process in three phases, attention has increasingly turned to the future role of junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, with analysts and the public speculating on his next political move.

In recent weeks, he has reshuffled key military positions, including promoting his trusted general Ye Win Oo, currently serving as chief of military intelligence, to the post of Army Chief. Observers note that such appointments deviate from long-standing norms and may reflect efforts by Min Aung Hlaing to consolidate and extend his authority.

On March 13, Min Aung Hlaing delivered a speech lasting more than two hours. Although officially framed as a message from the Commander-in-Chief’s Office, many analysts interpreted it as having the tone of a farewell address. During the speech, he and senior officials repeatedly praised Vice Senior General Soe Win, highlighting his role as a close associate over the past 15 years.

Political developments have also unfolded within the junta-backed political structure. On March 16, Khin Yi, chairman of the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), was appointed as speaker of the lower house. The appointment had been widely anticipated following earlier leaks. A former brigadier general, Khin Yi previously served as

police chief during the State Peace and Development Council era and later as immigration minister under the Thein Sein Government.

He has remained a controversial figure, particularly for his alleged involvement in mobilizing nationalist groups during the administration of Aung San Suu Kyi between 2016 and 2020. Meanwhile, as of March 18, Aung Linn Dway has been appointed as speaker of the upper house, with his deputy named as former military officer and Kachin ethnic figure Jeng Phang Naw Tawng, who is currently serving as the junta's minister for hotels and tourism.

Further speculation surrounds Min Aung Hlaing's own political trajectory. Leaked information indicates he may assume the presidency, potentially appointing his close ally Nyo Saw as vice president (1). Doi Bu, a Kachin legal figure, is reportedly being considered for vice president (2). In this scenario, Soe Win would take over as commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Prior to these developments, the junta introduced the Union Consultant Council Law. Analysts note similarities between this legislation and the State Counsellor Law created for Aung San Suu Kyi, though adapted to serve different institutional and political purposes under the current military administration.

Trouble in Rakhine

The Myanmar military carried out a three-hour airstrike on a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp in Ann Township, Rakhine State, on March 8, killing at least 116 detainees and injuring 32 others, according to local sources and independent media reports.

Among those killed were high-ranking military officers, including a brigadier general—the most senior casualty—along with a colonel, a medical officer, detained soldiers, and some family members of POWs who were staying at the site. Survivors and relatives of victims later spoke to independent media outlets, condemning the attack as a reckless and unjustified act carried out against their own personnel.



Arakan Army on the move. Photo: AA

The incident marks the sixth reported airstrike by the junta targeting POW camps in Rakhine State since September 2024. Previous strikes were reported in Pauktaw, Maungdaw (twice), Mrauk-U, and Kyauktaw townships. In total, at least 226 junta soldiers have been killed and more than 90 injured in these attacks, all attributed to strikes by their own air force.

Meanwhile, fighting has intensified in the junta's last controlled townships in Rakhine State as the Arakan Army (AA) expands operations against junta positions.

In Sittwe, the state capital, AA forces launched surprise attacks targeting key military installations, including the naval headquarters in Min Gan and other strategic positions forming the city's defensive perimeter. The sudden offensives reportedly caught junta troops off guard, despite prior preparations to

defend the city.

Heavy clashes were reported on March 7, with local media indicating fighting at around 15 locations in and around Sittwe. Both sides made extensive use of artillery and drones. In response to mounting losses, junta forces fired artillery into urban areas, with some shells striking two medicine storage buildings at Sittwe General Hospital. No casualties were reported, but the damage has raised concerns over civilian safety and the protection of medical facilities.

In Kyaukphyu Township—home to major Chinese-backed oil and gas pipeline projects—the AA has escalated attacks on junta positions. Artillery strikes targeting the Danyawaddy naval headquarters reportedly killed around 20 junta personnel.

On March 16, AA forces also ambushed and destroyed a junta military column in Thaingchaung



A rush to the pumps has led to fuel shortages as vehicle users seek to top up their tanks. Photo: AFP

village. The column was part of a newly reinforced force of approximately 400 troops deployed to the area. The junta has reportedly sent thousands of soldiers from the No. (11) Light Infantry Division to Kyaukphyu since early 2025. The division previously suffered significant losses, including the death of its commander in May 2025. More recently, surviving troops from the defeated No. (5) Military Operations Command—overrun by AA forces in December 2024—have been reassigned to reinforce operations in the township.

In the border area with Magway Region, AA forces have made further gains near the strategically important Natyekan position. In early March, AA troops captured an outpost located approximately 1,000 yards from the main base, where a junta brigade commander and an estimated 1,500 soldiers are stationed. Following the seizure of surrounding outposts, AA and allied forces have intensified their assault on the main Natyekan base, while also attempting to cut off incoming junta reinforcements. Fierce fighting has been reported along the Rakhine–Magway border, where both sides are engaged in efforts to control key supply routes.

Cost of living fallout from the Middle East conflict

Myanmar's military junta has enforced an odd-even vehicle rotation system for daily commuting cars and motorcycles starting from March 7, in response to worsening domestic fuel shortages, creating widespread disruption to daily life, education, and economic activities.

Under the system, vehicles are allowed on the roads only on designated days based on their license plate numbers. While exemptions are granted for ambulances, public transportation, construction vehicles, goods transportation vehicles, and organized ferries transporting workers and students, many parents say the policy has made it increasingly difficult to take their children to and from school.

Most basic education schools, from Grade 1 to Grade 11, have already closed for the academic year. However, Grade 12 students are currently sitting for matriculation exams, scheduled to conclude on March 18. Despite the education department offering recommendation letters for student transportation,

the requirement that vehicles must carry at least four students has limited its effectiveness.

“Although the education department provides recommendation letters for student ferries, the car must carry at least four students. Therefore, we have to rely on taxis,” a parent told Mizzima. Another parent said they were fined 20,000 kyats despite presenting an official recommendation letter while transporting their child.

Fuel restrictions imposed by the junta have further compounded the challenges, particularly for farmers during the dry season. The Ministry of Energy has limited fuel purchases to once per day. For commuting vehicles, authorities have introduced a barcode system linked to wheel tax registrations, while farmers are required to present documentation proving ownership of farmland to purchase fuel.

Farmers say the process is time-consuming and burdensome, especially for those operating tractors, harvesters, and water pumps essential for irrigation and harvesting. “We have to buy fuel daily with a recommendation letter. It takes a lot of time and becomes a burden. We can only buy enough for one day, and then we have to repeat the process the next day,” a farmer from Ayeyarwady Region told DVB.

As a result, some farmers have been forced to reduce or halt irrigation, raising concerns about agricultural output during a critical period.

In urban areas, the impact of the restrictions is also being felt. The odd-even system has limited people's mobility, leading to a sharp decline in customer traffic and affecting small businesses. “Customers cannot come because authorities warn of prison sentences if people travel on the wrong days. Our sales have dropped by about half,” a vendor in Mandalay told local media.

The combined impact of fuel shortages and movement restrictions is placing increasing strain on both rural livelihoods and urban economies across the country.



A displaced woman at her temporary home.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

ONLY ONE MOVE LEFT: DISPLACED PEOPLE FACING MYANMAR JUNTA ADVANCES

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

The displacement situation in Burma is becoming increasingly acute. There are now an estimated 3.7 million internally displaced people, while support is dwindling. There was never a great deal of international support for internally displaced people's camps because international aid either stops at the border or operates only with the junta's permission in junta-controlled areas. Now the number of camps and IDPs is rising, the needs are greater, and the support is shrinking.

Camps in resistance-controlled areas are supported through the civilian governments, which have very low incomes. They also receive relatively small amounts of sporadic aid from private individuals, churches, and some NGOs inside Burma, which are finding it increasingly difficult to remain in operation.

In Pekhon Diocese alone, on the Shan side of the Karenni State border, there are 83 IDP camps. As fighting is intensifying in Pekhon and Moby, IDPs are fleeing to the last town in Burma on the Thai border. The local priest who made the arduous journey with his flock explained that it took them 28 days to walk to their present location.

Their camp has no source of water, so water has to be purchased, but of course IDPs generally have no

jobs and no money. The camp had only one truck and a few motorcycles and was located about a 45-minute drive from town.

"We use it to take people to the hospital, and we also organize shopping once a week." Father told me that as many inhabitants as could fit would pile into the back of the truck and drive to town to purchase whatever necessities they could afford.

It took almost a year of negotiations to obtain land to grow food for the camp, and now that planting has begun, the camp is scheduled to move again in just three months as the front line shifts and the bombs land closer.

Not only does the move mean that the more than 900 camp inhabitants will have their lives upended again, but it also means that after this move, there is no place left to go. Unless the resistance can recapture territory and shift the front line further out, most of the IDPs from the area will be clustered in one location, trapped between the Burma army and the border.

In the face of war and repeated displacement, the normalcy of camp life is both surprising and encouraging. Although the adults generally do not have jobs, the camp's 229 children attend school from preschool through kindergarten and high school.

The classrooms were bamboo-frame buildings with plastic tarps for walls and ceilings. However, just like in schools anywhere else in the world, the students sat on benches at long tables made of bamboo, and each classroom had a whiteboard.

The kindergarten had 28 children, and despite an acute lack of resources, they were already learning their ABCs and 123s in English, Burmese, and Karenni. The two kindergarten teachers worked patiently with the children each day, despite not receiving a salary. The preschool had even fewer amenities, not even crayons or paper for the children. It was just a bamboo hut with a few mats on the floor for children to crawl and play on. The teachers had no whiteboard and instead wrote on pieces of old brown cardboard attached to the wall.

At lunchtime, the teachers helped the children wash their hands at the small reservoir tank in front of the classroom, then gave the students the lunch boxes their parents had prepared for them. "We can't afford to give the children lunch," lamented the Father. "I hope if we can find donors, next year we can." He walked around encouraging the children and making them laugh as he inspected the contents of their lunch boxes. "You see," he began in English, "mostly just rice." He pointed at a few of the boxes, saying, "That one has a little vegetables. That one has curry." We were both pleasantly surprised that one of the children had a bit of chicken in his lunch.

Father took me around to the elementary school, where he introduced me to a family with an elderly

grandmother. "We had to carry her the whole way from Pekhon," he said, remembering the difficult trek. Crossing a wide place in the trail, he lamented, "We do not have a good place for the children to play football."

The next hut we visited, called the study hall, had long tables and benches, and solar collectors and batteries to provide a little light at night because many of the students had no light in their families' homes.

On one of the support posts was a long list of rules written in Burmese. "Those who come to study here have to follow these rules," Father said, sternly.

The camp may have lacked food and water, but they were determined to see to it that the children received an education.

The first grade was the largest class, with 31 students. The youngest was five years old, but the oldest was 16. "They never had the right time for proper school," said Father. "We had to run, run, run for five years now."

The education system was so disrupted in Burma, particularly in resistance-controlled areas, that it was not uncommon to see students with age spans of six years in a single grade. Grade 5 had 26 students, but the older grades seemed to have far fewer.

This was partly because students have not caught up yet and remain in lower grades, and partly because when they reach their older teens they may drop out of school rather than sit with small children, or they may join the revolution and go to the front lines. Some leave



Displaced children in class.
Photos: Antonio Graceffo



in search of work in the mines. Many go to Thailand and try to get jobs as laborers so they can send money back to their families in the camps.

When he introduced me to the grade 8 teacher, Father explained that she had just had a baby. We later visited the teachers' office, a bamboo structure with a small pile of mildewed books, where another teacher was caring for the baby. Father smiled, recounting the teacher's dedication. "The baby is only a month old, but where her mother is needed, she will go. So she said, 'Put the baby in the office while I teach.'"

As we left the teachers' office, Father pointed at a bamboo box attached to the outside wall next to the door. "That's the suggestion box. Anything the people think we should try to improve they can write on a paper and put in the box." Father laughed again. "But it is usually empty."

The problems and needs in the camp were so great that asking for help through the suggestion box was not going to improve the situation.

In the camps there are always some families that do better than others, either because they are receiving support from abroad or because they have a small business. These two are probably related, in that only those with outside support can afford to start a business. Even so, there are always a few families running small shops selling soap, toothpaste, snacks, and other basics.

There was a family running a charging business where camp residents can charge their phones for a small amount of money, and there was the Starlink

shop where people can get online for a few pennies an hour. One family showed me the still where they made traditional wine.

Father said that the new place they will be moving to is in the forest. This means they will have to clear the land again, build homes, cut trails, and eventually clear land for farming. The school, the Starlink shop, the church, and the still will all have to be rebuilt from scratch.

It was a difficult decision to make, but Father said, "We cannot stay here any longer. Now we are worried about the fighting." So there was really no option apart from leaving. However, Father did not like the idea of moving to the new place either. "Now I do not feel sure to go there anymore because if the military is approaching, if they can come here... they will follow us."

Father's concern was justified. The next move would be the last. If the junta's troops break through the lines and flood into the area, past experience shows that many civilians will be arrested, tortured, or killed. Homes will be ransacked and burned, girls will be raped, men will be forced to work as porters, and boys will be conscripted into the junta's army.

"That's why we have no place, nowhere to go," said Father. "All of us are ready. We are ready to escape to another place."

The problem now is that there is no place left to escape to.

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



Where can the people move next?
Photos: Antonio Graceffo





Sister Ma Ruan. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

CATHOLIC NUN BRINGS GRIEF COUNSELING AND SUPPORT TO WAR VICTIMS IN KARENNI STATE

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

The room bore the scars of war. Huge bullet holes covered the walls, panes of glass were missing, and of course there was no electricity, like in most buildings in Karenni State. About twenty participants sat around on an odd mix of plastic and wooden chairs, some in terrible disrepair. The meeting was part of a course training grief counselors under the watchful eye of a very animated and caring Catholic nun named Sister Ma Ruan.

The sister explained the impact that grief counseling has had on the internally displaced people she serves. "We make one-by-one counseling sessions. The second time I met them, I saw very much improvement." After repeated sessions over the course of a year, the sister said there was even greater improvement. "They learn how to control their emotions. They learn resilience and self-care, and also spiritual care. They begin to have more self-love and self-value, you see, after around one year."

The sister and her group of ten volunteer counselor-trainers made a proposal for a one-year mental and psychosocial support program to the Karenni State

civilian government, the Interim Executive Council (IEC), but funds are very tight. "So really it is very hard, and we pray a lot to get support for this project." The sister received some of the necessary funds and continues to look for additional support from other organizations while continuing her life-saving work.

The program extends across multiple IDP camps throughout the state. Karenni State's population has one of the highest percentages of displaced people, which by some accounts is about 80 percent of the total population. Compounding the issues of grief and displacement, many people are disabled, often victims of landmines, mortars, drones, or airstrikes, which are frequently directed at civilians and displaced persons' camps. In her current cohort of counseling patients, she has three disabled people.

Disabled people are invited into every new cohort of patients. "This is our policy," she said. Generally, about 15 percent of the group members are disabled. The sister said it is important for them to attend because "they have to talk and learn to meditate." These coping skills, the sister says, must be incorporated into their

daily lives. Then the sun radiated from her face as she smiled and said, "They have to learn to smile."

The counselling journey is a process, with multiple meetings and sessions over time. "For follow-up sessions, we want to get the result." She went on to say that it is important for participants to share their success stories with others. "This is the way we can handle our emotion and our stress and our depression, so that we can release ourselves. So we can see the center of God and also see our inner space. When we are capable of seeing our inner space, we know who we are."

She clarified that when she speaks about connecting with God, she means religion. "Now this is very good, the diversity: Baptists, Buddhists, and Catholics," she said, listing the three major religions in this part of Burma.

The conflict in Karenni in Burma has displaced roughly 80 percent of the population of Karenni State. Nearly everyone has lost someone, witnessed violence, or been forced from their homes. The needs are unlimited, and the resources are not, which is why one nun ends up running multiple programs at once.

Beyond grief counselling, Sister Ma Ruan runs several projects with internally displaced and disabled people. One point she raises is how hard life is for disabled people in Burma because the civilian government does not have the money to build accommodations for them. In Western cities, there are ramps, elevators, and handicapped access, as well as buses and other public transportation. But in Karenni, most of the disabled are living in IDP camps where they may have to walk a long way to get water. They have to collect firewood to cook, and with most IDP camps unable to provide people with a full set of rations, they must find a way to work or obtain food, all of which may be extremely challenging or even impossible for someone who has lost the ability to walk, see, or carry heavy loads.

Sister lamented, "There is no pavement for them to walk, no handrails to help them not fall down, and no toilet seats." Even going to the toilet is a problem because wounded and handicapped people may lack the ability to squat in a bamboo outhouse.

"Now I try to get also the young disabled people to study in Rangoon," Sister explained. "But I don't know where some of their parents are." This underscores another tragedy of this war. Many families are separated,

and many have lost family members.

Those who come for grief counseling are suffering from multiple losses and exposures to trauma, while those who are disabled may lack a family who can care for them. But Sister encourages them to study because this is their best hope for a better life. However, many lack basic education. "Originally they are simple people, just farmers. So they don't know how to support their children to get an education. They don't have much knowledge about that."

One of the income-replacement projects she was working on is fish farming and home gardening. She believed these were activities that could be modified to accommodate disabled people and help them grow food and live independently. Sister's proposal is consistent with the views of Khun Bedu, the vice president of the Karenni State Interim Executive Council, who also wants the IDPs to work on raising chickens and pigs and to begin cultivating land to increase food security in Karenni State.

Another group Sister works with is women who have survived abuse. This is a further example of the destruction the war is causing through alcoholism, which may stem from trauma or add to trauma, resulting in domestic violence. "So many survivors, women, they have been abused by their husbands," explained Sister. "So we have a shelter now. We brought them to our house, to our safe house. And we help them. We share some skill training, maybe, for example, like sewing, like knitting, to make clothes, to make a shawl, to make a scarf to sell."

Of all the country's needs in Burma, Sister said she wanted to focus on disabled people. "It's really painful for me to see them." She became emotional as she said, "They're so young, very young, very young. It's very difficult." Most of the amputees in Karenni State's only rehab clinic are in their late teens or early twenties. "But they are very strong," Sister affirmed. "They can determine to do the work, to give their leg, to give their arm, to give their life also." But she believed that despite these handicaps, through hard work and prayer they can overcome and build a life. Then, in a moment, her hopeful tone became serious again as she said, "But sometimes it's too early for me," meaning the victims are too young.

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



Tom Andrews. Photo: AFP

MIDEAST WAR RISKS DRAMATICALLY DEEPENING MYANMAR CRISIS: UN EXPERT

Myanmar's spiralling rights and humanitarian crises risk getting "much worse" as global attention focuses on the Middle East war and aid dwindles further, the top United Nations expert on the Asian country warned.

More than five years after Myanmar's military snatched power in a coup, the junta is relentlessly continuing to attack civilians and obstruct desperately needed humanitarian aid, Tom Andrews, the UN special rapporteur on rights in Myanmar, told AFP in an interview this week.

Andrews, whose mandate ends next month, cautioned that the war in the Middle East risked dramatically deepening the Myanmar crisis, and obscuring it even more from international view.

"Things are bad. They could get much worse," said the former US Democratic congressman from Maine, who also heads Harvard University's Southeast Asia Human Rights Project.

Even before the Middle East war started with Israeli-US air strikes on Iran on February 28, Myanmar had been affected by "a significant decrease in humanitarian aid", Andrews warned.

The aid cuts, which came amid the dramatic decline in global international funding since US President Donald Trump's return to office last year, had occurred at a time when the needs "continue to rise significantly", he said.

That aid is now likely to dwindle further as international focus and resources concentrate on the Middle East.

"In a place like Myanmar, it becomes completely hidden from view.

And support for the courageous people of Myanmar, who are risking life and limb daily, ... support for things like humanitarian aid, it's all going south," Andrews said.

"It's just a tragedy."

The Middle East war has also deepened the impression that the United Nations, which is working to protect and promote rights and provide aid in Myanmar, "is under siege", the special rapporteur said.

Andrews, who is an independent expert mandated by the UN Human Rights Council but does not speak on behalf of the United Nations, condemned the fact that international relations were increasingly seen as "purely transactional".

A world where powers accept that "might makes right" is "extraordinarily dangerous", Andrews said, warning about the signals sent to Myanmar's "brutal" junta.

Civilians targeted

The situation in Myanmar is already dire, with attacks on civilians escalating exponentially.

In the first year of the coup in 2021, "there were nine aerial attacks on civilian targets by the military", Andrews pointed out.

"Last year, there were 1,140 aerial attacks on civilian targets in Myanmar.

"This is not just people getting caught in the crossfire of a civil war. These people are being targeted."

The expert stressed that international pressure in recent years had had a positive impact, leading to a significant reduction in the flow of weapons to the junta.

And he said international pressure was also surely behind the junta's decision to host "sham elections" in recent months, with the leadership increasingly feeling the need to portray some sense of legitimacy.

Those elections, which were beset by fatal violence and widespread rights abuses, were widely rejected by the international community and dismissed by democracy watchdogs as an attempt to rebrand army rule.

Andrews called on countries to maintain their pressure on the Myanmar junta and also reject the "civilian government" that will emerge following the vote.

"An illegitimate government follows an illegitimate election," Andrews said.

"This will be a military junta in civilian clothing."

AFP



MYANMAR RESISTANCE TARGETS KETUMADI AIRBASE IN 18-ROCKET BARRAGE AMIDST CLAIMS OF GLOBAL FUEL SUPPLY DISRUPTION

On the night of 12 March, the Brave Warriors for Myanmar (BWM) and a coalition of allied revolutionary groups launched a coordinated rocket attack on the Ketumadi Airbase in Taungoo, Bago Region.

Firing eighteen 107 mm rockets from three separate locations at approximately 11:08 pm, the mission specifically targeted the airbase's aviation fuel storage tanks and a drone warehouse. Of the rockets prepared, 13 were successfully launched, reportedly catching the military off guard despite heightened patrols in the area.

"They appeared to be caught off guard. Despite continuous military patrols and columns operating in the area, we were still able to carry out the launch," a BWM official told Mizzima.

This operation was timed to coincide with a period of perceived vulnerability for the military junta's aviation logistics. BWM claims that the recent death of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei - who was killed in late February 2026 during the opening phase of the U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict - has severely disrupted a critical "ghost fleet" supply chain of aviation fuel to Myanmar.

While the Military Commission officially claims to hold a 40-day fuel reserve, resistance intelligence suggests the junta is scrambling to secure alternative suppliers from Arab nations to sustain its escalating aerial campaign.

Following the attack, Military Commission forces responded by firing small arms and six rounds of heavy artillery. The BWM official also said that the newly-appointed regional commander, Thura Zaw Lwin Soe, arrived the next morning to inspect the site. He reportedly ordered that information about the incident be suppressed, as it occurred on the same day the air force was commissioning new aircraft into service.

The commander also reportedly ordered troops to begin ground operations in the area and allegedly ordered that any suspects encountered should not be taken alive.

Taking advantage of the situation, resistance forces said they targeted a drone warehouse, an aviation fuel storage tank, and other high-value installations at the airbase.

According to BWM, if revolutionary forces can coordinate attacks on fuel depots and airbases during a period when the Military Commission is facing fuel shortages, the revolution can achieve victory more quickly.

The operation was carried out under the leadership of BWM in cooperation with the Mountain Knight Civilian Defense Forces (MKCDF), the Anti-Coup People's Liberation Force (ACPLF), and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Brigade (2), Battalion (5). The group said the mission was successfully completed despite heavy security blockades, attributing the outcome to strong coordination among allied forces and support from local groups.

BWM also referred to an earlier operation carried out on 27 January at around 4:30 am when five 107 mm rockets were fired at the Central Command during a visit by Myanmar's military leader Min Aung Hlaing. According to the group, he had arrived at the site to inspect polling stations and perform yadaya rituals intended to ward off misfortune.

The group said the attack reportedly injured several military officers, who were later transferred to Pyin Oo Lwin Hospital for treatment.



MYANMAR JUNTA INDUCTS NEW SU-30 AND K-8 FIGHTER JETS IN MEIKTILA TO BOLSTER AIR SUPERIORITY AMID RISING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

At a regional air force base in Meiktila on 12 March, the Myanmar military junta commissioned four new combat aircraft into its fleet. This latest induction included two Russian-made Sukhoi Su-30 multirole fighter jets and two K-8 Karakorum light attack aircraft, co-developed by China and Pakistan.

This was confirmed to Mizzima by Ko Naung Yoe, a military research officer at the Myanmar Defence and Security Institute (MDSI).

The induction ceremony comes more than four months after the military also inducted two Y-8F 200WB aircraft and three Mi-38 helicopters in November 2025.

During the ceremony, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing emphasized that a formidable air force is essential for maintaining "air superiority" and defending national interests, a statement that comes as the military intensifies its aerial campaigns to retake territories lost to revolutionary forces.

He added that possessing aircraft and helicopters alone is not sufficient, stressing the need for supporting systems, maintenance, and logistics capabilities, as well as training systems.

The K-8 light attack aircraft currently in service can reach a maximum speed of about 800 kilometers (500 miles) per hour and operate at altitudes of up to 13,000 meters (over 42,000 feet). They have a range of around

2,200 kilometers (over 1,300 miles) from their base.

The aircraft can carry 250-pound and 500-pound bombs and 57-mm unguided rockets and are armed with a 23-mm cannon. They can carry up to about 2,200 pounds of munitions and are used by the military both for pilot training and airstrike missions.

The Su-30 is currently the most advanced fighter jet in the junta's air force, equipped with advanced avionics, modern radar systems, and sophisticated missile capabilities.

It can conduct interception missions, long-range reconnaissance, precision airstrikes, and missile attacks. The aircraft can be equipped with beyond-visual-range missiles, guided bombs, and anti-ship missiles, carry up to eight tons of weapons, and has a range of about 3,000 kilometers (1,800 miles).

While the Military Commission continues to strengthen its air force capabilities, civilian casualties from airstrikes across the country have also increased.

According to the Nyan Lin Thit Analytica research group, from the time of the Myanmar coup d'état in February 2021 through August 2025, the military conducted more than 5,800 airstrikes.

These attacks killed more than 3,400 civilians and injured over 6,000 people, according to a report released in October 2025.



Fighters in action. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES KILL EIGHT, INJURE DOZENS IN THREE-DAY BOMBING CAMPAIGN AGAINST TIGYAING TOWNSHIP VILLAGES

Between 8 and 10 March, the Myanmar military junta launched a series of deliberate aerial attacks on four villages in Sagaing Region's Tigyaing Township, resulting in the deaths of at least eight residents, including monks and novices, and injuring 18 others near Zee Kone village.

At around 12:15 pm on 8 March, a jet fighter departed from Homalin and dropped two bombs near a local clinic in Ah Lal Taw village, injuring two residents.

On 9 March at approximately 2:15 pm two more bombs were dropped near Aung Thar Kone village. Later that day, at about 4:30 pm, two jet fighters taking off from Tada-U dropped four bombs near Sut Sar village and Ni Tar village. According to the Tigyaing Revolution (TR) group, the attacks resulted in five casualties, including deaths.

"These villages were sheltering internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had fled from the town, and there

were no ongoing clashes in the area. The strike was a deliberate attack on civilians," an official from the Tigyaing Revolution (TR) group said on 11 March.

The official added that at around 1:00 pm on 10 March, a jet fighter dropped two bombs on Zee Kone village, killing eight local residents and injuring 18 others.

"The bombs struck an area near the village monastery, and those killed include monks and novice monks," he added.

Although there has been no recent fighting in Tigyaing Township, local organizations are warning residents to remain vigilant about the threat of airstrikes, as junta forces continue to carry out aerial attacks on villages they no longer control.



INSTITUTE OF CHIN AFFAIRS REPORTS HEAVY MYANMAR JUNTA CASUALTIES AND ESCALATING AIRSTRIKES AS RESISTANCE FORCES DEFEND STRATEGIC FALAM HUB

The Institute of Chin Affairs (ICA) has released a comprehensive report detailing four months of intense conflict in Falam Township, revealing that over 200 military junta troops were killed and 40 captured between November 2025 and February 2026.

"We gathered casualty figures from reports by revolutionary comrades and officials who took part in the battles and verified additional information using primary reports from the ground," Salai Van Sui San, Information Officer of the ICA, told Mizzima.

The report also stated that the junta carried out more than 2,500 airstrikes during the same period. Drone attacks and heavy artillery fire killed 15 civilians and injured another 30. In addition, more than 60 structures – including schools, churches, and hospitals – were destroyed.

"The military junta's current offensive is quite unusual. When the fighting began in October 2025, incidents of houses being burned were relatively limited. However, since late February, airstrikes targeting civilians and the burning of homes have become much more frequent," said Salai Van Sui San.

Chin resistance forces believe the military commission may be increasingly targeting civilians as it faces heavy casualties and difficulties in delivering reinforcements and supplies on time.

The ICA report said Chin revolutionary forces believe the military junta's extensive use of force and heavy airstrikes in Falam are linked to its strategic objective of securing access to Surbung Airport for administrative and military logistics.

"They want to use the airport to more easily transport rations and ammunition required for operations in northern Chin State," the ICA Information Officer said.

If the junta were to regain control of Falam, it could potentially deploy troops along routes linking northern and southern Chin State, as well as toward the India-Myanmar border.

The report also noted that ongoing fighting has displaced around 85 percent of residents from nine villages in Tedim Township and 27 villages in Falam Township.

At present, children, pregnant women, and elderly people displaced by the fighting are facing serious health challenges and urgently require food, shelter, and medical assistance.

The ICA said the junta's actions show a complete disregard for human rights and international humanitarian law.

Amid escalating military tensions, the ICA has urged continued documentation of human rights violations, international investigations into airstrikes and civilian casualties, and increased humanitarian assistance for affected communities.

According to Chin revolutionary forces, the junta has launched an offensive involving more than 1,000 troops organized into four columns to retake Falam, which is currently under the control of Chin forces. The advancing columns are moving from Kalay in Sagaing Region – a key gateway to Chin State along the Kalay-Natchaung-Gangaw, Kalay-Natchaung-Webula, Kalay-Khaikam-Thaingngin, and Tedim-Thaingngin routes.

The junta's columns are being jointly resisted by a coalition of Chin revolutionary forces. This coalition includes the Chin National Defence Force (CNDP), part of the Chin Brotherhood (CB) based in Falam, as well as units from the Chinland Council (CC), including the Chin National Army (CNA).

JUSTICE FOR MYANMAR CALLS FOR ACTION OVER ALLEGED SANCTIONS BREACH



On March 10, Justice For Myanmar (JFM) urged Canadian authorities to investigate four Canadian citizens linked to the pearl company Belpearl for allegedly continuing business with the military-controlled Myanma Pearl Enterprise despite Canadian sanctions. JFM warned that the trade may be generating revenue for Myanmar’s junta.

The statement is as follows.

In April 2024, leading Canadian sanctions lawyers representing Justice For Myanmar made a submission to the RCMP to report the suspected violations of Canadian sanctions, and shared evidence that included leaked documents and corporate filings.

The four Canadian citizens are Pierre Hajjar, Marie Rose Jarmakli Hajjar, Sarkis Hajjar and Michael Pierre Hajjar, the family behind Belpearl, a network of companies engaged in the farming, processing, auctioning and trade of pearls. The Canadian company, Belpearl Toronto Inc, was also reported to RCMP.

Belpearl operates a pearl farming business in Shwe Kyun (Russel Island), off the southern Tanintharyi coast of Myanmar, through the local company Belpearl Myanmar Co. Ltd., a subsidiary of the Singapore company Belpearl (S) Pte Ltd.

Belpearl was granted a Myanmar Investment Commission permit in 2014 by the military’s proxy

government for its Tanintharyi farm.

Belpearl Myanmar farms pearls under a production sharing contract with the state-owned MPE, which was illegally seized by the junta through its February 1, 2021 illegal coup attempt. Under the arrangement, Belpearl provides MPE with a share of its production. The junta then sells the pearls in regular emporiums in Naypyidaw, often attended by war criminal and junta head Min Aung Hlaing.

By providing the junta with pearls, Belpearl is helping generate revenue that funds its ongoing campaign of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In addition to pearl farming, Belpearl operates a pearl auction business in Hong Kong that sells both pearls from Belpearl Myanmar and other companies in Myanmar that are farming pearls, including Tasaki, Myanmar Atlantic, Myanmar Andaman and Annawar Pearl.

Belpearl is therefore supporting the junta-controlled pearl sector more broadly by bringing Myanmar pearls to the global market.

On May 17, 2021, Canada sanctioned Myanma Pearl Enterprise. Yet, evidence on file with Justice For Myanmar and submitted to Canadian police demonstrate the continued involvement of members of the Hajjar family in Belpearl’s Myanmar operations, in

suspected violation of Canadian sanctions:

Marie Rose Jarmakli Hajjar and Pierre Hajjar served as directors of Belpearl Myanmar until January 2026, according to corporate records. Sarkis Hajjar was also a director of Belpearl Myanmar in the period following the military's coup attempt.

Until January 2026, Belpearl Myanmar was owned by Marie Rose Jarmakli Hajjar and Michael Pierre Hajjar through the Singapore registered company Belpearl (S). Sarkis Hajjar was a director of Belpearl (S).

Pierre Hajjar's direct involvement in Belpearl Myanmar operations is further demonstrated by Environmental Compliance Certificates submitted to the junta in 2024 that list him as the chairperson.

In addition, Marie Rose Jarmakli Hajjar and Pierre Hajjar are directors of Belpearl Auctions Limited in Hong Kong and are engaged in the sale of pearls from both Belpearl Myanmar and other pearl farms that operate under licences from MPE.

Belpearl Myanmar's farming operations have been sustained by Belpearl Japan Co. Ltd., a company associated with Pierre Hajjar that has shipped pearl nuclei to Belpearl Myanmar following Canadian sanctions on MPE, according to leaked tax filings. This has enabled Belpearl Myanmar to continue farming and supplying pearls to MPE.

Under Section 13 of Canada's Myanmar Sanctions, Canadians are prohibited from knowingly doing anything that can cause, facilitate, or assist any prohibited activity, which includes transactions or dealings in property owned, held or controlled by MPE.

The police submission argues that the four members of the Hajjar family identified have almost certainly breached Section 13 of the Myanmar Sanctions because they had to know the sanctions implications of their actions, or were at minimum wilfully blind to them, which also meets the legal test.

While it is not possible for Justice For Myanmar to confirm whether pearls sold by Belpearl Toronto were sourced from Myanmar after MPE was sanctioned, there is a high risk that it has done so and therefore also breached Canadian Sanctions, which requires investigation.

Australian and EU loophole through failure to sanction MPE

In the months following the military's coup attempt, the USA and the UK also sanctioned MPE, however the EU and Australia have thus far failed to do so.

The four members of the Hajjar family and their business associates appear to have exploited this sanctions loophole by transferring Belpearl Myanmar to Georges Christian Jarmakli, a French citizen who joined the company's board in 2024, and Nejteh Movses Demirian, an Australian citizen who joined the board in 2025.

In January 2026, Marie Rose Jarmakli Hajjar and Michael Pierre Hajjar transferred ownership of Belpearl (S) to Nejteh Movses Demirian via his fully owned Singapore company, APAC Aquaculture Pte Ltd.

Due to the close links between the current and former owners of Belpearl, Justice For Myanmar believes there is a high risk that members of the Hajjar family could continue to direct Belpearl by proxy, despite exiting Belpearl Myanmar and Belpearl (S). Georges Christian Jarmakli is believed to be a relative of Marie Rose Jarmakli. Furthermore, Nejteh Movses Demirian and Marie Rose Jarmakli Hajjar were business partners in the Hong Kong company, South Sea Aquaculture Company Limited before she transferred her shares to Georges Christian Jarmakli in 2024.

The recent involvement of a French and Australian citizen in Belpearl demonstrates potential dangers when sanctions are not coordinated. We urge the USA, UK, EU, Canada and Australia to coordinate sanctions and close loopholes, including through the urgent sanctioning of MPE by the EU and Australia.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "The Hajjars and Belpearl have been in business with a Canadian sanctioned junta entity for over four years.

"By doing so, they have helped generate revenue for an illegal military junta that is killing children, bombing schools and hospitals and destroying whole communities.

"We have welcomed all rounds of Canadian sanctions imposed in response to the military's illegal coup attempt and atrocity crimes.

"However, sanctions need to be backed by rigorous enforcement and the actions of members of the Hajjar family amounts to an egregious disregard for Canadian law.

"We call on Canadian authorities to fully investigate all cases of sanctions violations involving Belpearl and its owners and take action to the full extent of the law."

Photo: Supplied

MICS-TUSF THREATENS HEINEKEN MYANMAR BOYCOTT OVER ALLEGED LABOUR EXPLOITATION AND SYSTEMATIC CONTRACT DENIALS

The Myanmar Industry Craft Service-Trade Unions Federation (MICS-TUsF) is moving to launch a widespread boycott of Heineken Myanmar products following an investigation into the Hmawbi-based brewery that uncovered evidence of workers being denied permanent contracts, forced to work without rest days, and subjected to unstable six-month employment cycles through third-party agencies.

In February, the MICS-TUsF investigated the factory and found that workers were being exploited, barred from securing permanent contracts through employment agencies for six months, and required to work without days off.

Following the intervention of the European Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar (EuroCham), discussions were held on February 11, but the company failed to provide a positive response.

Thet Hnin Aung, General Secretary of the MICS-TUsF, said Heineken was shirking its responsibilities by refusing to recognize the workers as its employees and instead classifying them as agency workers. He also criticized the company's cooperation with the military-appointed Ministry, saying the imposed fine appeared to be merely for show rather than a genuine effort to resolve the issue.

"Heineken is still denying that these workers are its employees, claiming instead that they are agency workers. This is not only a violation of the law but also a superficial solution in collaboration with the military council's Ministry of Labor," Thet Hnin Aung told Mizzima.

Although Heineken paid 24 days' compensation for six months of unpaid leave as ordered by the junta, it was merely a show of compliance rather than a solution to the underlying problem, Thet Hnin Aung added.

"We have received complaints from more than 200 workers, while the factory employs around 500 in total. However, workers are dismissed every six months, leaving them without job stability. At present, the more than 200 workers who reported the issue have not received compensation; only those who file complaints individually are compensated, and the exact number remains unclear. That is why I say there is no transparency," Thet Hnin Aung said.

Mizzima has learned that factory workers were previously fined 30,000 kyats for missing a single day of work but are now required to sign a pledge and face dismissal after two days of absence.

The MICS-TUsF has accused Heineken of failing to comply with international business ethics, including OECD guidelines and ILO standards, and has reported the alleged violations to the company's headquarters in the Netherlands.

If Heineken fails to carry out an impartial investigation and transparency remains lacking, the MICS-TUsF has warned it will issue reports and is prepared to take action against Heineken products.

The Heineken Myanmar factory has not yet issued an official response to the allegations.



Kyaw Htun. Photo: supplied

MYANMAR AMBASSADOR TO JAPAN CRITICIZED FOR PRESSURING FIRE VICTIMS TO SHUN POLITICS

U Kyaw Htun, the military junta's acting ambassador to Japan, has sparked a backlash among the Myanmar diaspora after telling fire victims in Ibaraki Prefecture to return home if they wish to engage in political activities.

During a visit on 5 March to assist workers whose documents were destroyed in a 19 February house fire in Shimotsuma, the ambassador reportedly used the meeting to warn workers against joining revolutionary organizations.

In a video clip seen by Mizzima, U Kyaw Htun said, "I ask you not to join such organizations. You only want to follow your own ideas. Are you here to do politics or to earn money? Don't lose your purpose. If you want to do politics, go back to Myanmar and do politics."

He also said that wherever they were in Japan or Thailand, they should avoid getting involved in politics and instead focus on their work, rather than joining politically active organizations.

"You don't need to side with those who try to persuade you. If you do, you will simply become tools for them," U Kyaw Htun said.

The ambassador added that Myanmar citizens should not betray their country because they were born on Myanmar soil, drank Myanmar water, and grew up there.

According to U Myint Swe, chairman of the Federation of Workers' Union of Burmese Citizens (FWUBC), U Kyaw Htun who arrived 20 days after the fire to assist the workers repeatedly told them during the meeting not to become involved in political activities.

"He came 20 days after the fire. He showed little concern about what kind of assistance would be provided to the fire victims in Japan or when it would be delivered. Instead, he repeatedly echoed the words of the Military Commission, telling us not to get involved in political activities," U Myint Swe said.

A house fire broke out early on the morning of 19 February in Shimotsuma, Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan, where 21 Myanmar workers and one Chinese national were living. One Myanmar worker was killed in the blaze.



Photo: Supplied

NUG FUEL TRANSIT DIRECTIVE SPARKS FRICTION WITH CHIN AND RAKHINE ALLIES

A confidential directive issued by the National Unity Government (NUG) on 6 March, has ignited a rare public dispute within the anti-junta resistance over the management of fuel supplies to the ethnic states.

Signed by U Lwin Ko Latt, the directive mandates that all fuel transit through NUG-controlled divisions or federal units destined for Kachin, Chin, and Rakhine States must now obtain explicit permission from the NUG Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration.

“Since there was no prior discussion with our organizations, we don’t know the intent behind this letter. If followed, this directive effectively treats the people in Kachin, Chin, and Rakhine States with discrimination,” Salai Thang Cung Phe, Chairman of the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC), told Mizzima.

Salai Thang Cung Phe added that allowing fuel storage in the central regions while requiring NUG approval for transport to other states creates confusion and potential dissent among the public, which he views as a negative sign.

He further noted that while transport was previously free, these new restrictions could lead to black markets and skyrocketing fuel prices in the states, causing hardship and loss for civilians struggling to access fuel.

U Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson for the NUG Prime Minister’s Office, explained to Mizzima that the directive aims to prevent fuel from reaching the military

junta. “The main reason is to strictly monitor fuel, so it doesn't reach the terrorist military. If it is confirmed that the transport belongs to our allies, passage will be permitted,” he said.

The directive, which orders "allowing all types of oil to enter controlled areas but strictly prohibiting their exit," was addressed to Union Ministries, the NUG Coordination Office, Military Region 1 Command Office, and district and township administration teams.

The directive also claims that because Middle Eastern oil exports are disrupted by the war in Iran, causing a global fuel crisis, it is a time when state-level policies must be implemented to manage resources for the public.

From the date of the directive, township tax and fine collection gates are required to strictly implement the order, and relevant departments have been notified to issue necessary further instructions.

Dissatisfaction regarding this confidential NUG directive has emerged among the Chin people and revolutionary circles, with widespread criticism appearing on social media.

Out of the nine townships in Chin State, the junta is only stationed in Hakha and Tedim, while revolutionary forces control the remaining seven. Fuel is reportedly imported from the central plains and India.



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 Karen National Union



Massacre victims in a video screenshot from a drone. Photo: Supplied

USCB CONDEMNS BAGO REGION MASSACRE BY MYANMAR JUNTA

The US Campaign for Burma (USCB) released a strongly worded statement on 9 March condemning the detention and killing of civilians by Myanmar junta troops in Kyauk Kyi Township (called Ler Doh Township in Karen) on 5 and 7 March.

The statement is as follows.

The U.S. Campaign for Burma (USCB) strongly condemns the recent atrocities committed by the Burma Army in Ler Doh Township, Kler Lwee Htu District, which constitute clear violations of international humanitarian law and may amount to crimes against humanity.

According to the Karen Peace Support Network, on March 5, 2026, Burmese Army Infantry Battalion (IB) 264, combined with forces from Battalions 20 and 439, entered Htee Pu Lu Tract and fired indiscriminately on civilians.

Five men, aged 35 to 53, were shot and killed as they were running away from junta forces. Approximately 160 villagers, including women and children, were also arrested and detained within a village school and used as human shields.

On March 7, 2026, the same joint forces escalated their assault, launching drones and jet fighters on Kyaung Gone and Dala Hseik villages in Htee Pu Lu Tract. These attacks killed twenty-five civilians, including seventeen women and girls (aged 6 to 60) and eight men and boys (aged 7 to 55).

"The Burma Army does not wage war — it wages terror. Bombing civilians, killing the unarmed, and arresting the survivors is not a military strategy. It is a crime against humanity. The people of Kyauk Kyi deserve justice, and the world must stop looking away."

Myra Dahgaypaw, USCB Board Member

These deliberate attacks on civilians, extrajudicial killings, and use of human shields are grave breaches of international law. USCB calls on the international community, including the United Nations, ASEAN, and neighboring governments, to urgently hold the Burmese junta accountable for its crimes against humanity and provide emergency humanitarian assistance and protection to affected communities.

F FORTIFY L RIGHTS

FORTIFY RIGHTS REPORT EXPOSES ABUSE OF ROHINGYA IN MALAYSIAN DETENTION CENTRES

Fortify Rights said on 12 March that Rohingya refugees in Malaysia are being held indefinitely in harsh and degrading conditions in immigration detention centres, warning that many detainees face years of detention without legal recourse or access to courts.

The full release is as follows.

On January 1, 2026, the government of Malaysia began a new refugee registration scheme, the Dokumen Pendaftaran Pelarian (Refugee Registration Document, known as the DPP). The programme, implemented by the Home Affairs Ministry with the aim of registering refugees in Malaysia, replaces the current U.N. Refugee Agency's registration. The government is first piloting the scheme with refugee detainees held in the Immigration Detention Centers (IDC).

"Malaysia's immigration detention is notorious for being one of the most broken and abusive systems globally. Many detainees are held in horrendous conditions," said Yap Lay Sheng, Senior Human Rights Specialist at Fortify Rights. "For Rohingya, due to their

manufactured statelessness, they can be detained indefinitely in legal limbo, subjected to years of severe abuse and inhumane treatment."

Between April and December 2025, Fortify Rights conducted 16 interviews with Rohingya current and former detainees—including two who called from within IDCs—their family members, and other witnesses, who described how detainees are held for extended periods without legal representation, judicial oversight, or avenues to challenge their detention. While in detention, immigration officials subject interviewees to further torture and severe ill-treatment.

According to the latest government statistics, IDCs nationwide are operating at or near full capacity. The IDCs currently hold more than 21,000 migrants and refugees—only a few hundred below the government's declared limit of 21,530. Of this total, detainees from Myanmar constitute the largest nationality group, at 8,884 individuals, including 5,102 Rohingya; approximately one in every four detainees is Rohingya. The National Human Rights Commission of Malaysia has also found instances in which authorities declared

IDC capacities in excess of their officially gazetted limits.

Arbitrary and Indefinite Detention

Rohingya refugees are often held in indefinite detention in the IDCs without judicial remedies that can limit the period of detention, effectively amounting to arbitrary detention that contravenes international law.

In December 2024, “Bibi,” not her real name, a 15-year-old Rohingya girl, was traveling with her uncle, “Abdul,” from Terengganu state in northeastern Peninsular Malaysia to the capital, Kuala Lumpur, when police stopped their bus at a checkpoint. Because she lacked U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) documents, the police arrested and detained her at the Kuala Krai police station.

Her uncle told Fortify Rights that police officers solicited bribes in exchange for her release, but then reneged on her release after the family paid a bribe. “I arranged for 2,000 ringgit [approximately US\$500],” he said. “The officer told me they would release her after a day or two.” The officers refused to accept the payment through official channels. Abdul explained, “They summoned us to a location. We went into the officer’s car. He took the money and told us to get out. They took the money but didn’t release her.”

Bibi, a minor, has now been detained at the Tanah Merah IDC for more than a year. During video calls with her family, she described contracting scabies and frequently falling ill. “When she asks for medicine from officers, they kick and punch her,” Abdul told Fortify Rights.

In another incident, in January 2025, authorities arrested “Siddiq,” 26, although he possessed a UNHCR card. He said the authorities “destroyed my UNHCR card and threw it away into the trash” at the Putrajaya immigration office, where arrestees were taken in for processing. At the time, an officer reportedly told the individuals that they were no longer registered refugees

but were instead “kosong” (literally “zero”), a colloquial Malay term for undocumented status.

Authorities detained Siddiq beyond the 14-day remand period that authorities use to verify refugee status. “After 14 days, I was sent to the Magistrate’s Court. They asked for documents and UNHCR card number. I don’t have the card number, so the magistrate put my status as undocumented,” Siddiq recounted. “I started worrying that I cannot be released because I didn’t have a card.”

Although Siddiq was eventually released after obtaining a replacement card, other detainees have their cards routinely confiscated—or damaged by immigration officers, stripping refugees of the only documentation that could protect them from arrest and prolonged detention.

In February 2024, “Razia,” 35, visited her husband at a police station where police detained him on immigration-related charges. Though he was a UNHCR-registered refugee, Razia told Fortify Rights, “They [the police] threw the card away. Then they told him, ‘Now you don’t have a card, we have to arrest you.’ They threw the card away on the spot. The card is lost. I don’t know where it is now.”

The police then moved Razia’s husband away from the station, but despite making direct requests to the police for information, Malaysian authorities failed to disclose the whereabouts of her husband.

She has not seen or heard from him for more than two years, in what may amount to a case of an enforced disappearance.

“I want to know where my husband is and I want to meet him again,” she told Fortify Rights.

Once in detention, detainees can be held incommunicado, cut off from families and denied access to UNHCR, leaving them with no means to seek refugee registration, often the only means for securing release.

Since August 2019, the Malaysian government has barred the UNHCR from entering IDCs, hindering effective oversight and protection of refugees and other vulnerable individuals. The Home Ministry has denied allegations that it bars UNHCR access, highlighting that it has granted two visits to UNHCR in 2025 to individual IDCs. However, such limited, ad hoc access falls far short of any meaningful or effective monitoring, which requires regular UNHCR access to all IDCs and their detainees.

As a result, detainees can languish in IDCs for a long period. According to one Rohingya former detainee, “There were thousands of people in there. Some of them are in there for seven or eight years.”

Lack of Due Process

Current and former detainees who spoke to Fortify Rights described how some had never been brought before a court nor given the opportunity to engage a lawyer, violating international legal standards for due process and detention.

“I was never brought to a lawyer or a court,” said “Sara,” 25, who was detained with her three- and four-year-old children in November 2023. “The only thing they did was to take my fingerprint on the morning I was arrested. Nothing after that.”

She said the family was only released from the Machap Umboo IDC after the UNHCR reportedly intervened in early 2025, after they were detained for more than a year.

In certain cases, detainees are brought to court, but proceedings are conducted without interpreters or access to legal counsel. As a result, detainees often lack a clear understanding of the charges they face. Malaysia’s state-funded legal aid programme, administered through the National Legal Aid Foundation, does not extend to adult non-Malaysian nationals.

Since 2006, Malaysia has instituted a Special Sessions Court for Immigration for detainees within the highly securitized complexes of the IDCs. In 2020, the government increased the number of these courts to “expedite disposal of cases” and “prevent backlog of cases.”

One humanitarian worker who accompanied a refugee to proceedings in one of these courts—together with another refugee acting as a volunteer interpreter—told Fortify Rights that they were denied entry to the detention facility where the court was held:

They [the authorities] said, “The court is inside the detention center, so you cannot enter. Only the lawyer or a witness, or someone called by the court, can go in.” ...The lawyer called [name withheld] to enter to translate. They denied his entry and said, “You are a refugee. You cannot enter. Even if the court summoned you, you cannot enter, even if you are a UNHCR card holder.”

The Malaysian Bar Council has previously reported how the vast majority of detainees in these special courts were unrepresented by legal counsel, frequently pleaded guilty without understanding the consequences, were often not informed of the charges against them, and were processed in group hearings with little or no individualized judicial inquiry, raising serious concerns about the lack of fair trial and due process guarantees.

Ill-Treatment and Inhuman and Degrading Detention Conditions

Rohingya refugees and other detainees interviewed by Fortify Rights described pervasive ill-treatment, severe overcrowding, denial of food and clean drinking water, lack of access to healthcare, and other abuses amounting to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment in the IDCs.

An 18-year-old Rohingya, “Ali,” arrested in 2024 and detained in the state of Johor, described conditions

unfit for detainees and experiencing repeated abuse. Speaking to Fortify Rights by phone from within the IDC, he said:

They put over 220 people in one detention cell, all crammed together. I can't sleep, move and even take a shower properly. They don't provide me and others enough and timely food either. Moreover, the officers often made us do 'muster' [roll call in stress position].

Multiple detainees reported being subjected to physical violence and collective punishment for minor or arbitrary reasons.

"Kamal," 38, a UNHCR-registered Rohingya refugee from Klang, recounted physical abuse and overcrowding inside the IDCs. He described how a total of 134 men had to share a space barely 20 to 30 feet long. "We had to sleep in two rows packed tight. Our heads and legs were touching and there was no free space," he told Fortify Rights. "If I needed to go to the toilet, I had to cross over the bodies of others since there was no space left."

Kamal told Fortify Rights how officers would punish them for minor infractions or arbitrarily, saying, "Sometimes, if people speak loudly, they would just come in and start beating. They also made us do 'muster.' If anyone mistakenly turns his head during the muster time, the officials also beat [them]."

Zahid's wife, who arrived in Malaysia in 2024, was arrested while seven months pregnant and has been in detention for more than a year. She was forced to give birth inside a detention camp. He told Fortify Rights:

My wife was arrested seven months ago at home by immigration. She arrived in Malaysia in 2024. Until now, she remains in detention. She had to give birth to our child in detention camp. Two women officials broke into the house we lived in and arrested her by force ... My wife was arrested in Kota Baru and taken to Tanah Merah camp.

According to Zahid, his wife was subjected to degrading treatment. He said, "My wife told me that ... she has to keep the child asleep in the evening. She said she can't get enough sleep as the officers force her to dance for them."

"Shabbir," a 33-year-old Rohingya refugee whose pregnant wife was arrested in January 2025, and who has remained in detention since, told Fortify Rights that his wife was denied maternal healthcare. "She told me that they beat her during the delivery. She was unable to deliver and didn't know how to. She was physically beaten at that time," Shabbir said.

Shabbir also described extortion inside the detention system, telling Fortify Rights: "Two months after I was released, I was able to talk to my wife. I had to pay 200 ringgit to transfer the money out of my account to the officer's [to be able to call my wife]."

Other detainees suffer from long-term health conditions due to prolonged medical neglect.

"Shomin" told Fortify Rights that his 13-year-old brother has been arrested and detained since May 24, 2022, after attempting to enter Malaysia. The brother has since become partially paralysed, after falling seriously ill in custody and being denied adequate medical care. "Right now, he is paralysed. He can no longer walk," Shomin said. "He fell sick and couldn't get proper treatment."

In the past few years, there have been scores of deaths in custody in immigration detention centers due to untreated illnesses and medical neglect. Since mid-2024, the government has dramatically ramped up its campaign of immigration enforcement, resulting in a sharp increase in arrests, detentions, and deportations nationwide. Data compiled by Fortify Rights—drawing on parliamentary disclosures, official government statements, media reporting, and archived data from the Ministry of Home Affairs—shows that immigration-related arrests rebounded steeply after the COVID-19 pandemic and surged to their highest levels in more than a decade in 2025.

This intensified enforcement, which has been driven by large-scale, nationwide immigration raids targeting undocumented migrants and refugees, has significantly increased the population held in IDCs, exacerbating already overcrowded conditions and compounding risks of abuse, prolonged detention, and medical neglect.

Ill-Treatment and Inhuman and Degrading Detention Conditions

Malaysia is not party to the 1951 U.N. Refugee Convention or its 1967 protocol, and does not formally use the UNHCR refugee framework to determine refugee status. Malaysia's primary legislation on immigration matters, the Immigration Act 1959/63, does not distinguish between undocumented migrants and refugees. Anyone who lacks a "valid entry permit" is considered an "illegal" or "prohibited" immigrant. Under Section 35 of the Act, police, immigration and other officers can arrest "without warrant" any person "reasonably believed to be a person liable to removal from Malaysia."

Section 51 of the Immigration Act 1959/63 authorizes the detention of non-citizens at an immigration depot or other place designated by the Director General "until an opportunity arises to return him to his place of embarkation or to the country of his birth or citizenship." The provision does not prescribe a maximum period of detention, nor does it establish a requirement for periodic judicial review of continued detention. In circumstances where removal is not reasonably foreseeable—such as in the case of Rohingya individuals, who are deemed stateless by Myanmar authorities—this statutory framework permits detention of indeterminate duration.

Furthermore, Section 59A(1) of the Immigration Act 1959/63 provides that "[t]here shall be no judicial review in any court of, and no court shall have or exercise any jurisdiction in respect of, any act done or any decision made by the Minister or the Director General under this Act," except with respect to compliance with procedural requirements. This ouster clause restricts courts from examining the substance, reasonableness,

proportionality, or duration of detention decisions, nor can individuals challenge the legality of the detention.

Since Malaysia has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, authorities do not formally recognize UNHCR cards as conferring legal status to cardholders. However, the Convention provides authoritative guidance on refugee protection under international law. Under the Convention, a refugee is defined as a person unable or unwilling to return to their country due to a well-founded fear of persecution. Article 31 of the Refugee Convention notes that refugees should not be penalized, including through arrest or detention, in relation to their irregular entry or stay in a country of asylum, recognizing the fact that individuals fleeing persecution cannot always obtain proper documentation or official authorizations.

Despite the lack of formal treaty ratification, Malaysia is still bound by international human rights obligations that prohibit arbitrary arrest, indefinite detention, and the refoulement of individuals to countries where they may face persecution, violence, or other serious harm.

The DPP must lead to the immediate release of refugees from detention and end their criminalization for seeking safety, Fortify Rights said today.

"The widespread abuses and violations of the rights of legitimate refugees in Malaysia are a direct result of Malaysia's unwillingness to sign and abide by the UN Refugee Convention, which sets out clear guidelines on recognizing and protecting refugees," said Yap Lay Sheng. "Instead of tinkering with a migrant system already rife with abuse, Malaysia should abide by international legal standards and follow the U.N. Refugee Convention."



POWs in the camp prior to the junta bombing. Photo: Supplied

HIGH-RANKING MYANMAR JUNTA OFFICERS KILLED IN "RUTHLESS" AIRSTRIKE ON PRISONERS OF WAR CAMP IN RAKHINE STATE

Brigadier General Myint Shwe, commander of Light Infantry Division 101, and several officers with the rank of major were among the 116 people killed during a massive four-hour junta airstrike on an Arakan Army (AA) detention camp in Ann Township on 8 March.

In a video testimony released by Arakan Princess Media, surviving prisoner of war Brigadier General Thaung Htun described the assault as a "calculated and ruthless act," noting that the military conducted multiple reconnaissance flights and was fully aware the location was a prisoner of war (POW) facility before deploying four jet fighters and four Y-12 transport planes for the attack.

"Division Commander-level officer Col. Thet Htoo San narrowly escaped the incident. However, Brigadier General Myint Shwe was inside a building that caught fire during the attack and died there. Several majors were also killed. A clinic located next to the detention ward was struck in the airstrike. Young military doctors and nurses among their ranks, as well as two or three Grade-2 staff officers holding the rank of major were killed," said Brigadier General Thaung Htun.

The strike targeted prison wards and a clinic, burning many detainees alive including military doctors and nurses while Colonel Thet Htoo San, a high-ranking officer captured in 2024, narrowly escaped the flames.

The Myanmar Defence and Security Institute (MDSI) had previously reported him as killed or missing during the fighting in Thandwe Township in August 2024.

Colonel Thet Htoo San (Army-30317), a graduate of the 40th intake of the Defence Services Academy (DSA-40) and who was captured in December 2024 when the Arakan Army (AA) seized the Military Operation Command 5 (MOC 5) headquarters, survived the attack.

According to a statement by the Arakan Army (AA), the junta's forces carried out an airstrike on the POW camp in the Dalat Chaung area on March 8. The attack lasted nearly four hours, from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm, and involved four jet fighters and four Y-12 transport aircraft.

Brig. Gen. Thaung Htun explained that the bombs first struck the prison wards, causing the buildings to catch fire immediately. Because the flames spread rapidly, those inside had no chance to escape and were burned to death.

He further stated that the junta had carried out numerous reconnaissance flights prior to the attack. Despite being aware that the location was a detention facility, they still launched the heavy bombing attack, which he described as a "cruel" act.

"It is heartbreaking and tragic. Why be so cruel? This incident appears to be a calculated and ruthless act. That is how I see it, and I feel deeply saddened by it," he said.

During the junta's airstrikes, some prison doors were broken open, allowing a number of detainees to escape.



KPSN LABELS MYANMAR JUNTA ATTACKS IN NYAUGLEBIN DISTRICT 'WAR CRIMES' AND CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION

The Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN) issued an immediate press release on 11 March detailing recent massacres, airstrikes, and large-scale detentions of civilians in Nyaunglebin District, Bago Region between 5 and 7 March.

The text of the release is as follows.

41 Civilians in Kawthoolei (Karen State), have been killed in Burmese military attacks from 7 March to 10 March. 18 children were among those killed. An unborn baby was also killed when its mother was killed.

On 7 March, the Burmese military IB 264 launched attacks on Htee Pu Lu track, Ler Doh township, Kler Lwee Htu district (also known as Nyaunglebin District in the eastern Bago area).

During the attacks, drones and fighter jets were used to drop bombs on Kyaung Gone and Dala Hseik villages. The bombs killed seventeen girls and women, aged 45, 48, 40, 40, 50, 43, 12, 13, 53, 43, 9, 6, 8, 9, 10, 60, and 16, and eight boys and men, aged 15, 14, 14, 7, 55, 12, 13 and one age unknown.

In addition, there were 17 civilians injured: nine women and girls aged 1, 5, 56, 61, 57, 26, 41, 35, and 32, and eight men and boys aged 8, 13, 14, 61, 60, 30, 29, and 38.

The same day, soldiers entered Htee Pu Lu village, Ler Doh township, Kler Lwee Htu district, and captured many villagers, killing five men, aged 48, 45, 53, 35 and 46.

According to local sources, about 160 villagers

have been detained by the Burmese military in the village school and are being used as human shields.

Additionally, on 7 March, a Burmese military fighter jet dropped two bombs on Naw Wee Hta village, which is located in Dweh Lo township, Mutraw district. The bombs injured two people and destroyed a monastery and four residences.

On 8th March, a Burma Military fighter jet dropped a bomb on Mae Kaw Lo village in Dweh Lo township, Mutraw district. The bomb killed a 23-year-old pregnant woman and severely injured her two-year-old daughter and her 27-year-old husband.

On March 9th, the Burma Army jet fighter dropped two 500-pound bombs on T'pi Lay Kho village, Ler Mu Lah township, Mergui-Tavoy district. The bombs killed a girl, aged 6; two boys, both aged around 11; and 3 other men, aged around 40, and injured 3 boys, aged around 13.

On 10 March, a Burmese military Chinese-made K8W aircraft dropped four 250-pound bombs on T'ku village, Ler Mu Lah township, Mergui-Tavoy district. The bombs killed 4 people, including a child.

These attacks are war crimes under the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute of the International Court of Justice. They are also crimes against humanity.

The 7 March massacres took place the day after a United Nations Security Council meeting on Burma, which did not focus on human rights or Burmese military violations of international law and did not produce any practical outcome or even a statement.

Despite the number of airstrikes and drone attacks by the Burmese military significantly increasing, and the number of civilians killed increasing across the country, there have been no new sanctions against the Burmese military by any country for more than a year.

The Karen Peace Support Network repeats our call for urgent international action to cut sources of jet fuel and money reaching the Burmese military and to sanction the state banks controlled by the Burmese military, which are used to buy jet fuel and arms internationally.

"The Karen and all people in Burma are facing daily violations of international law with no serious effort being made to stop them. No country is making any new effort at all to try to reduce jet fuel and arms reaching the Burmese military, and the result is more dead children in Burma," said Naw Wahku Shee of Karen Peace Support Network. "The international community is cutting aid to the people of Burma but doing nothing new to cut off money and arms to the Burmese military."



JOINT REVOLUTIONARY FORCES CAPTURE STRATEGIC WIN WA MILITARY CAMP IN TANINTHARYI REGION AFTER MONTH-LONG SIEGE

Joint revolutionary forces, led by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and local People's Defence Forces (PDF), successfully captured the Win Wa military camp in Thayetchaung Township, Tanintharyi Region, on the afternoon of 11 March.

Situated on the strategic No. 8 Union Highway connecting Myeik and Dawei, the camp had been the site of intense fighting since 7 February, finally falling to the resistance at 4:00 pm despite daily junta airstrikes and naval artillery support from a warship near Kanet Thiri village.

According to the source, throughout the fighting, the junta forces carried out almost daily airstrikes, while a naval warship positioned in the sea near Kanet Thiri village fired artillery in support. Ground reinforcements were also sent in, but the camp ultimately fell to the joint revolutionary forces.

During the battle, the junta also frequently launched airstrikes on villages in the lower part of Thayetchaung Township, including Mindap village near the camp. Airstrikes were reportedly carried out at least twice on the day the camp was captured.

On the morning of 12 March, the junta carried out airstrikes in the area around Gon Nyin Seik village near the Win Wa camp.

"The area around Gon Nyin Seik village near the camp was bombed and machine-gunned at around 10 am," the source said.

During the battle for the camp, casualties were reported on both sides, including among the junta forces and the joint forces led by the KNLA.

"Regarding security, we still need to remain cautious. However, one thing is certain, we now have full control of that area," Padoh Saw Eh Na, Secretary of Karen National Union (KNU) for Myeik-Dawei District in the KNLA Brigade 4 area, told Mizzima yesterday evening.

Due to the junta airstrikes and heavy artillery attacks, residents from around 20 villages including Win Wa, Thae Chaung Gyi, Min Dat, Theim Kone, and Son Sin Phyar have been forced to flee their homes.



KNU fighters. Photo: Mizzima

KNU CONDEMNS ESCALATING MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES ON CIVILIANS IN KAREN AREAS

On 12 March, the Karen National Union (KNU) condemned Myanmar military airstrikes that have killed at least 50 civilians and displaced thousands since February, calling for international pressure to stop the air attacks.

The text of the KNU statement is as follows.

Taking advantage of the current global focus on tensions in Iran and the Middle East, the Myanmar military junta has been intensifying their terror campaigns across the country by daily indiscriminate attacks at multiple location simultaneously, specifically targeting civilian population, trade and logistic hubs and even areas where there has been no fighting, therefore destroying our administration and public service delivery. According to KNU's official data, in February and March 2026 in Kawthoolei area alone, the Myanmar military junta has carried out more than 60 airstrikes and killed at least 50 civilians.

In February and March 2026 alone, there were a total of 53 airstrikes in KNU's Mergui-Tavoy (Myeik-Dawei) district located along the Thai border, including 48 in Kaser Doh Township (Theyetchaung) alone and 5 in the other three townships, forcing thousands of people to flee their homes.

On March 8, 2026, an airstrike in Mae Kaw Laung village, Dwe Lo Township, Mutraw District, killed one pregnant woman and injured two civilians.

On March 9, 2026, airstrikes in Ta U Dae, Ta Dae, and Posa Naw Dae villages, Luthaw Township, Mutraw District, killed three civilians and injured six.

On March 9, 2026 alone, in Ler Doh Township of Kler Lwee Htu (Nyaung Lay Pin) District, the Myanmar military junta committed a massacre of killing at least 30 civilians, including elderly women and children.

On March 9, 2026, at 12:30 m., the military jets dropped two 500-pound bombs on the church in Taphi Lay Kho Village, Lermulah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, while students were taking a short-term Bible study and musical instrument lesson. A total of 11 people killed, including 7 students and 4 civilians. This was not a place where fighting had broken out.

On March 10, 2026, in the same Lermulah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District, the military junta dropped 250-pound (250-pound) bomb around 12:17 m. on Taku village, killing four civilians, including one child, and injuring twelve others. One civilian house was also damaged. Three of the seriously injured civilians were

taken to a Thai hospital for treatment, arranged by the KNU Mergui-Tavoy district leaders.

On the evening of March 11, 2026, a drone fired by the Myanmar military junta exploded in the Palu (Min Let Pan) area, south of Myawaddy, on the Thai border, causing many houses to catch fire. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has increased by nearly 4,300 due to the military's multi-pronged offensive in the Palu region following the sham election, and they are now sheltering in 4 new IDP In addition, thousands of people have fled to Thailand.

The atrocities committed by the Myanmar military junta are unacceptable under any circumstances. Our children and students, instead of focusing on their future, are afraid of the sound of fighter jets. Instead of peacefully holding pencils and pens, they are hiding to escape the bombs. Schools, classrooms and civilian areas should be safe places, but today they are targets of the Myanmar military junta.

Immediate, Coordinated and Maximum International Pressure is Essential

The Myanmar military junta's daily airstrikes on residential areas, education, health, and religious buildings across Myanmar and deliberate destruction of civilians' livelihood are serious acts of war crime, and a complete disregard to the continuing engagement of and calls from the international diplomatic community. The very first point of the five-point consensus adopted by the ASEAN five years ago to resolve the Myanmar issue, "an immediate cessation of violence attacks," has no progress whatsoever but has gotten worse day by day.

As long as the Myanmar military junta continues to commit such deliberate acts of crimes against humanity, the vicious cycles of fighting will continue and the ability of the revolutionary organizations to build cohesion will be hampered, and regional security and stability will continue to be threatened. The opportunity to find a negotiated solution for the long-term stability and peace that we all desire will remain elusive.

The Karen National Union, therefore, calls on the ASEAN, neighboring countries and international communities to recognize the gravity of these atrocities and to move beyond statements of concern toward meaningful engagement for impactful results. Silence, indifference, or superficial engagement in the face of such heinous crimes only emboldens the perpetrators.

Meaningful international engagement must include immediate, coordinated and maximum

diplomatic pressure on the military regime, concrete measures to prevent the continued use of air power against civilian populations and to cut their access to deadly weapons, revenue and jet fuel, and sustained humanitarian support for communities displaced by these attacks. It also requires a multi-track approach to find viable solutions to the complex and dynamic nature of our shared challenges, continuing engagements with democratic resistance forces and revolutionary governance institutions that represent the aspirations of the people on the ground.

Aid urgently needed for the growing humanitarian crisis

The attacks have caused immeasurable losses of lives, livelihood and massive chaos and instability across Kawthoolei with 1.2 million internally displaced people, including along Thailand-Myanmar border areas, adding to the already dire humanitarian crisis. In addition, tens and thousands of people fleeing from other cities and villages across Myanmar to escape the military's repression and economic oppression, and those fleeing to Thailand to find work, are also arriving in the Kawthoolei area every day. There is also a growing concern for the safety of civilians on the Thai side due to the military regime's reckless firing.

KNU at districts and townships leaders are doing everything they can to provide much need humanitarian assistance in collaboration with local and international relief organizations. But the needs are massive. We appeal to the international community to continue to cooperate with local humanitarian organizations to ensure that relief and aid delivery efforts are carried out more effectively and in a timely manner. If humanitarian aid were to be provided only through the military coup, millions of people would be left in dire situations.

The people of Kawthoolei—and across the country—have endured decades of such brutality. Yet history has proven that aerial bombardment, forced displacement, and collective punishment cannot break the people's determination to achieve freedom, justice, and a genuine federal democratic union. Each attack only further exposes the illegitimacy and moral bankruptcy of the military regime.

The Karen National Union reaffirms its determination to protect the people, end the military dictatorship, and work with all like-minded allies to build a federal democratic union based on equality, justice, human dignity, and self-determination.

TIKTOK 'HEIN HTET' SCAM DEFRAUDS DESPERATE MYANMAR JOB SEEKERS WITH FALSE PROMISES OF WORK IN CHINA

An online fraudster operating through the TikTok account "Hein Htet" has reportedly scammed more than 50 people predominantly women by promising high-paying jobs in China.

Claiming to be an assistant to a prominent businessman, the scammer lured victims from Upper Myanmar with promises of monthly salaries in the millions of kyats, only to leave them stranded at border towns after stealing their money.

A member of a local defense force in Thazi Township, who is close to some of the victims, told Mizzima that the scammer instructed the victims to travel to Myanmar-China border towns such as Tachileik, Muse, Laukkai, and the Wa region. Once they arrived, the scammer cut off all contact.

"They asked for money via K-pay for processing passports and documents. After two or three days, they would say the passport is ready and ask where to pick them up. But once the victims arrived at the meeting point, the scammer switched off their phone. Some were told the recruiter was in Lashio or elsewhere, but they never showed up in person. They lied by saying they would send them to China with great prospects," the source said.

The defense force member added that they have a list of over 50 victims defrauded during February and March, though the actual number is likely higher. Most of the victims are women.

The victims are reportedly from Thazi, Mahlaing, and Taungtha in the Mandalay Region, as well as Lashio, Kutkai, and Hsenwi in Northern Shan State.

"By district, most victims are from Upper Myanmar. Since there are no jobs there, they came to the border hoping for work. We don't know how many people were scammed before this. They were contacted online and are now stranded at the border," said a person close to one of the victims.

The source said that the scammer appeared to target Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and those who are desperate for work and might be hesitant to report to the police.

"When they asked for 500,000 kyats and a victim said they only had 200,000, the scammer would claim to cover the rest. Then, they would say they were on their way to pick the victim up but would call saying their car broke down and ask for another 100,000 kyats urgently. I want to warn others so they don't get scammed like this," said one of the victims.

Since the military coup, online financial fraud has worsened, and no effective action has been seen from the Military Commission.

Despite the Military Commission's raids and crackdowns on scam hubs across the country, online fraud operations continue to function.



Myanmar refugees in Mizoram.
Photo: Supplied

MIZORAM AUTHORITIES SEIZE DRUGS WORTH OVER RS 317 CRORE UNDER OPERATION JERICHO AS TRAFFICKING ROUTES SHIFT TO SOUTHERN BORDER

During a budget session of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly on 11 March 11, Home Minister K. Sapdanga announced that joint security forces have confiscated narcotics valued at Rs 317.30 crore (US\$34.4 million) over the past six months under the intensified crackdown known as Operation Jericho.

The operation, a collaborative effort between the Mizoram Police, Assam Rifles, the Excise and Narcotics Department, and local youth organizations, was originally slated to end in late 2025 but has been extended through 31 March 2026, to combat the persistent flow of heroin and methamphetamine from the Golden Triangle.

While the minister noted significant success in curbing transit through the traditional hub of Champhai district, he warned of emerging smuggling routes in the southern districts of Siaha and Lawngtlai, which share a porous border with Myanmar.

Sapdanga said the government will decide whether to extend Operation Jericho further after reviewing the situation.

Indian authorities stated that most of the seized drugs were heroin, crystal meth (Ice), and

methamphetamine, which are commonly trafficked through the Golden Triangle – a region spanning parts of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos known for large-scale drug production.

A Myanmar national living in Mizoram told Mizzima that frequent reports of drug seizures make life difficult for refugees.

“Every time we hear about drug seizures, it’s hard to live here. Some locals dislike it because the drugs are coming from our own country,” he said.

He added that Myanmar citizens living in exile should respect the laws of the host country and consider how their actions might affect others.

According to a report published by The Statesman on 25 August, citing the Mizoram Police, 439 Myanmar nationals were among 460 foreign nationals arrested for various crimes in Mizoram between the military coup in Myanmar in 2021 and May 2025, and most of them were arrested in connection with drug-related offences.

Currently, more than 30,000 Myanmar nationals are living in Mizoram, and the state government has collected their biographical records as part of its administrative monitoring efforts.



Arakan Army fighters. Photo: AA

MIZORAM CHIEF MINISTER CONFIRMS ARAKAN ARMY CONTROL OVER STRATEGIC KALADAN PROJECT AS CROSS-BORDER TRADE SHIFTS TO REBEL-TAXED ROUTES

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalthanhawla (Larthu Auma) announced to the State Assembly on 11 March that the Myanmar government has lost control of the territories hosting the US\$484 million Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP), with the Arakan Army (AA) now governing the strategic corridor.

"The Myanmar government no longer controls the areas where the KMMTTP road project is located. The areas are now in the hands of the Arakan Army (AA). Our (Mizoram) government maintains a good relationship with the AA, and the AA is also looking forward to the time when the KMMTTP highway can be opened," the Chief Minister said.

In response to the shifting power dynamics and an influx of displaced persons, Mizoram has established an "Impact Study Team" and mobilized security forces to manage the border until official Land Customs Stations can be formalized under these new conditions.

Furthermore, there is deep concern regarding the high influx of people from Myanmar into Lawngtlai District via the Kaladan project route. To control this movement, the District Magistrate, Police, Assam Rifles, Border Security Force (BSF), and civil society organizations will work together.

A trader told Mizzima that those using the route for commerce are currently paying taxes at checkpoints

operated by the Arakan Army and within Mizoram State.

While the Mizoram government maintains a working relationship with the AA to facilitate future trade, the route is currently characterized by "extra-legal" commercial activity where traders must pay a 5% tax to the AA and informal fees to Indian border police to transport essential goods like food and fuel into Chin and Rakhine States.

"In Mizoram, there are three police checkpoints alongside the border where we have to pay, though it's not exactly official. Once across the border at Shwe Laik Wa, there is an AA gate where we must pay a 5% tax on the value of the goods," he said.

The trader added that since merchants face high living costs alongside payments to both sides, they hope for a reduction in tax collection.

Food, medicine, and fuel are currently being imported from Mizoram into Chin State and Rakhine State.

The agreement for the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project was signed between India and the Myanmar military government in April 2008, based on mutual development and bilateral relations.



Maung Maung Lwin.
Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR NATIONAL TEAM CAPTAIN MAUNG MAUNG LWIN FACES PUBLIC OUTRAGE AFTER PHYSICAL ASSAULT OF FEMALE SPECTATOR

The captain of the Myanmar national football team, Maung Maung Lwin, has sparked a massive wave of controversy following an incident on 10 March, where he reportedly climbed into the stands to physically assault a female spectator during a match at Tihadeepa Stadium.

The altercation occurred during a heated league game between Yangon United FC and Yadanarbon FC, with witnesses and live broadcast audio capturing the moment the player rushed into the seating area to punch the fan after she heckled him.

During the live broadcast of the match, the voice of a woman crying and shouting was heard, "What are you doing? Don't touch me! Don't be so arrogant just because you're a footballer. He's attacking me here. He punched me in the face, and he's a footballer!"

While Maung Maung Lwin later took to social media to claim he was responding to racist insults, the public response has been sharply critical of his use of violence and the subsequent lack of disciplinary action

from the Myanmar National League.

Despite football regulations mandating a red card for violent conduct, the captain was allowed to play the full 90 minutes, leading to allegations of a cover-up by club officials and the Football Federation.

"Since it was a football match, the opposing fans were shouting—standard heckling. He couldn't tolerate it and turned to physical violence," the source said.

The situation has been further inflamed by Yangon United vice-chairman U Sai Khin Maung Aye, who publicly defended the player and announced that the female fan would be banned from the club's stadium, which is owned by junta-linked businessman U Tay Za.

"I am on Maung Maung Lwin's side in this matter. I am not saying that what he did was right. Anyone can come forward and resolve the issue however they wish," Sai Khin Maung Aye wrote.

Some spectators criticized the player's actions, saying that even if insults were shouted during the match, physical violence should never have been used.

One football fan said she had purchased official tickets to watch the National League match and noted that security personnel, match supervisors, and officials were present. He added that if an incident occurred, a complaint could have been filed instead of resorting to violence. The fan also criticized the fact that the player had not admitted wrongdoing.

This latest scandal marks a volatile shift in the career of Maung Maung Lwin, who had only recently redeemed his reputation and regained the captaincy in 2025 after a historic performance where he scored the winning goal against Manchester United.

This event mirrors his previous suspension in late 2024 for verbal abuse and offensive gestures, raising serious questions about the professional standards of the national team leadership and the influence of powerful backers in shielding star players from accountability.

The Myanmar National League features clubs from various regions across the country, including top teams such as Yangon United, Shan United, and Yadanarbon FC.



Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing. Photo: AFP

DEFEATED PARTIES BLAMED BY MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER FOR 'ELECTION' LOSS AS POWER TRANSFER TO MILITARY-BACKED GOVERNMENT NEARS IN APRIL

In a review of the junta's activities from 2021 to 2025, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing dismissed criticisms of the recent three-phase election by claiming that losing political parties simply failed to utilize the three-year preparation period and "opportunities" provided since 2023.

"It was observed that some parties could not effectively utilize the opportunities given, while parties that engaged more with the public were found to have received more popular votes," the junta leader said.

He added that the junta began allowing political party registrations in 2023, giving parties approximately three years to prepare.

Furthermore, the junta leader stated that organizing activities to increase party membership were permitted, noting that recruiting members is a way of organizing the public. He claimed that an increase in membership leads to more supporters and that procedures for member recruitment and campaigning were systematically allowed.

However, some political parties previously told Mizzima that they faced difficulties during the designated

campaign period due to the strict regulations imposed by the junta's Union Election Commission (UEC).

In the junta-organised election, held in three phases starting from 28 December 2025, a total of 57 political parties participated, with the military-backed USDP (Union Solidarity and Development Party) winning the majority of seats.

The elections were widely condemned as a "sham" by resistance organisations, rights groups, and international organisations.

Following the election, the junta leader said that parliamentary sessions will be held in March and power will be transferred to the incoming government in April.

During the ceremony, the junta leader spoke not only about the election but also addressed issues regarding peace, education, health, and international relations.

Regarding peace, the junta leader stated that the junta would make appropriate concessions, while adding that armed groups should only make demands that are realistic.



MIDEAST WAR SPARKS WORRIES OF IRAN 'TERROR' ATTACKS IN EUROPE

European countries have stepped up domestic security since US-Israeli strikes on Iran sparked the Middle East war, with fears Tehran could be plotting "terrorist" attacks as part of its retaliation.

The Islamic republic has been accused of seeking to orchestrate incidents in the past, and three such attacks have occurred in the United States and Europe since the start of the war on February 28.

In Norway, three Norwegian brothers of Iraqi origin have been arrested on suspicion of a "terrorist bombing" over an explosion at the US embassy in Oslo on Sunday that caused minor damage, and police have said they are exploring the possibility they were following "an order from a government entity".

Iran's ambassador in Oslo has denied any involvement.

A video appearing to show Iran's late supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, a religious guide for Shia Muslims who was killed on the first day of the US-Israeli strikes in Iran, was uploaded to the Google Maps page for the US embassy after the incident.

In Belgium, a pre-dawn blast on Monday damaged a synagogue in the country's eastern city of Liege, but caused no injuries.

Authorities said on Thursday they were examining a video claiming responsibility for the attack that was shared by the Shia "militant online community".

In the United States, a US citizen of Senegalese origin who earlier this month killed two people in Austin, the capital of the US state of Texas had expressed "pro-Iranian regime sentiment" on social media, the SITE Intelligence Group has said.

'Criminal networks'

Several European intelligence agencies have accused Iran of having a network of agents and criminals to carry out covert operations.

In its annual threat assessment, Norwegian security service PST said last month that Iran, which it considers one of the main threats to the country, could rely on "proxy actors", including "criminal networks", to commit acts.

Austrian intelligence service DSN in 2024 wrote in a report that "criminal networks have increasingly replaced Iranian services in carrying out violent attacks abroad", and that it should be assumed "that this new strategy will intensify".

Thomas Renard, head of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, said reaching out to these criminal networks would be the easiest option for Tehran.

But Iran could also activate European circles linked to Palestinian militant group Hamas or Lebanese movement Hezbollah, both of which have fought Israel on home turf.

"Iran is the main sponsor of these organisations -- even though their objectives may differ from those of Tehran," Renard said.

"Less likely -- but very serious -- would be the activation of Iranian agents who have infiltrated Europe," he added, though "burning your agents is generally a last resort".

Finally, Iran could encourage an individual to carry out an attack, as the Islamic State jihadist group has in recent years.

"Isolated individuals could take action, because they are in a cycle of heavy consumption of propaganda, combined with an intense media cycle that would draw a great deal of attention to any potential attack," he said.

'Extension of foreign policy'

US researcher Matthew Levitt says Iran has carried out plots abroad targeting dissidents, journalists, foreign officials, and others since just months after the 1979 Islamic revolution.

"Iran sees terrorism as an extension of foreign policy -- an asymmetric means of reaching its adversaries beyond its borders despite their military superiority," the expert at the Washington Institute wrote in August.

Most recently, in June 2024, an assassination attempt was carried out in Haarlem on an Iranian citizen living in the Netherlands, according to Dutch intelligence agency AIVD.

One of the suspects was also suspected of the failed assassination attempt on Spanish politician and Iran critic Alejo Vidal-Quadras.

"It is likely that Iran is responsible for the two assassination attempts," AIVD wrote in a 2024 report.

A Belgian court in 2021 jailed an Iranian diplomat for 20 years after convicting him of plotting the thwarted bombing of an opposition rally outside Paris.

The man was attached to the Iranian mission in Austria when he supplied explosives for an attack that was planned to target a rally of the exiled National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRI) in 2018.

AFP



Thai soldiers at Cambodian scam centre compound.
Photo: AFP

GLOBAL CRACKDOWN TARGETS SOUTHEAST ASIA'S CRIMINAL SCAM NETWORKS

Meta disabled more than 150,000 accounts and Thai police arrested 21 people in a sweeping international crackdown on Southeast Asian criminal scam centers that targeted people around the world, the social media giant said on 11 March.

The operation was led by Thailand's Royal Thai Police Anti-Cyber Scam Center alongside the FBI and the US Justice Department's Scam Center Strike Force, with Meta investigators acting on intelligence shared in real time by law enforcement.

Online scam networks — many operating out of compounds in Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos — have grown increasingly sophisticated in recent years, running what authorities describe as full-scale criminal business operations designed to evade detection.

Scammers working at these fraud compounds lure internet users into fake romantic relationships and cryptocurrency investments, and have expanded operations into multiple languages to steal billions of dollars from victims around the world.

The latest crackdown also involved the UK's National Crime Agency, as well as agencies from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, the Philippines and Indonesia.

A pilot action in December yielded the removal of 59,000 accounts, pages and groups from Meta's platforms and six arrest warrants. Last week's follow-up operation more than doubled that account tally.

"This operation is a testament to how sharing information and coordinating our efforts can make real progress in disrupting this criminal activity at its source," said Chris Sonderby, Meta's vice president and deputy general counsel.

Thai police official Jirabhop Bhuridej, assistant commissioner general of the Royal Thai Police, said the crackdown "sends a clear message to criminals" that authorities would continue to pursue online scam syndicates operating across borders.

Alongside the enforcement action, Meta announced a series of new protective tools, including alerts on Facebook for suspicious friend requests and a WhatsApp warning system to flag potentially fraudulent device-linking attempts.

AFP



Indian PM Narendra Modi and Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Photo: AFP

INDIA EASES INVESTMENT RULES AMID WARMING TIES WITH CHINA

India on 10 March relaxed foreign investment rules for land-bordering countries including China, the latest sign of warmer relations between New Delhi and Beijing.

The cabinet said the changes would result in greater investment flows and boost "India's competitiveness as preferred investment and manufacturing destination".

The new rules will apply to all investment from neighbouring countries that share a land border with India -- including Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and Myanmar -- but are widely seen as courting Chinese or Chinese-backed investors.

Under the new rules, entities that have "non-controlling" foreign ownership of up to 10 percent will be allowed to invest without prior government clearance.

Investment proposals from firms in specific sectors including electronic components, capital goods, and "polysilicon and ingot-wafer" will also now be "processed and decided" within 60 days provided "majority shareholding and control" remains with resident Indian citizens or companies controlled by resident Indian citizens.

"It is expected that the new guidelines will provide clarity and ease of doing business in India," the cabinet said in a statement, adding that the new rules would also "facilitate investments" that contribute to "access to new technologies" and "domestic value addition".

The changes mark a partial stepdown from curbs introduced in April 2020, which the government said were needed to prevent "opportunistic" takeovers or acquisitions of Indian companies due to the pandemic.

While China was not specifically named in the 2020 directive, it was widely seen aimed at Beijing after bilateral relations nosedived including a deadly border clash later that year.

Ties between the geopolitical rivals have slowly thawed since 2024, when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Chinese President Xi Jinping at a summit in Russia.

And last October, direct flights were resumed between the two nations, which the Indian government said would boost people-to-people contact and aid the "gradual normalisation of bilateral exchanges".

AFP



Chinese leader Xi Jinping tightens his control over the CCP. Photo: AFP

THE POLITICAL LOGIC OF CHINA'S NEVER-ENDING ANTI-CORRUPTION PURGE

SUN LEE

On January 24, 2026, China's Ministry of National Defence released a four-line statement confirming that General Zhang Youxia, Xi Jinping's second-in-command, childhood acquaintance, and the man Xi himself elevated to the highest operational military post in 2022, had been placed under investigation for "serious violations of discipline and law." With him fell Liu Zhenli, the PLA's chief of staff and the military's pre-eminent operational commander. The Central Military Commission (CMC), once a seven-member body, now consists of two people: Xi Jinping and Zhang Shengmin, a political commissar best known for having overseen the investigations into the other five. Whether or not Xi intended this as a statement of strength, it reads unmistakably as one of fear.

This is the mature form of Xi's anti-corruption campaign, the most extensive in the CCP's history and the most institutionally destructive. Since 2012, over six million party members have been investigated and punished. In 2024 alone, the number of party

members investigated jumped 40%, from 626,000 in 2023 to 877,000. By the first quarter of 2025, the CCDI had initiated 220,000 investigations into officials for potential bribery, and from January to November 2025, it opened 251,516 cases, a 30.87% increase over the same period in 2024. In January 2026, Xi told delegates to the Fifth Plenum of the CCDI that the party must "press ahead with the anti-corruption fight with a clearer understanding and stronger resolve."

A Campaign Without a Cure

The foundational problem with Xi's anti-corruption drive is one the party has never been willing to confront: that corruption in a one-party state is not a deviation from the system but a product of it. This structural blindness is embedded in the campaign's own design. The CCDI, the body tasked with prosecuting corruption, is a party organ, reporting upward to the Politburo Standing Committee and, in practice, to Xi himself. It has no judicial authority. Detention under its *liuzhi* mechanism (the successor to *shuanggui*) permits months of confinement without charge, without legal

counsel, and without oversight. Confession rates in such proceedings are close to universal. The CCDI's own Secretary since 2017 has been a Politburo Standing Committee member, making its notional independence from political direction effectively theoretical.

The removal of Zhou Yongkang, Bo Xilai, Sun Zhengcai, and Ling Jihua, all enormous figures of institutional capital, all potential obstacles to Xi's consolidation, did not happen because they were uniquely corrupt in a system saturated with corruption. It happened because they were uniquely inconvenient. That selectivity becomes more obvious in the campaign's own data: in 2024, CCDI records show 73 provincial-ministerial officials investigated, yet public case listings accounted for only 58 named cases; in 2023, the CCDI reported 87 centrally managed officials investigated, but public disclosures listed only 45 named cases.

The moral authority the campaign depends upon is further eroded by what a March 2025 declassified report from the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence documented: Xi's siblings, nieces, and nephews held assets worth over one billion dollars in business investments and real estate, while Wen Jiabao's family controlled assets of at least 2.7 billion dollars. Neither figure has produced any domestic accountability. The campaign's jurisdiction, it turns out, is precisely coterminous with its author's political interests. Xi himself has declared that the situation "remains complex" and that "there can be no stopping, slacking or compromising on anti-corruption", a formulation that would seem to acknowledge, without quite admitting, that thirteen years of unprecedented enforcement have not resolved the underlying condition.

Permanence as Weakness

Normal political logic would suggest that a genuine reform programme eventually produces institutional results, a measurable decline in corrupt conduct, a stabilisation of enforcement, a gradual transition from emergency campaign governance to routine rule of law. Instead, the opposite has occurred. In July 2024, the Third Plenum communiqué called on the party to "redouble" the anti-corruption drive; in January 2025, Xi told CCDI delegates the party must persevere in the "tough, protracted fight against corruption."

Nowhere is the cost of this perpetual campaign more acutely visible than in the military. Since July 2023, at least 43 officers have been purged from the

PLA leadership, including two consecutive defence ministers, Wei Fenghe and Li Shangfu, and four CMC members. Of the 81 generals promoted by Xi in the PLA since October 2022, at least 14 have been purged and 23 have effectively vanished from public life. The January 2026 purge of Zhang Youxia is the peak of this wave. According to PLA Daily, Zhang and Liu Zhenli had "seriously betrayed the trust and expectations" of the party by "severely trampling on and undermining" Chairman Xi, language that makes clear this is no longer, in any meaningful sense, a corruption case but rather a case of loyalty.

Many analysts have concluded that the core driver of Zhang's removal was a fundamental divergence with Xi over PLA joint operations training timelines and the 2027 deadline for Taiwan-contingency readiness. Zhang's purge removed the last senior commanders with genuine combat experience from the CMC at precisely the moment when Xi has most publicly committed to military credibility. The campaign against disloyalty has left the military commanded, at its highest level, by a discipline inspector.

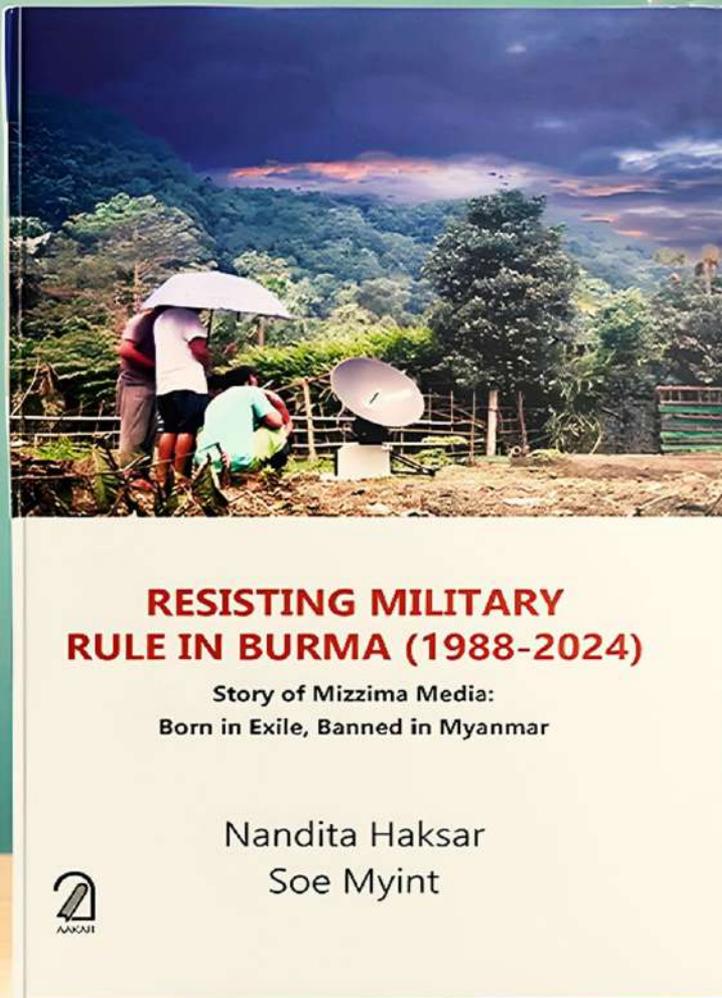
The systemic effect on the broader bureaucracy is equally damaging and has become one Xi himself has been forced to acknowledge. In 2024, Xi recognised the crackdown had led to "bureaucratic inertia" among officials who, fearing punishment, are unwilling to act or make decisions. The South China Morning Post reported that officials are "becoming more risk averse, overworked and lacking any incentive to use their initiative" so acute a problem that in 2021, Xi was already asking publicly whether his officials would do any work if he did not personally hand out instructions.

The anti-corruption campaign, whatever its genuine reformist content in the years immediately after 2012, has become the primary instrument of elite insecurity. What it cannot produce, and what no campaign operating without independent courts, a free press, or competitive accountability ever could, is legitimacy. In purging Zhang Youxia, his childhood friend, his most trusted appointee and the man he kept on beyond mandatory retirement age, Xi did not demonstrate omnipotence. He demonstrated that, thirteen years and six million investigations in, there is still no one he can trust. That is not the signature of a system being cleaned but signs of a system that is slowly eroding itself.

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

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

by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint



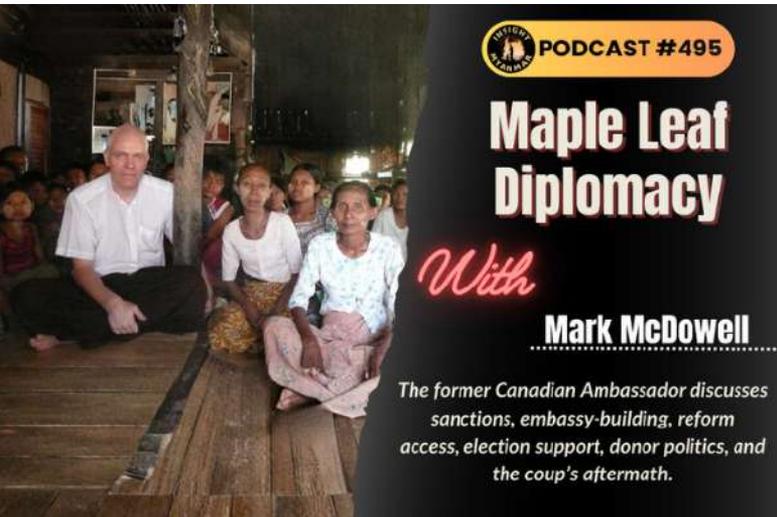
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MAPLE LEAF DIPLOMACY

"All of that buzzing, of advertising and consumerism and globalization, it all just kind of stopped."

These are Mark McDowell's initial impressions on his first visit to Myanmar back in 2001, in advance of the massive changes the country would see in ensuing years. McDowell, a foreign service officer who spent decades working across Southeast Asia, was posted as Canada's first-ever ambassador in Yangon from 2013 to 2016.

Going into more detail about that first trip, he recalls it as an encounter that felt both unmistakably political and oddly intimate at the level of daily life, a place where calm could coexist with coercion, and where the texture of ordinary Burmese existence could be impossible to separate from the machinery of a military state.

Posted to Bangkok in 2003 as political counsellor, McDowell became the main Canadian official making regular trips into Myanmar, building contacts with activists, civil society groups, and the small ecosystem of international missions already present. He places that period inside a Canadian policy environment he found unusually indirect. Myanmar policy, in practice, was often shaped by Canada-based advocacy and border-focused organizations whose access and institutional habits sat largely outside the country. He argues that this produced a set of incentives that rewarded moral clarity in Ottawa while leaving little room for the slower work of building

durable relationships inside Myanmar, where reality rarely aligned cleanly with the narratives that travelled well abroad.

In this period of the mid-2000s, newly released political prisoners and opposition figures were available for contact and support. Small programs—training, quiet networking, low-cost capacity-building—created points of connection, and he describes the work as "pioneering" mainly because so little had been attempted from the Canadian side before. Yet he also emphasizes how fragile this engagement was, not simply because Myanmar was dangerous or closed, but because Canadian bureaucracy could be just as constraining in its own way. Approvals were slow, internal caution was high, and the political appetite to invest in sustained in-country work could evaporate quickly, leaving local partners exposed to the consequences of international attention without the protection of sustained international commitment.

Cyclone Nargis and its aftermath become another hinge. In the months following the disaster, McDowell became persuaded that the surge of humanitarian funding helped catalyze a more capable civil society—local organizations that formed around relief work, people trained through emergency programs, networks built under pressure that later evolved into broader forms of social action. While not seeing this exactly as an origin story for Myanmar's later reform period, McDowell does believe this was an important period when political space began to open.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/3/3/episode-495-maple-leaf-diplomacy>



MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF CALLS FOR A STRONGER AIR FORCE AS NEW AIRCRAFT COMMISSIONED

Myanmar junta leader called for further strengthening of the air force capabilities, urging the Tatmadaw (Air) to maintain momentum in expanding its operational capacity and training.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing made the remarks last week during a ceremony commissioning aircraft into service at Meiktila airbase in Mandalay Region, according to a report in the junta-run *Global New Light of Myanmar*.

Speaking at the event, the junta leader said the army, navy, and air force must be strengthened to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity. "Only when Tatmadaw is strong with high capabilities will it safeguard and uplift independence, sovereignty, and national integrity," he said.

The ceremony marked the addition of new aircraft to the air force's inventory as part of efforts to enhance aerial capabilities. Junta officials claimed the aircraft were commissioned into service following preparations involving training systems, maintenance arrangements, and logistical support structures.

Min Aung Hlaing stressed that modern air capability depended not only on aircraft and helicopters but also

on supporting systems and skilled personnel capable of operating them effectively. He called for the continuous development of "qualified and well-rounded human resources" to ensure that air force assets are fully utilised.

According to the junta-run paper, the commander-in-chief also highlighted the role the air force has played in what the military describes as internal security operations, counter-terrorism efforts, and other missions.

He said the Tatmadaw (Air) had also participated in disaster response, environmental conservation, and anti-narcotics operations.

During the ceremony, Commander-in-Chief (Air) General Tun Aung explained preparations for bringing the aircraft into operational service, while Chief of Staff (Air) Lieutenant General Tun Win formally declared the aircraft commissioned.

Senior military leaders, airbase commanders, junta ministers, and regional officials were among those attending the event, the report said.



Motorcyclists line up for fuel.
Photo: AFP

SOCIAL MEDIA USERS REACT TO FUEL SHORTAGES CAUSING HARDSHIP IN MYANMAR

Fuel shortages across Myanmar have sparked widespread frustration, with many people saying they are struggling to buy petrol and diesel as long lines form at fuel stations in several cities.

Photos and videos shared online show vehicles waiting for hours at petrol stations in Yangon, Mandalay, and other towns as people rush to secure fuel supplies.

The situation follows the military authorities' introduction of a new fuel rationing system, which requires private vehicles to operate on an odd-even license plate rule starting March 7, in an effort to conserve fuel.

The announcement has led to widespread discussion on social media, with many users complaining about the difficulties they face in daily life.

Some users said they had to wait for hours at petrol stations.

"People have to queue for hours just to buy fuel, and sometimes the station runs out before it's our turn," one Facebook user wrote.

"We drove to three different stations today and still couldn't get petrol," another user said.

Others mentioned that the shortages are making daily life harder as transportation costs rise and power outages continue.

"Fuel problems, electricity cuts, and high prices — ordinary people are suffering," one user commented.

Some users also criticized the government's explanation that the restrictions are only a precaution.

In response, military spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun said Myanmar still has enough fuel reserves for about 40 days and insisted that the restrictions are only meant to manage fuel use systematically.

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.