

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

**Fleeing Conflict
and Conscription
in Myanmar's
Shan State**

ELECTION UPDATE

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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

MYANMAR BEGINS TO GRIND TO A HALT

The convergence of fuel shortages, unreliable electricity, and intensifying heat is creating a slow-moving but deeply disruptive crisis across Myanmar, with consequences that extend well beyond immediate discomfort into the core functioning of the economy and daily life. Each of these stressors alone would strain a fragile system, but together they form a compounding cycle that risks bringing large parts of the country to a near standstill.

Fuel scarcity is perhaps the most visible constraint, prompted by the war in the Middle East. Myanmar relies heavily on imported fuel, and disruptions to supply chains, foreign currency shortages, and logistical bottlenecks have sharply limited availability. This has immediate ripple effects: transportation costs surge, goods become more expensive to move, and supply chains begin to fracture. Farmers struggle to operate machinery or transport crops, small businesses face higher operating costs, and urban workers find commuting increasingly unaffordable. As fuel becomes scarce, informal markets expand, often at significantly higher prices, further widening inequality between those who can afford access and those who cannot.

Electricity shortages compound these problems in critical ways, with power output from dams reducing in the hot season. Myanmar's grid has long been uneven, but recent conditions have made supply even more erratic. Frequent blackouts disrupt manufacturing, halt refrigeration, and limit the functioning of essential services. Small enterprises - tea shops, workshops, internet cafes - are forced to either invest in costly generators or reduce their operating hours. For households, unreliable electricity affects everything from food storage to access to information, particularly in a country where digital connectivity has become an important lifeline. The lack of power also undermines healthcare delivery, as clinics struggle to keep equipment running and medicines properly stored.

Overlaying these structural constraints is the intensifying heat of

the hot season, which is becoming more severe due to broader climatic trends, including the effect of El Nino. High temperatures increase electricity demand just as supply falters, creating a vicious cycle of overload and outage. For workers, especially those in agriculture, construction, and informal labour, extreme heat reduces productivity and raises health risks. Heat stress can lead to exhaustion, dehydration, and in severe cases, death, particularly among vulnerable populations without access to cooling or adequate water. Concerns have been voiced for the very young and the very old.

The interaction between these factors is where the real danger lies. Reduced fuel limits the ability to run backup generators, making electricity shortages more acute. Power outages, in turn, disrupt fuel distribution systems and storage. Heat amplifies both problems by increasing demand while simultaneously degrading infrastructure and human capacity. The result is a system under pressure from all sides, where each failure reinforces the next.

For the broader economy, this translates into slowed production, rising prices, and declining investor confidence. Businesses face uncertainty that discourages expansion or even continued operation. Inflation erodes purchasing power, pushing more households into precarious conditions. Informal coping mechanisms - such as reducing meals, pulling children from school, or taking on debt - become more common, storing up long-term social costs.

For ordinary people, the crisis is deeply personal. It is felt in longer queues for fuel, darker nights without power, and sweltering days with little relief. It shapes decisions about work, health, and survival. While resilience has long been a feature of life in Myanmar, the simultaneous pressure of fuel, electricity, and heat is testing the limits of that resilience, raising urgent questions about how long communities can adapt before the strain becomes unsustainable.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of Shan workers in Thailand by Antonio Graceffo



Young Myanmar citizens who have fled take class. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

FLEEING CONFLICT AND CONSCRIPTION IN MYANMAR'S SHAN STATE

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Shan State is home to dozens of ethnic groups and a corresponding array of armed organizations. The major ones include the United Wa State Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, the Shan State Army-South, the Shan State Army-North, and the Pa-O National Army. These groups are broadly divided between those opposing the military junta, those aligned with it, and those maintaining ambiguous or shifting ceasefire arrangements. They frequently clash with one another as well as with the military.

Alignments change periodically, with some EAOs shifting sides. The MNDA fought the junta as part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance's Operation 1027 offensive but surrendered the city of Lashio back to the junta in April 2025 under Chinese pressure. The Pa-O National Army functions as a junta proxy, conducting joint operations with the Tatmadaw against civilian populations and rival armed groups. Vast areas of the state

remain outside central government control. Drug trafficking and organized crime are embedded in the conflict economy, and China exercises political and economic influence over armed groups along its border. Civilians are caught between all of these forces.

Against this background of conflicting armed groups, Sai Kham Lu, an 18-year-old Shan boy from Tangyan Township in northern Shan State, explained why he fled to Thailand.

Sai Kham Lu's parents are farmers, relying on their land for survival. He is the eldest child in his family and has a 15-year-old younger sister. Sai Kham Lu had just begun his first year of higher education, while his sister was attending high school.

"The UWSA was expanding its control in the area," recounted Sai Kham Lu. He explained that when their armed forces reached his village, they began forcing



Burmese refugee children return to camp from school in Thailand. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

young boys, some as young as ten years old, to join their army.

During the first two or three months, they collected information about the number of young men in the village. Later, they ordered the village head to send all boys for three months of military training. "They said that after the training, we could return home."

Sai Kham Lu's name was included on the list. "I tried to explain that I was still a student and needed to continue my education, but they ignored me," he said. "They told me we could discuss returning to school after the training."

With no real choice, he joined the three-month military training. However, once the training ended, the recruits were not allowed to return home. "After three months, we were sent to the frontline to build military bases and do hard labor," he said. "They told us we were now full soldiers. I felt sad and hopeless."

Realizing he would not be allowed to resume his studies, Sai Kham Lu contacted his parents. They discussed their options. If their son fled, the remaining relatives could be arrested, interrogated, or tortured.

His parents did not want their son to become a soldier, so they decided to escape together to Thailand. To avoid suspicion, Sai Kham Lu pretended to comply with orders and requested permission to visit home for three days. Once permission was granted, he returned to his village, and the family immediately fled.

After crossing the border into Thailand, relatives helped them search for work. Within a few days, they found employment as caretakers on an orange farm. The farm owner allowed them to live on the property and provided basic necessities, including shelter, rice, cooking oil, and salt.

For now, the family is safe from the war, and Sai Kham Lu is no longer a conscripted soldier. However,



Burmese refugee children.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

their lives remain uncertain. They exist in a legal limbo in Thailand. Like 1.7 to 2 million Myanmar nationals in Thailand, they are undocumented. They are in a country where they do not speak the language, although Shan people generally learn Thai quickly. They have no legal status, no health insurance, no upward mobility, no way to leave and go to a third country, and no pathway to citizenship in Thailand. Sai Kham Lu will have to jump through nearly insurmountable hurdles if he is to continue his studies.

No one knows when the war will end or when they can return to their homes. The larger conflict has been going for nearly 80 years, while the post-coup revolution is now in its fifth year. Until then, the family will have to find ways to survive. At least the whole family is together and they are not injured, which is more than many other Burmese in Thailand can say.

Many are lone mothers who know their older children are conscripts fighting somewhere in Burma. Ot-

hers are young people looking for whatever undocumented work they can find so they can send money home to their parents, who are in internally displaced persons camps in Burma. Many have lost family members in the war, and some very unfortunate people have experienced all of the above and are now searching for work as laborers despite having prosthetic limbs. The number of civilians killed since the coup is in the thousands, but those whose lives have been destroyed number in the tens of millions.

Sai Kham Lu shared a simple message: "I am tired of living in a country with so many armed groups fighting each other. I want world leaders to help end military rule in our country."

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



ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



KIA fighters. Photo: KIA

CHINESE PRESSURE BUILDS ON THE KIA

China has stepped up pressure on the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) to de-escalate tensions and consider renewed engagement with Myanmar's military authorities, according to sources familiar with recent talks.

At a meeting held in China in late February, Beijing's special representative for Asian affairs met KIA officials to address security concerns along the China-Myanmar border and clarify responsibility for a reported drone attack on Myitkyina's civilian airport. The junta has accused the KIA of carrying out the attack, an allegation that Chinese officials reportedly raised directly during the discussions. According to sources linked to the peace process, the Chinese side sought clarification from the KIA while emphasizing the importance of avoiding instability near the border.

The talks took place shortly after the junta's planned multi-phase elections, widely criticized as lacking legitimacy. Sources said China's primary focus was to encourage the KIA to consider political dialogue with a post-election military administration. While Beijing framed its approach in terms of stability and conflict management, it also signaled a preference for reduced hostilities that could disrupt cross-border trade and security.

KIA spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu confirmed to media that China stressed the need for stability along the border areas during the meeting, as usual. However, developments on the ground since then suggest limited immediate impact on military dynamics.

In the second week of March, KIA forces launched a surprise offensive against junta troops and allied Shanni Nationalities Army (SNA) positions near Indawgyi Lake. The KIA reportedly seized two outposts near Hegan junction and the Mang Pop area, both linked to positions controlled from Lonton village. Lonton is considered strategically significant, as it hosts around 1,000 junta and SNA personnel and serves as a potential staging ground for operations toward Nangmung town on the eastern side of the lake.

Despite the escalation, clashes appeared to subside in the third week of March, with both sides

largely limiting engagement to artillery exchanges and drone strikes rather than direct ground assaults.

Further west, in the jade-mining hub of Hpakant, fighting intensified during the second week of March as junta-aligned forces advanced into civilian wards, including Mashikahtawng and Htonebo. Local residents reported that troops occupied residential areas, deploying small units across streets and homes. "Clashes are happening inside the wards," one resident told local media, describing how soldiers from both sides were positioned in close proximity, increasing risks for civilians.

The Kachin Independence Organization's information department reported at least five battles across Bhamo, Waingmaw, and Hpakant townships during the same period. In Bhamo, confrontations remain ongoing, with military tensions described as persistently high.



Taken together, the developments highlight a widening gap between China's push for stability and ceasefire discussions and the continued volatility on the ground in Kachin State, where both sides appear to be consolidating positions rather than moving toward de-escalation.

Myanmar junta drones change battlefield tactics

The Myanmar military's growing reliance on drones and paramotors has become a defining feature of its recent counteroffensives, reshaping both battlefield dynamics and risks to civilians.

Facing persistent challenges in ground combat, the junta has increasingly turned to aerial platforms to compensate for limited maneuverability and morale issues among its troops. Among these, drones have emerged as a central tool in both reconnaissance and attack operations. During counteroffensives in northern Shan State—notably in Naungkhio—drone strikes were used extensively to weaken positions held by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). By deploying drones for targeted bomb drops and real-time surveillance, the military was able to disrupt supply lines and defensive positions, contributing to its ability to retake previously lost areas.

This drone-centric strategy was also evident in Mandalay Region, where resistance forces had gained ground during the second phase of "Operation 1027." Junta forces relied heavily on drones to support efforts to reclaim townships such as Madaya, Singu, and Thabeikkyin. The use of drones allowed the military to maintain pressure from the air while minimizing direct ground engagement, reflecting a broader tactical shift toward remote warfare.

Alongside drones, paramotors have become an increasingly visible component of the junta's aerial operations, particularly in central Myanmar. These lightweight, low-cost aircraft are favored in flat terrain, where resistance forces often lack access to anti-aircraft weapons. The junta has used paramotors for both reconnaissance and offensive missions, including dropping improvised explosives.

However, their deployment has raised serious humanitarian concerns. In October 2025, a paramotor attack targeted a lighting festival in Boneto village, Chaung-U Township in Sagaing Region, reportedly killing around 30 civilians. In another incident earlier this year, a paramotor strike hit a village hospital in Salingyi Township, killing a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) doctor and two support staff at the facility.



Various drones. Photos: Supplied



Local sources indicate that paramotors are often used in areas where the military seeks to exert control without committing large ground forces. Their low operational cost and ease of deployment make them an attractive option for sustained aerial harassment, particularly against resistance-held territories and civilian-populated areas.

Taken together, the increasing use of drones and paramotors underscores a shift in the junta's military approach—from conventional ground offensives to a more technology-driven strategy. While this has enhanced its ability to project قوا across contested قاطانم, it has also intensified concerns over indiscriminate attacks and the growing toll on civilians.

Questions of border stability

The recent visit by Ukris Boontanondha, commander-in-chief of the Royal Thai Army, to Naypyidaw has drawn attention to the strategic importance of border stability and trade between Thailand and Myanmar. On March 18, he led a delegation for a one-day trip to meet junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, who is widely speculated to assume the presidency under the military's planned political transition. Border stability was a key topic of discussion, with observers suggesting that Thailand is seeking to revive cross-border trade disrupted by ongoing conflict.

Following the meeting, junta forces intensified operations in areas critical to trade routes, particularly in the northern parts of Kawkaik and southern areas of Myawaddy, which lies opposite Mae Sot in Thailand. These areas are strategically located along the eastern flank of the Dawna Range and serve as key corridors for trade.

The closure of the main border trade road and the Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge No. 2 has significantly affected Thailand's economy. In response, Bangkok has maintained communication not only with the junta but also with Karen resistance groups, particularly

the Karen National Union (KNU), which controls key segments of the route.

Meanwhile, the junta has launched operations to secure the Myawaddy-Kawkaik road, aiming to reassert control over contested areas, especially in northern Kawkaik, where KNU and People's Defence Force (PDF) units have held ground since mid-March. Fighting has been intense, with both sides reportedly suffering losses. A local resident told The Irrawaddy that clashes have become increasingly frequent, accompanied by regular airstrikes.

On March 20, junta forces initiated an operation targeting Phalu village, south of Myawaddy. Heavy artillery, including 120 mm shells and howitzers, was fired toward areas known locally as "Three Layer Curve," as well as Phalu and nearby villages. The shelling forced civilians, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), to flee. A source from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) told local media that widespread displacement occurred across affected areas, including IDP camps and civilian zones.

Despite these offensives, junta troops have so far failed to advance beyond key resistance-held positions near Phalu and Minletpan villages. At the same time, the military has reinforced its presence by sending additional troops and ammunition to units under the No. (12) Military Operations Command, signaling preparations for sustained offensives aimed at reopening the trade corridor.

Although the junta has indicated plans to reopen the route by April 1—coinciding with the launch of its new political administration—analysts remain skeptical. The route runs through rugged jungles and mountainous terrain, much of it under resistance control, making any near-term stabilization or reopening unlikely.



Internally displaced people. Photo: Supplied

NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS RISING CIVILIAN KILLINGS AND ABUSES IN MYANMAR

On March 17, the Network for Human Rights Documentation-Burma reported numerous human rights violations in Myanmar in late 2025, urging international action against the military junta.

The statement is as follows.

During this period, ND-Burma's member organizations documented 462 human rights violations across 279 incidents in seven regions and six states in Burma. Of these, 271 violations were committed by the military junta, 5 by Ethnic Revolution Organizations (EROs), and 3 cases could not be attributed to a perpetrator. In total, 881 individuals, including 357 males, 187 females, 182 children, and 155 individuals of unknown gender or age, had their rights violated. Significantly, 352 individuals, including 173 males, 80 females, 82 children, and 17 of unknown genders or ages, were killed.

The situation on the ground for civilians remains increasingly volatile as the armed actors continue to evade accountability for their widespread and

systematic crimes. The most vulnerable, especially women and children, are forced to endure the worst suffering as their calls to the international community for action go largely unanswered. With over 3.5 million people displaced nationwide, the urgency for action is clear. It is vital that global stakeholders are not deceived by the regime's insistence that the situation is normal. Quite the contrary. Humanitarian aid and elections are routinely weaponized as tools to control and surveil the population.

Furthermore, as shown in the latest report by ND-Burma, there are numerous cases in areas where members are actively documenting human rights violations, providing evidence of how the junta is terrorizing innocent people. A rule of law or a federal democracy cannot exist with the junta in any leadership role. Therefore, the international community must respond to the longstanding calls of civil society by pursuing coordinated and meaningful actions that hold the regime accountable at the highest levels, including referring the human rights situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court. The survival and future of a new Burma depend on it.



CNF CALLS FOR VOLUNTARY NATIONAL SERVICE ON 38TH CHIN REVOLUTION DAY AS RESISTANCE EYES 'FINAL BATTLE'

On 20 March, 2026, the Chin National Front (CNF) marked the 38th anniversary of Chin Revolution Day by calling on all adult Chin male citizens to fulfill their "national duty" by joining the armed struggle against the military junta.

The appeal, issued from the Chinland Council's headquarters, emphasizes voluntary service driven by national awareness rather than the forced conscription tactics currently employed by the Naypyidaw regime.

"We are urging everyone of legal age to serve in the military due to revolutionary requirements. Rather than a mandatory conscription, we are encouraging

people to serve as a national responsibility given the current state of the national revolution," Salai Htet Ni, a spokesperson for the CNF said.

He added that as military service for all adults is a policy set by the Chinland Council (CC), the CNF, being a council member, is also advocating for it. He addressed that recruitment for new comrades is being carried out under the Ministry of Defense of the Chinland Government.

"Protecting one's own land is a national duty. Right now, there are battles in Falam township. How can we fight if there are no people? If we can't fight due to a

lack of manpower, we will have to remain under the military dictatorship," an anonymous local Chin people said.

The local also mentioned that while the Chin population is relatively small, many are currently abroad, and it is necessary for everyone to fulfill their respective duties wherever they can.

He specifically called upon those living and working under difficult circumstances in India, Malaysia, and Thailand to join in fulfilling their national duties.

It is reported that the Chinland Council has established qualifications and policies for military service, granting exemptions to family members of those currently serving, those who have lost their lives, and those who have been disabled by injuries.

Additionally, exemptions are also granted to religious leaders and clergy, outstanding professionals, those performing other non-military national duties, and only children.

In its statement, the CNF urged Chin people both at home and abroad to remember the revolutionary comrades fighting on the frontlines and the martyrs who sacrificed their lives, calling for increased human and financial resources to swiftly reach the goals of the people's revolution.

The Chin National Front stated that it is a time for the people and revolutionary forces to clearly distinguish between friend and foe and to resist in unity, as well as to caution that the coup military junta attempts various deceptive means to maintain power, including planning a sham election to form a puppet parliament and a rebranded military government.

The statement also honored and paid tribute to the heroic martyrs who sacrificed their lives and the comrades who gave their limbs during the 38 years of the Chin revolution.

Chin National Revolution Day is celebrated annually on 20 March, marking the founding of the Chin National Front/Army (CNF/A) in 1988.

The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) sent a message for the 38th anniversary of the Chin Revolution, stating that it is inspiring and honorable to see Chin ethnic leaders and the Chin people striving with unwavering perseverance, diligence, and resilience toward the goal of uprooting the military dictatorship and building a Federal Democratic Union.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA DRONE AND ARTILLERY STRIKES DESTROY HOMES IN WESTERN MADAYA FOLLOWING DEADLY RIVER ISLAND CLASH

Tensions in western Madaya Township, Mandalay Region, escalated on 18 and 19 March as military junta forces launched a series of drone and artillery attacks on Moegyoe village.

The assault, which destroyed at least four civilian homes, followed a lethal confrontation between junta troops and local resistance forces on a nearby river island, according to the Wetlet Informational Network.

Junta forces reportedly shelled the village and carried out drone strikes, the source said.

The source added that the troops based in Seinpankone village launched the assault at around 6 pm on 18 March.

“There was a clash between junta troops stationed in Seinpankone and resistance forces, and the following

day they began drone strikes,” a local resident told reporters on 19 March.

According to the People’s Defence Force (PDF) in Madaya Township, junta troops had moved from Seinpankone village to a river island west of the Ayeyarwady River on 17 March, where fighting broke out.

The clashes reportedly left two junta personnel dead and seven others injured, according to a local People’s Defence Organization (PDO).

Local sources said junta forces remain deployed in villages across western Madaya Township, where they frequently carry out artillery attacks and are reportedly moving and operating toward Singu Township.



MYANMAR JUNTA ENACTS NEW PASSPORT LAW TO TIGHTEN CONTROL OVER OVERSEAS TRAVEL

On 17 March, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, acting in his capacity as head of the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC), signed into law the Myanmar Passport Law (NDSC Law No. 19/2026). The new legislation, which comprises 8 chapters and 47 sections, officially repeals the century-old Myanmar Passport Act of 1920.

The law is framed as a measure to safeguard national security and prevent document forgery, but human rights groups and legal analysts describe it as a strategic tool to suppress dissent.

By codifying broad powers to refuse and revoke passports, the junta has created a legal mechanism to strand political opponents, activists, and participants in the Civil Disobedient Movement (CDM) within the country.

Under the new law, authorities may refuse to issue passports to individuals who cannot provide sufficient proof of eligibility, whose citizenship has been revoked by the junta, who submit fraudulent applications, or who have been convicted of crimes. It also applies to individuals who are subject to court orders or official requests to block passport issuance.

In addition, the junta reserves the right to deny passports to anyone considered a threat to national security or national interests. The law also includes people released conditionally under Section 401(1) of the Criminal Procedure Code who have not completed their required period, individuals currently in detention under court orders, and those deported back to Myanmar for violating foreign laws.

The law further states that if a person is determined to have lost their citizenship, any passport previously issued to them will be revoked.

Individuals who are denied a passport or have their passport cancelled are allowed to appeal the decision to the junta's Union Minister for Home Affairs within 60 days of receiving notification.

The military authorities also plan to introduce a new electronic passport system with enhanced security features, including embedded chips containing personal data. Once implemented, citizens will need to apply for the new e-passport system, although existing passports will remain valid until their expiration dates.

The law also establishes strict penalties for passport-related offenses. Possessing or using a fake passport can result in a prison sentence ranging from six months to five years, along with fines between 500,000 and 1 million kyats.

Providing false information or documents during the application process may lead to imprisonment for three months to one year, a fine of 500,000 kyats, or both.

Transferring a passport to another person whether by selling, renting, or other means is punishable by three months to one year in prison, along with fines ranging from 300,000 to 500,000 kyats.

More serious offenses such as possessing, using, transferring, or destroying a passport without authorization, or forging and selling counterfeit passports—carry heavier penalties. These include prison sentences of one to five years and fines ranging from 1 million to 1.5 million kyats.



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NUG ACTING PRESIDENT DUWA LASHI LA WELCOMES MNDAA-TNLA DIALOGUE FOLLOWING CEASEFIRE IN KUTKAI

Acting President Duwa Lashi La of the National Unity Government (NUG) has formally welcomed the commencement of talks between the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA).

In a statement released on 17 March, the Acting President expressed relief that the two "brotherly alliances" have opted for the negotiating table following a period of intense military confrontation in northern Shan State.

"I believe that, as leaders of revolutionary organizations, they will be able to carry out negotiations in a way that does not undermine the interests of the revolution," said acting President Duwa Lashi La.

Meanwhile, Mizzima has contacted a spokesperson from the NUG Prime Minister's Office to ask whether the NUG would take part in facilitating a practical policy

agreement acceptable to both sides, but no response has been received so far.

The conflict, which originated from a territorial dispute in Kutkai on 13 February, escalated significantly on 14 March when the MNDAA launched an offensive into TNLA-controlled areas. The fighting, which lasted three days, concluded with an initial ceasefire agreement on the night of 16 March.

On 17 March, TNLA spokesperson Lway Yay Oo told Mizzima that leaders from both sides are currently meeting in Laukkai to discuss a comprehensive resolution to the conflict.

Mizzima sought comment from TNLA spokesperson Lway Yay Oo regarding the topics discussed and any agreements reached during the talks but had not received a response at the time of publication.



Damaged shelters. Photo: Supplied

STRONG WINDS AND HAILSTORMS DESTROY 100 IDP SHELTERS IN KAWLIN TOWNSHIP

A severe weather system involving heavy winds, rain, and hailstorms struck the western part of Kawlin Township in Sagaing Region on 15 and 16 March, destroying approximately 100 temporary shelters.

The disaster hit in the middle of the night, causing shelters to collapse and sweeping away the personal belongings and clothing of displaced residents. According to local aid workers, the victims are long-term internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled Kawlin town after it was recaptured by junta forces in 2024.

Ko Thee Gyi, who is assisting the IDPs said, "The strong winds caused shelters to collapse, roofs were blown off, and everything was swept away. Since it rained and hailed in the middle of the night, people are facing severe housing difficulties. Furthermore, their clothing and personal belongings were completely soaked by the rain."

He added that because the shelters were destroyed, the displaced people are currently seeking new places

to stay and urgently need assistance to rebuild their huts.

"Among the 100 damaged shelters, there is an urgent need to repair 10 huts specifically for mothers with disabled children," he said.

According to the "Pyi Thu Ma Pyi Thu - Kawlin" group, these windstorm victims are households who fled Kawlin after the military junta forces recaptured the town. They have been living as displaced persons for over two years.

"These people were already struggling just to survive. Now that their shelters are destroyed, everything food, water, and housing has become even more difficult for them," Ko Thee Gyi said.

Local organizations have reported that assistance is critically needed to repair the collapsed shelters of the long-term displaced residents of Kawlin.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA TOUTS SURRENDER OF OVER 500 REBEL FIGHTERS

More than 500 Myanmar opposition guerrillas surrendered to the junta, the military said 19 March, with AFP journalists witnessing a disarming ceremony that one resistance faction suggested was a propaganda stunt.

Myanmar has been consumed by a civil war since 2021, when the military swept aside the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in a coup.

A kaleidoscope of rebel factions have entered the fray including battalions of pro-democracy fighters formed after the putsch and ethnic minority armies which have long resisted central rule.

AFP journalists in central Mandalay city saw hundreds of personnel assembled on a military base in the grounds of the ancient Royal Palace before a table stacked with guns, bullets and weapon magazines.

"You went there because you didn't know any better, but now you have regained your conscience," head of Myanmar's Central Command, Brigadier General Aung Htay, told the assembled ranks.

"You all have experienced it firsthand. Living in the jungle is nothing like you see in movies or what other people say," he said. "A person in the light can live in freedom without any fear."

The mixed-gender ranks wore mismatched camouflaged and drab uniforms -- many stamped with the logo of the Mandalay People's Defence Force (PDF), considered one of the most powerful pro-democracy battalions.

"There is no case of our PDFs surrendering to the Myanmar military in those kinds of numbers," a Mandalay PDF spokesman said, suggesting the event

was for propaganda purposes.

"There are a few that surrender but it's very rare they surrender with full uniforms and badges," he added.

"We found out that some people are wearing our uniforms but we saw some mistakes in the way they're being worn as the caps don't match with the uniform."

The military permitted press interviews with the assembled personnel.

"I first joined them because I don't like the regime and thought the revolution could win," said one man, remaining anonymous for security reasons, adding he was followed into the PDF by his wife and two daughters.

"Their leadership is very different from what we expected. That is why we came back," added the 39-year-old.

While battalions dubbed the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) are fuelled by idealism to topple the junta, their most notable victories have come fighting alongside the more experienced ethnic minority armed groups.

But recent interventions by neighbouring China have sealed landmark truces with two key ethnic factions, once the stalwarts of the opposition, leaving the more rag-tag pro-democracy forces back-footed around Mandalay.

Analysts say the ceasefires are a sign Beijing backs the military to maintain some semblance of stability in Myanmar.

AFP



MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES RAID PHALAN PIN VILLAGE, KILLING THREE AND DETAINING FIVE IN MORNING ASSAULT

In a violent early-morning raid on 16 March, approximately 100 soldiers from the military junta stormed Phalan Pin village in the western sector of Nattalin Township, Bago Region.

The operation, which reportedly began at 5:00 am, resulted in the deaths of three local residents and the arrest of five others.

The resident said, "A clash broke out during their advancement. Afterwards, they entered the village, killed the locals, and some people were also taken into custody."

According to residents and local humanitarian groups, the deceased have been identified as U Htay Aung (48), U Chit Tun (65), and Daw Khin Yi (65).

The raid followed a brief clash during the military's advancement into the area. In the aftermath of the killings, troops detained four members of U Pho Kone's family and Daw Kay Thi (40), the widow of the slain U Htay Aung.

By the evening, the military column set fire to parts of the village, though the full extent of the property damage remains unconfirmed.

Due to the military operations, residents of Phalan Pin and nearby villages, including Thayet Bagan Yoe, Ngoke To, Nyaung Wine, and Khway Thay, have been forced to flee their homes.

The troops involved are based in Dama Ngai village, where revolutionary forces frequently launch attacks on the local police station.



Burning village. Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS AT WEAPONS FACTORY SHELL VILLAGES IN AUNGLAN TOWNSHIP, SPARKING FIRES AND MASS DISPLACEMENT

On 17 March, a junta military unit based within the Defence Industry 15 factory (KaPaSa 15) launched a heavy artillery assault on civilian areas in southwestern Aunglan Township, Magway Region.

Howitzer shells reportedly struck Intawthar village, causing multiple explosions that ignited a large fire in the northern section of the settlement.

“They are targeting a village called Ywarmahtone, located near the gate of the weapon factory. The northern section of Intawthar village has already been burned, and the fire is now spreading toward the south. There is no one left to control the flames,” the local source said.

The source also noted that artillery shelling hit Intawthar village on 16 March. While there were no human casualties, livestock were reportedly killed. The

junta army has been continuously shelling villages in southwestern Aunglan Township since early March, sometimes accompanied by drone strikes.

As a result of the ongoing attacks, residents of Intawthar and nearby villages including Inywaygi, Si Ywar, Kyauksaung, Kazuninn, Chingonegyi, Sintoke, and Kyarmway have been forced to flee their homes, according to local sources.

“People are relocating either to the town or to villages that are not being targeted by shelling,” one resident said.

On 1 March, shelling by junta units also destroyed homes in Darsan village. Local organizations subsequently urged residents to remain vigilant and to dig shelters, as artillery attacks and drone strikes have been occurring daily in recent days.



SURGE IN ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND GUEST LIST INSPECTIONS IN YANGON FOLLOWING COMMAND LEADERSHIP SHIFT

Security conditions in Yangon have deteriorated sharply in the first half of March 2026, with human rights monitors reporting a significant spike in arbitrary arrests and intrusive household "guest list" inspections.

This crackdown coincides with the appointment of Brigadier General Tin Min Lat as the new Yangon Regional Military Commander on 5 March. He succeeded Major General Pyae Sone Lin, who was promoted to a senior role on 2 March.

According to an official from the Rangoon Scout Network (RSN) monitoring conditions on the ground, prior to the change in the Yangon Regional Military Command, 52 cases of forced arrests and guest list inspections were recorded in February. In the two weeks following the leadership shift, 85 arrests have been reported.

"The regional military commander was replaced at the start of March, and since the new commander assumed office, arrests and household checks have increased," an RSN official said.

The incidents were documented between 1 and 15 March across Thaketa, Tamwe, Thingangyun, South Okkalapa, Ahlone, Hlaing, Kamaryut, Mayangone and Sanchaung townships.

"About 45 arrests occurred on the streets, five at homes, and around 35 following searches for money. Over the past two weeks, there has been a surge in people being forcibly detained in public areas," an RSN official said.

He added that the junta is preparing to convene a parliament and form a new government, with further administrative changes expected that could lead to an increase in arrests.

The public has been advised to avoid crowded areas, refrain from going out at night, and not linger on roadsides or consume alcohol in public.

"I urge everyone to stay vigilant about military service activities in their neighbourhoods and to prepare in advance to avoid potential problems," said a Yangon resident.

Since the coup, the junta has carried out guest list inspections and forcibly arrested residents for military service across Yangon's townships. Despite the junta's efforts to consolidate control over the city, urban guerrillas continue to target military-related sites in Yangon, more than five years after the coup.

On the night of 14 March, two soldiers were injured when a military post at a sports field in Ward 43, North Dagon Township, Yangon Region, came under attack, according to the Urban Rats Network.

OVER 100 KILLED AND 4,000 HOMES DESTROYED IN MYINGYAN DISTRICT AS MYANMAR JUNTA AERIAL ATTACKS INTENSIFY



Photo: AFP

Abrutal aerial campaign by the Myanmar military junta since January 2026 has devastated Myingyan and Natogyi townships in Myingyan District, Mandalay Region, resulting in the deaths of over 100 people and the destruction of more than 4,000 homes.

Myingyan Township Humanitarian Committee, which compiled the data in cooperation with Mizzima, reports that the actual casualties may be even higher. The attacks have notably targeted religious and public buildings, including monasteries, pagodas, and schools.

“More than 200 houses were destroyed directly by airstrikes alone. In total, over 4,000 homes in villages were burned down, including religious and public buildings such as pagodas, monasteries, and some schools. Among the more than 100 people killed were children, as well as about five monks and novices. Some residents also died of heart attacks during the attacks, even though the bombs did not hit them directly,” the official said.

Villages reported to have been burned or heavily damaged by airstrikes include Chaysay, Kwansaik, Kansink (North), Letwe, Myingni, Sinkut, Tasoe, Male, Nyaungto, Kanhnaung, Ywagyi, Ywathit, Khansatgone, Lonedaw, Thamantaw, Kwinpyangone, Thanpo, Yonesingyi, Yonesinlay, Seto, Shwemadaw, Kwanohn, Incahung, Mangyisu, Hteinpanthitywa, Thamonekaing, Phone, Sanpya, Thaeday, Layywasone, Letthamarkan, Pyathatgyi, Tazaung, Nabuaing, Pyitawtha, Thabyaythar, Taungshae, and Aungpyisoe.

According to the Myingyan Township Humanitarian Committee, several villages including Ywathitgyi,

Magyisu, Kanswe, Letwe, Myingni, Tasoe, Male, Talokemyo, Thinbawtin, Darguun, Nyaungpin, Pyar, and Khansatgone have been almost completely burned to ashes.

“There are fires nearly every day,” a local resident told Mizzima. “Tens of thousands of displaced people are suffering. There is nowhere for them to return to because their homes are being burned until nothing remains. Some of the victims are children.”

The resident also said that more than 30 resistance fighters were reportedly killed in the junta’s airstrikes. However, Mizzima has not been able to independently confirm this claim, as revolutionary forces have not publicly commented on the casualties.

Local sources said the military has been using gyrocopters and paramotors in its air attacks in the northern region, as these aircraft are cheaper to operate than jet fighters and conventional military support planes.

Village burnings by junta forces reportedly continued until 13 March, and residents say military columns have now advanced toward Myaing.

Meanwhile, the advocacy group Justice For Myanmar has called on international governments to impose sanctions on ships, ship owners, operators, fuel storage facilities, and the Myanmar Petrochemical Enterprise that supply jet fuel to the military.

According to Justice For Myanmar, data from the junta’s Myanmar Ports Authority shows that jet fuel imports into Myanmar nearly doubled from 64,562 metric tons in 2024 to 106,604 metric tons in 2025.



UKRAINIANS AND US CITIZEN ARRESTED IN INDIA OVER ALLEGEDLY ENTERING MYANMAR TO HELP RESISTANCE GROUPS

The Special NIA Court at Patiala House Court in New Delhi has remanded seven foreigners for 11 days of custody over entering Mizoram without official permission and allegedly crossing the border to contact resistance group in Myanmar, according to ANI report 16 March.

Three Ukrainians were arrested in Delhi, three in Lucknow and one US citizen in Kolkata.

According to the report, the NIA has sought 15 days custody to investigate the case.

It is alleged they came to India on a visa, then entered Mizoram, which is a protected area. Thereafter, they entered Myanmar and contacted ethnic war groups.

It is alleged they trained ethnic war groups and brought in a "huge consignment" of drones from Europe via India.

Two local lawyers oppose the custodial remand.

The Press Service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine provided the following press release:

On 13 March 2026, six citizens of Ukraine were detained in the Republic of India. According to preliminary information, the charges concern unauthorized presence in the state of Mizoram, access to which requires a special permit, as well as the alleged illegal crossing of the state border between India and Myanmar. At present, the competent authorities of India are conducting the relevant investigative actions.

As of now, there are no established facts proving the involvement of the said Ukrainian citizens in unlawful activities on the territory of India or Myanmar. At the same time, certain publications, including in some Indian and Russian media outlets, contain distorted interpretations of the available facts, are manipulative in nature, and put forward unfounded allegations.

The details of the case are not being disclosed in the interests of the investigation. With the assistance of Ukrainian consular officers of the Embassy of Ukraine in India, the citizens have been provided with legal aid and defence counsel during the court proceedings. On 16 March 2026, a court hearing took place, which was also attended by representatives of the Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of India; however, they were not granted the opportunity to communicate directly with the detainees. Following the hearing, the court decided to extend their detention until 27 March 2026.

Contrary to established international practice, the Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of India did not receive any official notification from the competent authorities of India regarding the detention of Ukrainian citizens. The Ukrainian side insists on the immediate provision of unimpeded consular access to the detainees.

The Ambassador of Ukraine to the Republic of India Dr. Oleksandr Polishchuk held a meeting with the Secretary (West) of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, Mr. Sibi George, during which he handed over an official note of protest demanding the immediate release of the Ukrainian citizens and access to them. In addition, the Embassy is maintaining contacts with other competent authorities of India in order to clarify all the circumstances and reasons for the detention.

The Ukrainian diplomatic mission remains in constant contact with the relatives of the detained Ukrainian citizens and is keeping the situation under special control.

We draw attention to the fact that there are certain restricted-access zones in India for foreign nationals, entry to which is possible only with special permits. At the same time, proper marking of such areas on the ground is often absent, which creates a risk of unintentional violation of the established rules.



CHIN REVOLUTIONARY FORCES DISAVOW ANY CONNECTION TO FOREIGN NATIONALS DETAINED IN INDIA

Chin resistance groups have denied any engagement with Ukrainian and American nationals currently detained in India on allegations of conspiring to commit acts of terrorism and providing drone and military training inside Myanmar.

This was in response to a report on 17 March by the Indian Express stating that India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested three Ukrainians at Lucknow and Delhi airports and one American at Kolkata airport. A total of seven individuals are facing charges under Section 18 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and other relevant legal provisions.

"The individuals currently detained in India have absolutely no connection with us. Our member organizations also confirm that they have no links to them," Salai Yaw Man, spokesperson for the Chin Brotherhood (CB), told Mizzima on the morning of 19 March.

He added that officials from their units in Falam and Tedim townships, where military tensions and clashes have intensified, confirmed that there is no affiliation.

Similarly, Salai Htet Ni, spokesperson for the Chin National Army (CNA), told Mizzima that they have no connection to those arrested.

"There has been no training conducted within the territories controlled by CNF/CNA and Chinland Council (CC) forces, nor is there any other connection," he stated.

While declining to comment specifically on the allegations made by Indian newspapers, he mentioned that they, like the junta, seek international support and

military technology including from India to win the war.

Salai Htet Ni further noted that such reports could harm the relationship between the accuser and the accused, and potentially affect the cross-border interactions between the people of India and Myanmar.

The newspaper, citing official sources, reported that "information was received that they crossed into Myanmar and met with ethnic groups hostile to India. Investigations also revealed that they delivered several shipments containing numerous drones from Europe to Mizoram State."

The Patiala House Court in Delhi has extended the remand of the detainees until 27 March to allow for the collection of evidence, uncovering criminal conspiracies, identifying co-conspirators, and analysing mobile data to verify the sources of their funding.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a statement claiming there is no evidence that Ukrainian citizens are involved in illegal activities in India or Myanmar, asserting that the reports are based on groundless allegations and distorted information.

Since the embassy was not officially notified of the arrests and has been denied access to the detainees, the Ukrainian Ambassador to India met with officials from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs to request their release and consular access.

The detainees are accused of entering India on tourist visas, traveling from Guwahati, Assam, to Mizoram, which is a restricted area requiring special permits, and then crossing into Myanmar to provide drone and military training to groups fighting against India.



EUROCHAM WHITE PAPER INDICATES MYANMAR'S DIGITAL ECONOMY UNDER GROWING PRESSURE

Myanmar's digital economy is facing growing pressure due to deteriorating internet infrastructure, regulatory uncertainty, and rising cybercrime, according to a March white paper released by the European Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar (EuroCham).

The report warns that while Myanmar has seen rapid adoption of digital tools in recent years, the conditions needed to sustain digital trade and investment are increasingly fragile.

"Severe infrastructure degradation, regulatory uncertainty, escalating cyber-fraud and a critical skills shortage are collectively threatening the viability of digital trade and investment," the report said.

Myanmar businesses have embraced digital platforms at a pace above regional averages. Mobile payment adoption among businesses stands at 99 percent, compared with an ASEAN average of 86 percent, while more than half of the surveyed companies rely on digital tools or e-commerce for the majority of their operations.

However, the white paper highlights a sharp decline in internet performance. Median mobile internet download speeds fell by 78 percent between January 2024 and January 2025, dropping from 18.22 Mbps to 5.09 Mbps, according to the report's findings.

EuroCham said the slowdown has had a significant financial impact. A January 2026 survey of European businesses operating in Myanmar showed 43 percent

reported average monthly revenue losses of up to 40 percent due to slow internet connectivity.

Operating costs have grown due to regulatory barriers. Businesses reported uncertainty around VPN restrictions and website "whitelisting" processes. Fifty-nine percent of businesses say they have experienced operational cost increases of up to 40 percent as companies deploy redundant systems and cybersecurity measures to maintain connectivity.

The report also warned of growing digital security risks, including a rise in fraudulent social media accounts impersonating established brands and broader reputational risks linked to transnational scam operations in the region.

A shortage of digital skills further compounds the problem. Survey findings show that 94 percent of businesses lack sufficient understanding of digital authentication systems and 90 percent lack familiarity with digital signatures — key components of secure digital commerce.

EuroCham called for urgent policy action in four areas – restoring stable internet connectivity, creating transparent digital regulations, strengthening cybersecurity coordination, and investing in digital talent development.

The report concluded that meeting these recommendations is essential for Myanmar to maintain a functioning digital economy.



MYANMAR CHEVENING ALUMNI URGE UK TO LIFT VISA RESTRICTIONS ON STUDENTS

The Myanmar Chevening Alumni Association expressed concerns about the UK government's decision to impose emergency visa restrictions on Myanmar nationals in a 19 March statement, warning that this move will disrupt scholarships and hinder the professional development of future Chevening candidates.

The statement is as follows.

We were shocked by the 4 March announcement of an 'Emergency Brake' on Sponsored Study Visas for Myanmar nationals by the UK Home Office. In particular, we deeply sympathise with the short-listed Chevening candidates for the 2026-2027 academic year who were in the middle of preparing for their Chevening interviews when they were informed that the scholarships will no longer be progressed due to the visa brake.

While we note, as the announcement says, that this is a temporary measure, we have learned that it will only be lifted when the UK government considers

it appropriate to do so. This will affect at least one year of potential Myanmar Chevening scholars jeopardizing their professional development and Chevening's positive impacts on Myanmar. We respectfully request the Home Office to reconsider the 'Emergency Brake' for Myanmar students, and in particular to immediately remove it for Myanmar Chevening scholars.

Chevening is more than just a scholarship scheme for Myanmar. It builds bridges for longer term relationships, practical cooperation and mutual benefits at all levels between Myanmar and the UK, in development, business, culture and academia. This effective support is needed now, more than ever, by the people of Myanmar.

We reiterate our commitment to sustaining the values of Chevening in Myanmar and call on all those concerned to ensure the immediate resumption of Chevening scholarships for future leaders in all development sectors for the country of Myanmar.



FULBRIGHT
FOREIGN STUDENT PROGRAM

US REOPENS FULBRIGHT GATEWAY FOR MYANMAR STUDENTS FOLLOWING END OF TRAVEL BAN

In a significant shift for international academic exchange, the US Embassy in Yangon announced on 18 March, 2026, the official reopening of the Fulbright Foreign Student Program for Myanmar nationals. The move marks a formal renewal of the prestigious scholarship after a period of suspension triggered by US-imposed travel restrictions.

The programme offers fully funded master's degree scholarships at leading American universities, covering tuition, airfare, and living stipends for "outstanding" Myanmar students. The current call for applications is for the 2027-2028 academic year, with a final submission deadline set for 1 May, 2026.

While the reopening signals a return to academic diplomacy, the embassy issued a pragmatic warning to potential scholars. Applicants are urged to carefully consider current domestic travel restrictions and the complex process of qualifying for travel exemptions.

Under current junta-administered laws, such as the newly enacted Myanmar Passport Law of 2026,

obtaining the necessary documentation to depart the country remains a significant hurdle for many young professionals.

The Fulbright suspension was a direct result of a broad travel ban issued by US President Donald Trump on 4 June, 2025. That executive order restricted entry for citizens from 12 countries, including Myanmar, and went into effect on 9 June, 2025. The ban effectively froze educational pipelines that had traditionally served as a bridge between the two nations.

By renewing the Fulbright programme, the US government is signaling a desire to continue investing in Myanmar's human capital despite the ongoing political crisis. For many students in Yangon and beyond, the scholarship represents one of the few remaining pathways to global education in an increasingly isolated environment.

NUG ACTING PRESIDENT DUWA LASHI LA DENOUNCES "PUPPET PARLIAMENT" IN MYANMAR AND ANNOUNCES FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC LEADING COUNCIL

On the morning of 16 March, Acting President Duwa Lashi La of the National Unity Government (NUG) addressed the 9th session of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, issuing a sharp warning against the military junta's attempts to secure international legitimacy through its newly convened parliament.

Speaking as the military-backed legislature began its first session in Naypyidaw, the NUG Acting President characterized the proceedings as a "theatrical performance" designed to deceive the global community following the widely condemned elections of early 2026.

He said, "We must not view these as ordinary events, we need to think deeply and respond effectively. Specifically, we must anticipate the objectives of the junta's sham parliament and take advance action. In this era of rapid change, I want to emphasize that we must calculate and prepare for future possibilities."

He added that during the five-year revolutionary period, it is necessary to enhance the checks and balances between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. He noted that the parliament needs

to implement a practical framework suited for the revolution rather than following traditional formats.

Furthermore, he urged that the existence of the revolutionary government should be further solidified by strengthening cooperation with international parliaments.

The Acting President revealed that significant time has been invested in building trust with Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) to establish a "Federal Democratic Leading Council," which will serve as the foundation for a future federal union.

He also shared that the NUG cabinet is boldly implementing reforms to strengthen the alliance between Spring Revolution forces and ethnic revolutionary organizations, requesting the parliament to join hands in these new steps.

Acting President Duwa Lashi La concluded his speech with a warning: "We must be mindful that if we cannot decisively work toward the total end of the military dictatorship at a time like this, it will not be easy to maintain hope in the future."



Photo: AFP

JUSTICE FOR MYANMAR AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS CALL FOR GLOBAL REJECTION OF JUNTA'S "PUPPET PARLIAMENT"

On 18 March, the advocacy group Justice for Myanmar (JFM) issued a formal statement urging international governments to unequivocally oppose the military junta and all institutions arising from the recent "sham" elections.

The call for a global boycott follows the convening of the Third Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) this week, which JFM characterized as a desperate attempt to rebrand a "criminal regime" responsible for mass atrocities.

"A simple change in name will not alter the nature of this group of war criminals. Regardless of the disguise, it must be dismantled," the statement said.

JFM also urged international governments to impose targeted sanctions on the junta, including its financial networks, military operations, and aviation fuel supplies, and to stand in solidarity with the people of Myanmar.

According to reports, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) secured a majority of seats in a three-phase election that began on 28 December 2025.

On 16 and 18 March, sessions of the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) were convened. Khin Yi, chairman of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), serves as Speaker of the Lower House, while Information Minister Maung Maung Ohn was appointed Deputy Speaker. In the Upper House, Former general Aung Lin Dwe serves as Speaker, with Sports and Youth Affairs Minister and Hotel and Tourism Minister Jeng Phang Naw Taung appointed as Deputy Speaker.

The military authorities have announced plans to convene parliament in March and elect a president in early April as part of forming a new government.

On 16 March, the Special Advisory Council on Myanmar (SAC-M) stated that military leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has appointed both former and current top generals who share his views to key positions, in an effort to consolidate control over both the junta's "government" and the military.

SAC-M added that such efforts will not bring the junta closer to the legitimacy and normalcy it seeks and urged international governments to reject the military's puppet government and refrain from engaging with it.



Aung Lin Dwe. Photo: AFP

SANCTIONED FORMER MYANMAR JUNTA GENERAL AUNG LIN DWE APPOINTED SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN JUNTA-LED PARLIAMENT

In a widely condemned move to consolidate its political framework, the Myanmar military junta appointed former General Aung Lin Dwe as the Speaker of the National Assembly (Amyotha Hluttaw) on 18 March.

The appointment took place during a parliamentary session in Naypyidaw following military-organized elections that have been labelled a "sham" by the National Unity Government (NUG) and much of the international community.

U Aung Lin Dwe was the sole nominee for the position, and acting chairperson Daw Dwe Bu formally declared his appointment. A key figure in the military administration, Aung Lin Dwe served as the Secretary of the State Administration Council (SAC) following the 2021 coup and currently holds a position as a junta member and Chief Executive of the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC).

Before the takeover, he served as the Judge Advocate General. Due to his role in the military's senior leadership, he is currently under personal sanctions by

the United Kingdom, European Union, Canada, and the United States.

At the same session, junta Minister Jeng Phang Naw Taung was elected Vice Speaker of the National Assembly. Earlier, on 16 March, U Khin Yi, chair of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), was elected Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw, with Information Minister U Maung Maung Ohn appointed as Vice Speaker.

Union Prime Minister Mahn Win Khaing Than of the National Unity Government (NUG) condemned the junta's election as an attempt to entrench its power. He described it as a "baseless show" aimed at deceiving the international community.

He added on 16 March that any election or parliament lacking public legitimacy would likewise fail to gain international recognition, warning that both revolutionary forces and the public would oppose it.

MYANMAR JUNTA IMPLEMENTS ROTATING POWER CUTS AMID WIDENING ENERGY CRISIS AND MIDDLE EAST OIL SHOCK

The Myanmar junta's Ministry of Electric Power has officially announced that rotating power outages will be implemented across Myanmar starting 18 March and will last through at least June.

While the ministry characterizes this as a routine measure to manage high summer demand, the current crisis is being significantly exacerbated by a "global oil shock" following the escalation of conflict in the Middle East.

"The power is still on this morning, but we don't know when it will go out," a woman living in Thingangyun Township told Mizzima on 18 March.

According to the ministry, the new electricity distribution plan will begin on 18 March and continue through June. However, it did not specify which areas will be affected or how the schedule will be organized.

The ministry added that electricity generated by liquefied natural gas (LNG) power plants supplying industrial zones will continue to be provided without interruption.

"The power supply had improved about a week before the election. It was only cut for three or four hours per week. Now that the election is over, parliament has resumed, and 10th-grade exams have finished, outages are starting again. It feels like the usual summer blackouts," said a resident of Mandalay.

Myanmar's daily electricity demand is 4,664 megawatts, but the Ministry of Electricity said it is currently only able to generate and distribute around 3,600 megawatts.

The rotating outages are intended to balance the load and control increased electricity consumption during the hot season.

A Yangon resident addressed that the ongoing conflict in the Middle East has contributed to global fuel shortages, which could worsen the situation in Myanmar, especially as the military authorities have urged fuel conservation.

"I think this year's outages will be worse than in previous years. In the past, households and small businesses with generators could manage. Now, it's uncertain because fuel isn't always available when we need it," he said.

He added that demand for solar panels and solar-powered equipment is likely to rise, which could drive up prices.

During the summer of 2025, the military authorities implemented scheduled power rationing across Myanmar, including Yangon. At that time, power surges and load imbalances frequently caused fires when electricity was restored.



MYANMAR AIRFARES TRIPLE AND BAGGAGE ALLOWANCES SLASHED AMID GLOBAL FUEL CRISIS

The cost of air travel in Myanmar has reached record highs as domestic airlines struggle with a dual crisis: a severe domestic jet fuel shortage and a global supply shock triggered by Middle East tensions.

On 19 and 20 March, 2026, the nation's primary carriers, Myanmar Airways International (MAI) and Myanmar National Airlines (MNA), announced emergency measures including a drastic reduction in baggage allowances and a nearly threefold increase in ticket prices.

MNA stated that passengers can purchase up to 10 kg of additional baggage only at check-in counters in Bangkok and Singapore airports. MAI has applied the 10 kg excess baggage limit across all its domestic and international routes.

"The usual 20–30 kg checked baggage allowance for flights from Chiang Mai to Yangon is no longer available," he said.

The airlines have also temporarily suspended special baggage privileges for loyalty members, including Sky Smile (Ruby and Diamond) and MNA CLUB members.

Ticket prices have surged significantly. One-way flights from Chiang Mai to Yangon now cost around 14,000 Thai baht, whereas previously this amount was typically the highest price for a round-trip ticket.

"Direct flights from Chiang Mai to Yangon now cost 14,000-baht one way. Previously, round-trip fares were

about 8,000 baht in the low season and 15,000 baht in the high season," the travel agent said.

The airlines have been refueling abroad due to domestic fuel shortages. However, some countries are prioritizing fuel for their own carriers, limiting supply. Myanmar airlines are reportedly still able to refuel in Malaysia and Singapore, but constraints remain.

As a result, online shoppers and small merchants are facing rising costs. Excess baggage fees on the Chiang Mai–Yangon route have reached approximately 500 baht per kilogram.

"A seven-kilogram bag is already like a suitcase. If you exceed that, you pay 500 baht per kilogram, starting from five kilograms," the agent said.

The restrictions are also expected to drive up prices of consumer goods and basic food items that depend on air freight, especially as land border trade routes remain disrupted.

The global fuel shortage is linked to tensions in the Middle East, including the Iran–Israel conflict, which has affected oil transport through the Strait of Hormuz.

Domestically, fuel controls have made jet fuel difficult to obtain. Airlines have had to rely on refueling overseas, and flights may be canceled if sufficient fuel is unavailable.

Both MAI and MNA said the baggage restrictions will remain in place until further notice.



Photo: EPA

MYANMAR FUEL PRICES SKYROCKET AS SHORTAGES AND STRICT RATIONING GRIP MAJOR CITIES

Domestic fuel prices in Myanmar experienced a massive surge on 20 March, 2026, with the Military Commission's Fuel Import, Storage and Distribution Supervision Committee announcing hikes of approximately 1,000 kyats across all major fuel categories.

The price of 92-octane gasoline rose by nearly 800 kyats per litre, while 95-octane increased by over 900 kyats. The most dramatic shift was seen in diesel prices, which surged by more than 1,200 kyats per liter in a single day.

In the junta's administrative capital of Naypyidaw, 92-octane gasoline jumped from 2,910 kyats on 19 March to 3,690 kyats per litre on 20 March, 95-octane gasoline from 3,010 kyats per litre to 3,930 kyats while premium diesel spiked from 3,640 kyats to 4,900 kyats per litre.

Fuel prices have resumed their upward trend, with 92-grade gasoline in Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyidaw priced between 2,300 and 2,400 kyats per litre until 26 March.

"We can only buy fuel worth 10,000 kyats a day and must scan a QR code. There are long queues at gas stations, and we have to wait in line. Previously, we

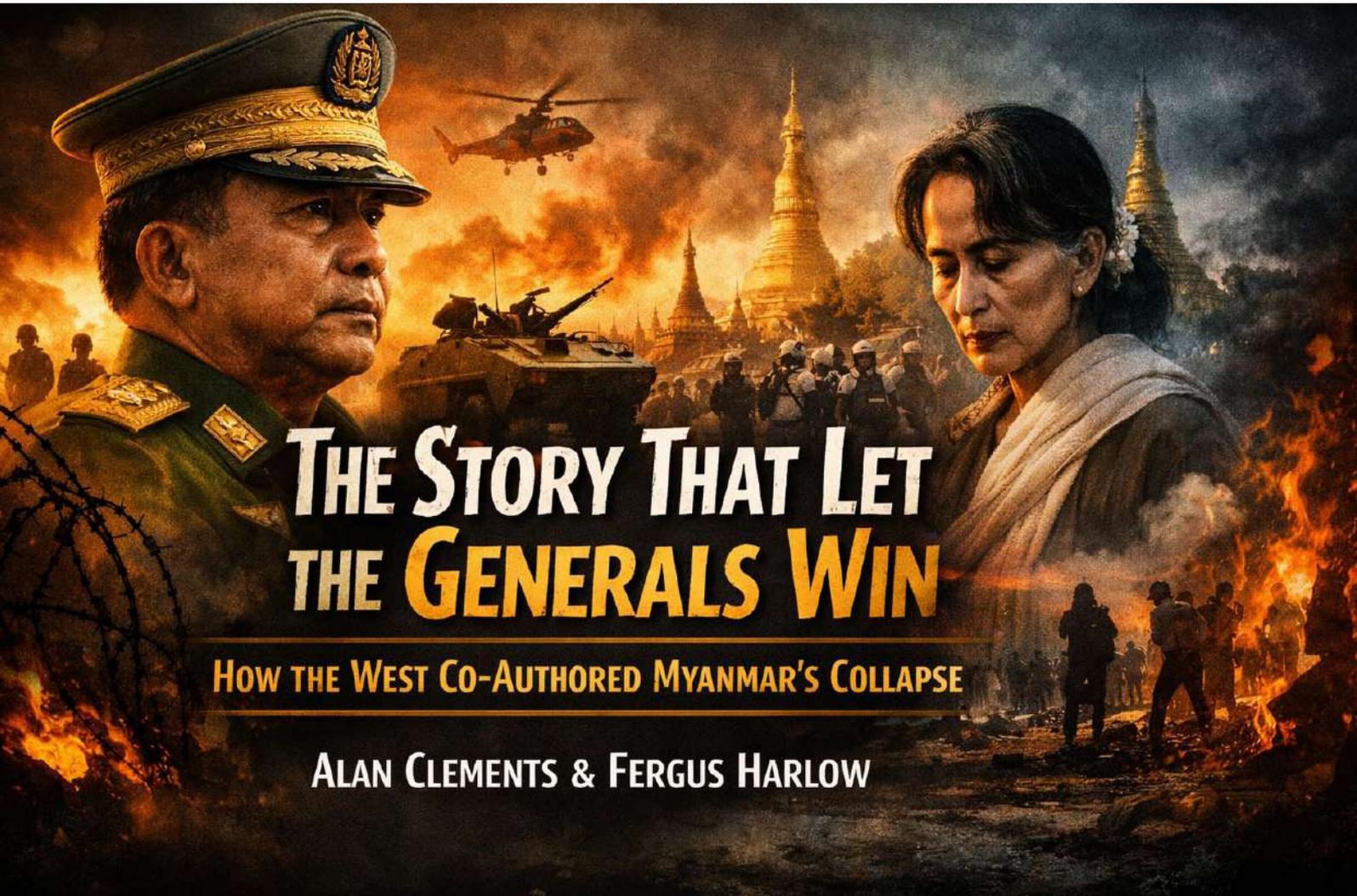
also had to queue just to get the 10,000-kyat quota," a Naypyidaw resident said.

Housewives say the latest surge in domestic fuel prices, coupled with the Military Commission's decision to raise electricity tariffs in industrial zones and special economic zones by 900 kyats per unit, is driving up the cost of food and basic commodities, including rice and cooking oil.

On 4 March, Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun, spokesperson for the Military Commission, said Myanmar has a 40-day fuel reserve, with two ships docked but yet to unload and 14 more vessels carrying purchased fuel en route, adding there is no reason to expect a shortage.

Citing the need to conserve fuel amid the conflict in the Middle East, the Military Commission has imposed an odd-even vehicle restriction system allowing cars with even-numbered plates to operate on even days and those with odd numbers on odd days while exempting electric vehicles, and limiting fuel purchases to once daily through a QR code system.

A Naypyidaw resident said fuel sales are priced at 50,000 kyats per car, 10,000 kyats per three-wheeled taxi, and 5,000 kyats per motorbike.



THE STORY THAT LET THE GENERALS WIN

HOW THE WEST CO-AUTHORED MYANMAR'S COLLAPSE

ALAN CLEMENTS & FERGUS HARLOW

“The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became the truth” — George Orwell

In February 2021, the world watched as Myanmar's military overthrew a fragile democratic experiment with grim familiarity: soldiers at dawn, leaders detained, a nation slowly suffocated just as it seemed on the verge of political rebirth.

The violence was unmistakable, and the perpetrators were not obscure. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and the Tatmadaw — Myanmar's powerful military establishment — had been rehearsing this logic of domination for decades.

Yet, coups do not occur in moral vacuums. They unfold within atmospheres - climates of perception that shape how quickly the world recognizes danger and how long it sustains attention. Long before the tanks rolled through Naypyidaw, something more elusive had already shifted. The global story of Myanmar had been rewritten, and in that act of rewriting, responsibility was subtly redistributed.

The generals did not steal Myanmar with guns alone. They stole it with permission - permission engineered through a narrative that relocated blame from the military machine to a civilian symbol. A democracy held hostage was judged as though it were free. A woman surrounded by generals was asked to speak like a sovereign.

By 2021, that narrative drift, much of it authored in the West, written in the language of moral certainty, made a coup seem inevitable. Contempt made it easier to excuse. The false dichotomy of Buddhists vs Muslims made the political prisoners easier to forget, the people of Myanmar easier to abandon.

The Shift in Focus

For most of the late twentieth century, the essential structure of Myanmar's crisis was not especially difficult to describe. A military regime held near-total authority

over political life. The 2008 military constitution formalized that authority with meticulous precision: control of key ministries, immunity provisions, and a guaranteed parliamentary veto over constitutional reform. Civilian governance existed, but within limits designed by generals who had no intention of relinquishing ultimate power.

Western reporting once reflected this structural clarity. The Tatmadaw was understood as the central actor in Myanmar's tragedy.

That clarity began to erode during the years surrounding the Rohingya crisis. As violence in Rakhine State drew international attention, the axis of global discourse shifted. Increasingly, the story of Myanmar was filtered through the figure of Aung San Suu Kyi - the Nobel laureate who had long served as the moral emblem of the country's democratic hopes.

What had been a structural story became a personal one. By the mid-2010s, the central question animating Western coverage was no longer primarily about military power. It was about her.

In an influential 2015 Al Jazeera opinion piece, Mehdi Hasan criticized Aung San Suu Kyi's "inexcusable silence" on the Rohingya crisis, lambasting her assertion that violence had been suffered by both Muslim and Buddhist communities alike as "shameful." Hasan claimed that there were no Buddhists 'confined to fetid camps,' no Buddhists 'succumbing to starvation, despair and disease,' no Buddhists who were the victims of crimes against humanity.

The Term That Inflicted the Greatest Harm

Few accusations traveled more efficiently than the claim that Aung San Suu Kyi had been "silent."

It appeared in major outlets with remarkable frequency. The BBC ran pieces asking, effectively, where she was. The Guardian, through reporters like

Simon Tisdall and editorial writers such as Jonathan Freedland and others, framed her perceived inaction as a moral collapse. Al Jazeera opinion contributors, including Maung Zarni, sharpened the charge further, portraying her not merely as insufficient but as morally compromised. Mehdi Hasan helped crystallize the accusation into a widely circulating narrative: silence as complicity.

The problem is that the historical record does not support the simplicity of Aung San Suu Kyi's "inexcusable silence."

She was not silent. She spoke - repeatedly, though often in ways that frustrated or angered Western observers. She gave interviews, issued statements, and addressed the crisis in domestic and international contexts. Her language was frequently cautious, legalistic, or defensive. But insufficiency is not absence, and the collapse of that distinction became one of the most consequential distortions in the international conversation.

The difference matters. Silence implies a moral void. Constrained speech implies a different category altogether - one shaped by political calculation, structural limitation, and, at times, fear.

Myanmar in the late 2010s was not a liberal democracy with a malfunctioning leader. It was a hybrid system in which the military retained decisive coercive power. Security ministries remained outside civilian control. Constitutional amendments required military consent. The armed forces operated not as a subordinate institution but as a parallel sovereign.

To evaluate a civilian leader in such conditions as though she commanded the machinery of violence was to misunderstand the system itself.

The Appeal of the Fallen Icon

The persistence of the "silence" narrative cannot be understood without examining the Western media's

fascination with fallen icons. The rise-and-fall arc is a durable narrative template, offering emotional clarity and moral resolution. It transforms geopolitics into biography.

Publications like The New York Times, through writers such as Hannah Beech and Max Fisher, helped shape this arc with features that asked whether the world had misunderstood her all along. TIME magazine reinforced the frame by chronicling her transformation from global hero to international disappointment. CNN panels debated her moral standing in segments that increasingly treated the question as settled.

The structure of the story was irresistible: the saint who failed.

But archetypes have consequences. Reducing structural limitations - such as those in international law, trade, resource extraction, illegal immigration, and entrenched systemic conflict - into moral theatre serves little purpose beyond our own moral self-satisfaction.

Dominik Stillhart, on the ground in 2017 as director of global operations for the Red Cross, described both Buddhist and Muslim communities as being "deeply scared of each other." The greatest threat to the Rohingya, he said, was "not that they are being attacked" but "very limited possibilities for them to access their own livelihoods," something Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD government were attempting to resolve - not through rousing speeches on podiums, but through the often-unreported redevelopment of Rakhine State.

When complex political realities are reduced to character studies, structural actors recede from view. The Tatmadaw did not vanish from coverage, but it increasingly occupied the background. The emotional energy of the narrative migrated elsewhere.

And wherever emotional energy migrates, political attention follows.

The Institutional Feedback Loop

Media narratives often interact with institutional authority, creating feedback loops that amplify their impact.

Human-rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, issued escalating condemnations of Myanmar's leadership. Amnesty's decision in 2018 to revoke its Ambassador of Conscience award from Aung San Suu Kyi was widely covered by outlets such as the Guardian, BBC, and Reuters. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum rescinded an honor previously bestowed upon her, an act reported globally and imbued with enormous symbolic weight.

These actions were not merely moral gestures. They functioned as narrative accelerants. Once institutional condemnation entered the record, it provided authoritative citations for further reporting, which in turn reinforced diplomatic and public perceptions.

A recursive loop emerged: journalism citing institutions citing journalism.

The Role of Celebrity Amplification

The narrative's migration into popular culture intensified its reach. Public figures with global platforms - among them Bob Geldof, who returned a civic honor he had once shared with her - transformed complex geopolitical analysis into symbolic gestures easily absorbed by mass audiences. Bono expressed confusion and disappointment in widely circulated interviews, even calling on her to resign. Cate Blanchett and others added their voices to the widening chorus of moral disillusionment.

Such interventions were often driven by genuine concern. But sincerity does not neutralize consequence. In the digital media environment, celebrity

condemnation acts as an accelerant. It simplifies narratives already trending toward simplification and transmits them to audiences far beyond the reach of policy journals or long-form reporting.

Competing analyses - including those from diplomats, regional specialists, and scholars who emphasized structural constraints or warned against premature conclusions - rarely achieved comparable amplification. Their arguments circulated in think-tank reports and specialist publications, but they lacked the aerodynamic qualities required for mass transmission.

By the time a geopolitical story becomes a cultural meme, much of its complexity has already evaporated

Western reporting angered and alienated many in Myanmar, bolstering the military's accusations of foreign meddling. It worsened violence between communities in a very direct and tangible way, driving the populace closer to the Tatmadaw, driving the Tatmadaw closer to China, and fueling a more rigid nationalism than had existed before intercommunal tensions.

The Diffusion of Moral Gravity

None of this required conspiracy. It required convergence.

Editors seeking clarity, journalists seeking impact, NGOs seeking accountability, celebrities seeking moral alignment - all operating inside systems that reward emotional legibility over structural fidelity.

Outrage, in the contemporary information economy, has lift.

The cumulative effect was a redistribution of moral gravity. Responsibility did not disappear from the Tatmadaw, but it was no longer singular. It was diffused, refracted through a prism that placed a civilian figure at its emotional center.

This redistribution had consequences. Not immediate, not mechanical, but atmospheric.

Political will operates partly on perception. The willingness of governments, institutions, and publics to sustain attention on distant crises depends on the clarity of the narrative framing those crises. When clarity fractures, endurance weakens.

By the time Min Aung Hlaing moved decisively in 2021, the global reservoir of uncomplicated solidarity had already been depleted.

And Myanmar is not an anomaly. It is a case study in a broader phenomenon: the compression of structural conflicts into moral caricatures within high-velocity media systems.

The same dynamics are visible elsewhere - complex struggles reframed as personality dramas, institutional violence personalized, algorithmic attention privileging emotional simplicity over analytical depth.

The Genocide of Democracy: A Reckoning

Five years after the coup, Myanmar stands as a testament to the perils of narrative misdirection. What began as a fragile democratic dawn has devolved into a full-scale humanitarian catastrophe - a genocide of democracy itself, where the generals have systematically eradicated elected governance through brute force and international apathy.

As of March 2026, over 22,000 prisoners of conscience remain silenced in junta prisons, many tortured, starved, disappeared, or executed, even after a recent amnesty that freed thousands in a cynical bid for legitimacy. The entire elected democratic leadership has been decapitated: former officials languish in cells or face fabricated charges, while Aung San Suu Kyi herself - now 80 and unseen for years - has no verifiable proof of life, her fate shrouded in the regime's unproven assurances of "good health."

Nearly four million people are internally displaced, fleeing indiscriminate airstrikes and ground assaults that routinely target schools, monasteries, orphanages, and hospitals. Another 1.5 million have sought refuge abroad, swelling the ranks of the stateless and desperate. An entire population of 55 million is terrorized daily, with one-third facing acute humanitarian needs and over 12 million in the grip of hunger, as conflict rages unchecked across regions like Rakhine, Sagaing, and Chin.

This machinery of oppression is directly fueled by Russia and China: Moscow supplies advanced fighter jets and signs military pacts to bolster the Tatmadaw's aerial bombardments, while Beijing offers diplomatic cover, economic lifelines, and arms, all while congratulating the junta on sham elections that are neither free nor fair.

All for what? To entrench a regime that rules through terror, enriching a cadre of generals at the expense of a nation's soul. And by whom? By the Tatmadaw's unyielding grip on power, enabled by foreign patrons who prioritize strategic interests over human lives, and abetted by a Western narrative that once fixated on a fallen icon rather than the structural villains.

The lesson is not that journalism should avoid moral judgment. It is that moral judgment without structural literacy can misfire, redistributing attention in ways that unintentionally advantage the very forces it seeks to oppose.

If we fail to rewrite this story now - restoring focus on the military's atrocities and rallying global action - the generals' victory will not just be Myanmar's tragedy, but a blueprint for authoritarian resurgence worldwide.

About the Authors

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Resistance fighters. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

'TELL DONALD TRUMP TO SEND RAMBO' - A PLEA FROM A RESISTANCE FIGHTER IN BURMA

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

On a quiet night in Burma, during a lull in the fighting, we sat in a relatively safe place, free from drones and airstrikes. A young resistance soldier sipped his tea and then blurted out, "Tell the American government to airdrop weapons like in the movies or send one Rambo."

The soldier, named Lewis, was joking, but the sentiment came from the heart.

His unit was in a state of paralysis due to a lack of munitions. They were unable to advance and reclaim lost territory. Meanwhile, most people in the resistance areas believe the government will launch a fresh offensive soon, with forces focused on taking the mines to cut off funding to the resistance and sever roads to Thailand.

The 2008 film *Rambo IV* depicted the titular hero, played by Sylvester Stallone, going into Burma to rescue a group of missionaries kidnapped by the Tatmadaw. At that time, the Burmese military ruled the country through the State Peace and Development Council under dictator General Than Shwe. The movie was actually shot in Thailand, but it used a number of real Karen and Burmese actors, many of whom had previously served in the resistance.

I was in Burma, in a resistance army camp, when the movie came out. This was before smartphones and Starlink, so for many soldiers and internally displaced people at the time it was one of the first, or one of the few, movies they had ever seen. In many cases they saw people they recognized in the film, and I frequently had soldiers asking me if it was a documentary and whether there really was a Rambo coming to save Burma.

Fast forward nearly twenty years, and people now have much greater access to movies and understand that Rambo is not real. But the character still sparks their imagination about a hero and fuels a very real discussion about whether the United States might ever intervene in Burma.

Resistance soldiers and civilians inside Burma now access the internet through Starlink, and they have all seen the U.S. intervention in Venezuela, which removed the dictator Nicolás Maduro. They are also closely watching the current conflict in Iran, which has killed Ayatollah Khamenei and is widely to be leading toward the collapse of the IRGC and the Islamic regime along with it.

"We need that too," people would tell me as I traveled between cities and camps. Last year they

were quoting the tens of billions of dollars the U.S. had given to Ukraine, saying, "Give us millions and we will win." Now that they have seen that U.S. intervention is possible in certain countries, they keep asking me to tell the president to put Burma on the list. Similar requests are flooding social media from Cuba, Syria, and Iran, as well as Burma, and other countries where the population is repressed.

"I think if we have ten Rambos we can conquer all the military camps, and inside there are many guns and bullets," said Lewis, only half-jokingly. Then, turning more serious, he said, "There are a lot of minerals in the mines, and some money. And the armed groups want to get inside the military camp because we know there are a lot of bullets and guns."

He shook his head sadly and repeated, "We can only defend, we cannot attack right now."

While the U.S. may not be able to help Lewis achieve his dream of ten Rambos, the Burma Act, which was enacted as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2023, authorizes the U.S. government to provide assistance to ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and other non-state actors in Burma that are resisting the military junta.

Key provisions relevant to EAO assistance include authorization for non-lethal aid and support to resistance forces, including the People's Defense Force (PDF) and allied EAOs; funding for democracy programs, civil society organizations, and alternative governance structures; and support for documenting human rights abuses committed by the Tatmadaw.

The act also directed the State Department to develop a strategy for supporting a federal democratic Burma, which implicitly involves engaging with the EAOs that have long sought federalism.

However, the question of which groups to support is far more complicated than a simple pro- versus anti-junta binary. The EAO landscape sorts into several distinct categories of alignment, each presenting different problems for U.S. policymakers.

Some groups are outright military junta proxies. The Pa-O National Army functions as a state-sponsored militia operating under junta command, protecting junta business interests and conducting joint operations against resistance forces, making it an obvious non-starter for any U.S. assistance.

The UWSA, the most heavily armed non-state force in the country, maintains a de facto ceasefire with the junta and has frequently allied with the Tatmadaw

against Shan nationalist groups. Unlike most EAOs, it is not pursuing federalism or democracy but territorial autonomy underwritten by Beijing.

Then there are groups that fought the junta aggressively and later pulled back under Chinese pressure. The MNDA signed a formal ceasefire brokered by Beijing in January 2025 and subsequently withdrew from Lashio under Chinese pressure, while the TNLA followed a similar trajectory. Beijing's leverage is already producing concrete effects, with EAOs increasingly being pushed into accepting bilateral ceasefires with the Tatmadaw on terms favorable to the junta.

The DKBA presents yet another category. The organization has splintered repeatedly since its founding, producing factions with opposing loyalties, some integrated into the military's Border Guard Force structure under direct junta command, others drifting toward the resistance following the 2021 coup. Those that shifted toward the anti-junta side did so gradually and incompletely, negotiating uneasy arrangements with the KNU while some elements continued to honor ceasefire obligations. The DKBA cannot be classified cleanly as pro- or anti-junta; it is an organization whose internal divisions place different factions on opposite sides of the conflict.

The RCSS/SSA-South is similarly murky. It maintains ceasefire arrangements and is currently not aligned with the resistance.

All of this means that any U.S. effort to channel aid under the Burma Act must first resolve a fundamental identification problem. In a landscape of proxies, defectors, Chinese-pressured ceasefires, and opportunistic hedgers, determining which groups genuinely and durably oppose the junta, and which can be trusted with U.S. support without that support being redirected or exploited, is an intelligence and policy challenge.

Notwithstanding these complications, the strategic logic for U.S. engagement remains compelling. Surveys indicate that between 63% and 85% of civil society groups, activists, and EAOs say that China is not a good neighbor. China's involvement in the war and its support for the junta have fueled product boycotts, silent protests, and symbolic attacks on Chinese-linked infrastructure.

China has forced ethnic resistance groups to halt fighting and barred them from formally aligning with the National Unity Government, pressuring the Brotherhood Alliance to cease Operation 1027 at the

height of its momentum, coercion that EAO leaders themselves have publicly resented. Beijing's flurry of diplomatic activity following passage of the Burma Act makes clear that China does not want U.S. aid and influence reaching EAOs along the Chinese border, which is itself evidence that such aid would carry real strategic weight.

A democratic government emerging from U.S.-backed resistance would likely have a negative disposition toward China and would seek support from a more powerful patron to counter Beijing's influence, an outcome that aligns directly with American strategic interests in the region.

The demonstration effect matters as well. Groups currently hedging, those in informal ceasefires watching the battlefield from the fence, are doing so largely because they have no viable alternative to Chinese mediation and junta accommodation. The continued absence of Western support risks pushing even reluctant EAOs toward closer accommodation with Beijing.

Conversely, tangible U.S. support flowing to clearly pro-democracy groups such as the KNDF, KNU, and KIA could shift the calculus for wavering groups, making alignment with the resistance more attractive than submission to Chinese-brokered ceasefires that serve the junta's survival rather than ethnic federalism.

"I hate China. But most of the resources go to China," said Lewis, referring to the natural resources, minerals, and most importantly rare earths, while money flows back to the junta. "China buys the minerals, buys the resources, gives the money, and then they use the money to buy Chinese weapons. So, they're getting money and weapons."

Wishing for a U.S. alternative and thinking of the Burma Act, he said, "I think America can give support to the big EAOs who control a lot of territory and are fighting the military."

His next question represented a tremendous escalation of U.S. intervention. "Can America make an empire in Myanmar?" He seemed disappointed when I said it could not.

He continued, "Many people during this time want America to colonize Myanmar."

Once again, he shook his head sadly and said, "But the U.S. wants only Greenland."

"Also, China doesn't care. They don't care if they buy from EAOs or they buy from the junta. They don't care. So, in the future it is very important for us to continue relations with the USA."

He then brightened up and said, "We are proud of our political unity. Many different armed forces should unite as one army. Because the civilians and the IDPs, the people, they are also willing to unite all the armed forces to fight against the junta. Otherwise, we cannot make a strong offensive. If the junta continues getting support from China, Russia, and Belarus, it will be enough for the junta to win."

"If China doesn't interfere in our country's peace revolution, or if they don't support the junta with weapons, airplane fuel, and technical support, we can definitely win against the junta."

Lewis was a veteran of many battles and had seen this destruction for himself. In some recent battles, resistance soldiers were pinned down by drones and never got close enough to fire their rifles.

"Because of airstrikes and drone technology, it is now difficult for us to fight against the junta. But if we can block their support in the UN, maybe we can have a better solution. But they are so shameless (Russia and China). They say they are using the veto power in the UN, yes, but they are supporting the junta. Because now we have had like five long years fighting the junta. So, if Russia and China didn't support them since the beginning, the junta would not have enough ammunition and enough fuel."

In Lewis's estimation, "the war would be over already if not for China."

"It could be better for us to get help from the USA," he concluded.

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



A US destroyer in the Gulf.
Photo: AFP

ISRAEL STRIKES IRAN AS TRUMP SAYS TEHRAN WANTS DEAL TO END WAR

Israel launched strikes across Iran on Thursday, hours after US President Donald Trump said Tehran wanted a deal to end the nearly four-week war despite its top diplomat rejecting any talks with Washington.

The conflict has mushroomed to draw in nations around the Middle East, sending energy markets into a tailspin and threatening to torpedo the global economy.

Iran, under near-daily bombardment since a joint US-Israeli attack started the war on February 28, was hit early Thursday by what the Israeli army said was "a wide-scale wave of strikes targeting infrastructure", including in the central city of Isfahan.

In turn, an Iranian missile attack activated sirens across central Israel including Tel Aviv and parts of Jerusalem on Thursday morning, according to the Israeli military, the first launches it identified from Iran in more than 14 hours.

Trump, whose daily statements have swung wildly from threatening to conciliatory, said talks to end the war were ongoing with Iran, but that officials in Tehran were covering them up out of fear.

"They are negotiating, by the way, and they want to make a deal so badly," Trump told a dinner for Republican members of Congress.

"But they're afraid to say it, because they figure they'll be killed by their own people," he said. "They're

also afraid they'll be killed by us."

The Islamic republic's top diplomat slapped down Trump's comments, saying the country did not intend to negotiate.

"We seek an end to the war on our own terms, of course, and in a way that it will not be repeated here again," Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told state TV.

Pakistan has passed on a 15-point US plan to stop the fighting to Tehran, two officials in Islamabad said.

But Iran's state-controlled Press TV cited an unidentified official saying Tehran had "responded negatively" to the proposal.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump "does not bluff and he is prepared to unleash hell" on Iran if no deal is struck.

China's top diplomat Wang Yi meanwhile said Thursday that signs both sides could be open to talks offered a "glimmer of hope" for peace.

Iranian conditions

According to The New York Times, the 15-point US plan touches on Iran's contested nuclear and missile programs as well as "maritime routes".

Tehran has largely blocked the vital Strait of Hormuz oil route in retaliation for the US-Israeli attacks, pushing up global energy prices.

The Iranian official quoted by Press TV said Tehran had put forward its own five conditions for hostilities to end.

These include guarantees that the United States and Israel do not resume the war and compensation for war damages.

Iranians marched in support of the country's military in the capital Tehran on Wednesday, waving the country's flag and holding pictures of new supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei.

The head of the US Central Command, Admiral Brad Cooper, said on Wednesday that Washington has hit two-thirds of Iran's production facilities for missiles and drones, and a similar proportion of its naval production.

Iran has still kept up retaliatory attacks on Israel and Gulf nations that it accuses of serving as launchpads for US strikes.

Saudi Arabia said it intercepted at least 18 drones, while the United Arab Emirates responded to a new missile and drone attack and Bahrain reported a fire at a facility caused by "Iranian aggression", without providing further details.

Kuwait also reported a new missile and drone attack on Thursday, a day after a drone hit a fuel tank and sparked a fire at Kuwait International Airport.

- No Lebanon 'surrender' -

The war has also drawn in Lebanon after pro-Iran Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on March 2 to avenge Khamenei's killing.

Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem said negotiations with Israel would amount to "surrender", before the group launched missiles early Thursday at military sites in central Israel, where air raid sirens sounded.

The militant group said its fighters launched more than 80 attacks against Israel on Wednesday, the largest daily number in the current war, and attacked Israeli forces in nine border towns.

As the fighting showed little sign of respite, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the military had "created a genuine security zone" in southern Lebanon and was expanding it.

"We are simply creating a larger buffer zone" that could prevent a ground invasion of Israel and missile attacks, he said in a video shared by his office.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on both sides to stop fighting.

Markets mixed

With thousands more US troops reportedly headed to the Middle East, Iran also threatened to open a new front by targeting Red Sea shipping should the United States launch a ground invasion.

In the event of a US ground invasion, Iran would block the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which connects the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, an unnamed military official told local media.

The divergent messages on talks and de-escalation saw oil prices rise Thursday and equities mixed as developments were tracked by investors recently buoyed by Trump appearing to step back from the goal of regime change earlier in the week.

But while crude prices are down from last week, uncertainty and the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz -- through which 20 percent of oil and gas passes -- continued to cast a shadow.

Araghchi assured the strait was "closed only to enemies" of Iran.

"There is no reason to allow the ships of our enemies and their allies to pass," he said.

Pakistan's defence minister, whose government has offered to host talks between Iranian and American envoys to stop the war, appeared to take a jab at the US operation that has closed the key waterway.

"The goal of the war seems to have shifted to opening the Strait of Hormuz, which was open before the war," Khawaja Asif posted on X, alongside hand-clapping emojis.

AFP



Chinese leader Xi Jinping. 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.



THE FIRE NEXT TIME

“Everyone was following with bated breath, like what was going to happen with this movement!” exclaims Paul Vrieze, a Dutch journalist, about the protests that erupted in Myanmar after the coup. Vrieze has been intimately connected to the country for 15 years, first as a journalist for outlets such as The Irrawaddy and Myanmar Now, and later as a PhD researcher at the University of Gothenburg and the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, focusing on the Spring Revolution. With his extensive journalistic background and PhD work on Myanmar’s protest movement, his insightful comments are a valuable perspective on what is transpiring there, and the direction in which a future Myanmar may go.

Vrieze spent several years working as a journalist in Cambodia, where he heard “old timers” talking about the excitement of Cambodia’s transition period in the 1990s. This made him feel like he’d missed something special. So in 2012 when he heard about Myanmar’s new opening, he felt that this was his opportunity to see a democratic government in the making. This was just after censorship had ended in the country, and independent media were allowed to operate in Yangon. Vrieze became the first foreign editor in The Irrawaddy’s Yangon newsroom. Politically, the Thein Sein government’s reforms and the NLD’s growing influence created a sense of momentum toward the 2015 elections.

However, Vrieze says there were some early warning signs that the transition was fragile. In particular, he notes the outbreak of anti-Rohingya violence just before he arrived. This revealed that although the government was enacting political reforms, it was still not addressing the country’s ethnic and religious divides, and that nationalist forces could quickly mobilize with impunity. And whatever democratic progress was being made was of course brought to an abrupt end by the February 2021 coup.

The initial nationwide protests in response impressed the world with their nonviolent discipline, even earning a Nobel Peace Prize nomination. However, the regime’s refusal to make concessions and its brutal crackdowns, particularly from late February to March 2021, triggered a shift toward armed resistance. It was then that Vrieze made his choice to focus his doctoral research on that transformation, seeing it as a rare and consequential case in social movement studies. Called Resisting the Return of Military Rule - Coalition Building, Armed Struggle and Governance by Myanmar’s Spring Revolution Movement, it traces the escalation from nonviolent protest to armed struggle, without significant fragmentation within the movement.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/3/10/episode-499-the-fire-next-time>



Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets General Ukris Boontanondha, chief of defence forces of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, in Naypyidaw. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA ENGAGES WITH THAI MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC DELEGATIONS

Myanmar's military authorities and Thailand stepped up engagement across defence and diplomatic channels last week, with discussions centred on border stability, security cooperation, and closer bilateral ties, according to state media reports.

On the defence side, senior Myanmar military officials hosted the Thai military delegation at an official luncheon in Naypyidaw on 18 March, where both sides exchanged commemorative gifts and reaffirmed ties between the armed forces (GNLM) reported.

The next day, 19 March, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing met General Ukris Boontanondha, chief of defence forces of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, in Naypyidaw. The two sides discussed strengthening cooperation between their militaries and maintaining stability along the shared border, the junta-run Global New Light of Myanmar (GNLM) reported.

Discussions also focused on combating illegal trade, including drug trafficking and telecom fraud in border regions, as well as cooperation on environmental issues such as transboundary haze pollution, the report said.

The meeting forms part of a broader series of engagements between Thailand and Myanmar's junta in the past week, including talks with Myanmar's foreign ministry. On 20 March, Deputy Minister for Foreign

Affairs U Ko Ko Kyaw received a Thai delegation led by Mr Kallayana Vipattipumiprates, Advisor to Thailand's Minister of Foreign Affairs, with both sides discussing enhanced cooperation in trade, investment, and people-to-people connectivity, according to the GNLM.

Officials also highlighted the importance of peace and stability along the border as well as closer collaboration in regional and international forums.

The engagements come as border areas between Myanmar and Thailand remain affected by ongoing armed conflict in Myanmar and cross-border criminal activity, including narcotics trafficking and online scam operations.

While state media framed the discussions as part of long-standing friendly relations, the meetings underscored continued cooperation between the Thai and Myanmar militaries despite the latter country's protracted political crisis and unfavourable human rights reputation.

A High-Level Committee meeting between the Myanmar and Thai armed forces is slated for later in the year, but the reports did not provide a firm date. Additionally, while intentions to expand coordination in security, economic, and diplomatic areas were highlighted, no specific agreements or timelines were mentioned.



SOCIAL MEDIA USERS QUESTION THE LEGITIMACY OF THE NEW JUNTA PARLIAMENT

Last week, a major topic of discussion on Myanmar's social media was the new parliament formed by the military-backed government following an election that has been widely criticized for not being free or fair.

The new parliament recently held its first session in Naypyidaw, with the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) dominating most seats.

During this session, USDP leader Khin Yi was elected as the Speaker of the Lower House, while Aung Lin Dwe became the Speaker of the Upper House. Both are members of the military-backed USDP and were elected without any opposition.

On social media, numerous users questioned the legitimacy of the new parliament and the election that created it.

"No country recognizes this election, but they are already forming a parliament," one Facebook user wrote.

"This is not a parliament of the people; it's just the military changing clothes," another user commented.

"They didn't allow real parties to compete, so how can this represent the public?" asked another.

Others pointed out that the everyday struggles faced by the people remain unchanged despite the new political structure.

"People are struggling with fuel, electricity, and prices — the parliament doesn't change anything," one user lamented.

The new parliament marks the first session since the 2021 coup, but with the military and its allied party controlling the majority of seats, many observers argue that it signifies a continuation of military rule rather than a transition to democracy.

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.