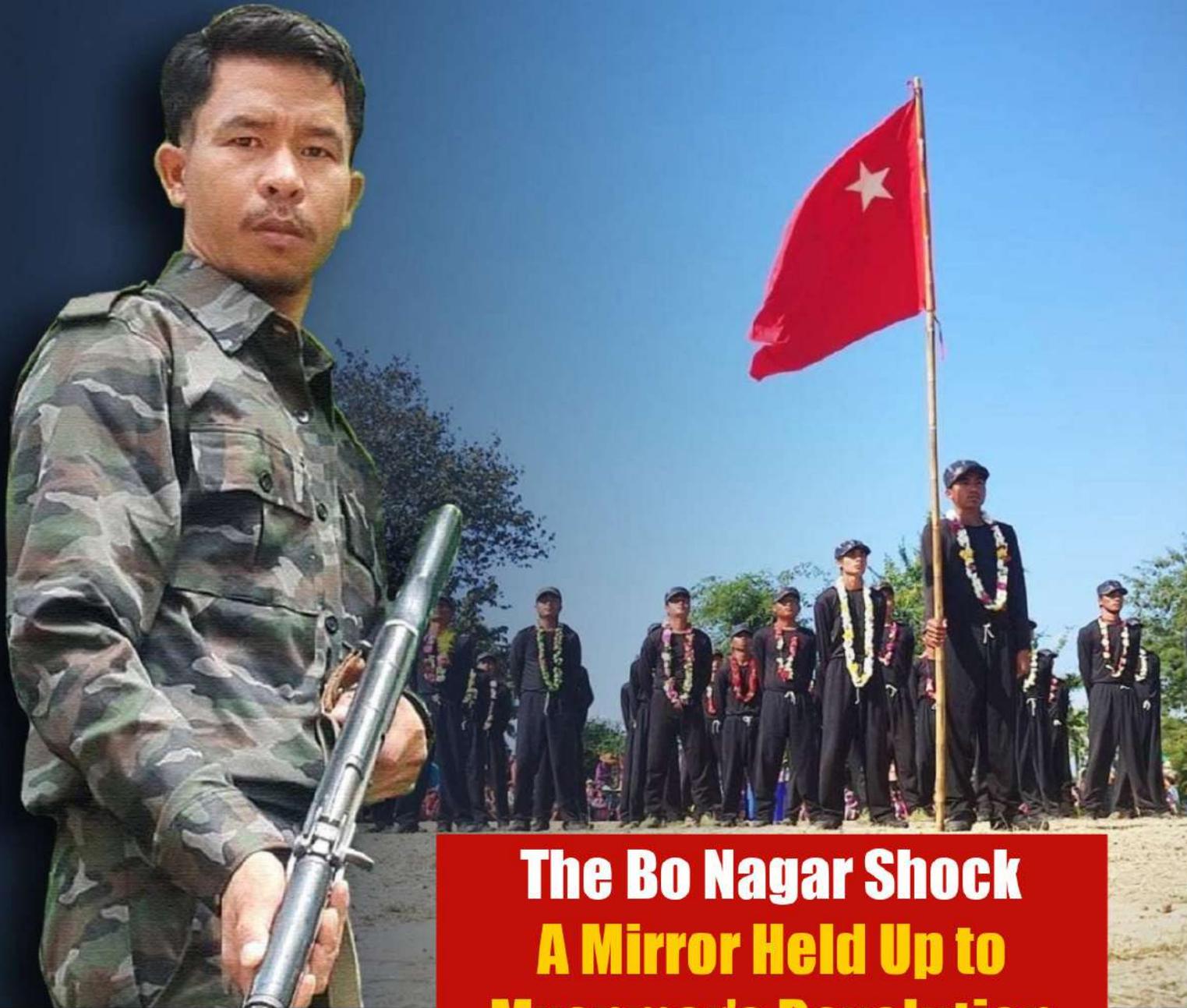


ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



## The Bo Nagar Shock A Mirror Held Up to Myanmar's Revolution

James Shwe

● Middle East War rattles Myanmar and the region

# 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.

# BURMA JUNTA'S DIVIDE-&-RULE ACTIONS

## TARGET SPRING REVOLUTION

**B**urma's military are doing what they do best – divide-and-rule. In the wake of the defection of Bo Nagar, leader of the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA) in Sagaing last month, the military junta is working to cause further division in Myanmar's heartland and across the country.

The defection of Bo Nagar to the Myanmar military junta underscores a central vulnerability in Myanmar's post-coup resistance - the fragility of unity under sustained pressure. Since the 2021 military takeover, the Spring Revolution has drawn strength from an unprecedented alignment between the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and long-established Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs). This convergence transformed scattered outrage into a nationwide insurgent movement. Yet it has always been a coalition forged in crisis rather than a fully consolidated political-military front. As the junta intensifies its divide-and-rule tactics, that distinction becomes increasingly problematic.

The resistance faces structural challenges that predate the coup. Myanmar's ethnic armed landscape has long been fragmented, shaped by divergent territorial claims, historical grievances, and varied relationships with the central state. Some ethnic forces have decades of battlefield experience and established governance structures, whereas the newer People's Defence Forces, by contrast, emerged rapidly from urban protest networks and rural self-defense initiatives.

Integrating these actors into coherent command structures, harmonizing strategies, and coordinating logistics across vast and contested terrain is an enormous undertaking. Unity in rhetoric does not always translate into operational cohesion.

The junta understands these fault lines well. It has a long history of exploiting mistrust between Bamar-majority resistance groups and ethnic minorities, as well as competition among ethnic organizations themselves. Co-optation, ceasefire offers, selective offensives, and targeted assassinations are tools designed not only to weaken

military capacity but to erode confidence in the collective struggle. High-profile defections – such as that of Bo Nagar - amplify suspicion. When a commander switches sides, questions ripple outward: Was it coercion, inducement, or disillusionment? Who else might follow? The psychological impact can be as damaging as the tactical loss.

Resource scarcity compounds these tensions. Resistance groups rely on local fundraising, diaspora support, cross-border supply lines, and captured materiel. Uneven access to weapons and funding can generate friction, particularly if frontline units perceive disparities in sacrifice and support.

Political vision is another test. The Spring Revolution has articulated aspirations for a federal democratic union, but translating that shared slogan into agreed constitutional principles remains a complex negotiation. EROs seek guarantees of autonomy grounded in decades of struggle - Bamar-majority actors are undergoing an evolving reckoning with past centralization and exclusion. Maintaining trust requires not only battlefield cooperation but credible commitments about the post-junta order. Any perception that one bloc might dominate a future settlement risks reopening old wounds.

Yet the resistance's resilience should not be underestimated. The coup shattered long-standing taboos and catalyzed solidarity across ethnic and generational lines in ways rarely seen in Myanmar's modern history.

Ultimately, the challenge is less about eliminating disagreement than about managing it without fragmentation. A diverse coalition confronting a ruthless adversary will inevitably experience strain. The junta's strategy depends on magnifying those strains into schism.

Whether the Spring Revolution can institutionalize unity - through inclusive political dialogue, equitable resource sharing, and disciplined coordination - may determine not only its military prospects but the character of any future Myanmar that emerges from this protracted conflict.

# EDITORIAL

## mizzima

WEEKLY

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# CONTENTS **mizzima** WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

## 3 EDITORIAL

**6** The Bo Nagar Shock: A Mirror Held Up to Myanmar's Revolution - James Shwe

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

## 16 CORE DEVELOPMENTS

Myanmar junta deploys AI-powered Russian and Chinese tracking system to target 50,000 individuals for new wave of arrests

**17** Myanmar junta deputy leader Soe Win confirms April timeline for presidential election and government handover following sham polls

**18** Junta defence minister admits recruitment of minors and overage civilians amid systemic corruption and forced enlistment

**19** Myanmar junta troops and Pyu Saw Htee militias loot Pale Township villages as 1,200 households flee following resistance surrenders

**20** Ta'ang civil society calls for dialogue between TNLA and MNDAA

**21** MNDAA and TNLA tensions in Kutkai trigger two-week trade suspension and sharp rise in commodity prices

**22** China's Double Game in Myanmar — Guns, Minerals, and Red Rosewood



- 24** JFM calls on western governments to target jet fuel supply chain to Myanmar military
- 26** Myanmar junta powered parachutes kill nine civilians in unprovoked strike on Myinmu village
- 27** Myanmar junta air strike near Sittwe kills at least 17: local groups
- 28** Myanmar junta jet fighters and gyrocopters launch retaliatory bombings on Kachin and Sagaing villages following airport drone shutdown
- 29** Myanmar junta Mi-17 helicopter bombs allied gold mine in Homalin in "friendly fire" incident, sparks civilian terror
- 30** SAC-M urges ASEAN to back Timor-Leste's legal move on Myanmar military
- 31** Burma Campaign UK says British government must impose sanctions on Arakan Army
- 32** The Good Life Club – Free Burma Rangers Program of Love for IDP Children and Families – Antonio Graceffo
- 35** **INSIGHT MYANMAR**  
An Uphill Battle - A Malaysian lawmaker argues why Myanmar's resistance faces a long climb
- 38** **ELECTION UPDATE**  
Myanmar's third parliament to convene in March following controversial USDP landslide victory
- 39** Myanmar drivers scramble for fuel as Mideast war cuts supply
- 40** UK to stop issuing study visas for Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan
- 41** **ASIAN & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**  
FBI vows to escalate pursuit of scam syndicates in Southeast Asia
- 42** US judge rules Trump third-country deportations 'unlawful'
- 43** Middle East war spirals as Iran hits Kurds in Iraq
- 45** **COLUMNS**  
**INSIGHT MYANMAR** – The Center Holds
- 46** **JUNTA WATCH**
- 47** **SOCIAL WATCH**

Cover image of defecting resistance fighter Bo Nagar from social media



Bo Nagar, left, hands over his weapons.  
Photo: Social media

# THE BO NAGAR SHOCK: A MIRROR HELD UP TO MYANMAR'S REVOLUTION

**JAMES SHWE**

**W**hen Bo Nagar boarded a junta helicopter out of Pale in mid-February 2026, he did more than defect.

He forced Myanmar's revolution to look at itself in the mirror.

A commander once celebrated as a symbol of An-gar's armed awakening had just walked, with his family, into the arms of the very military he claimed to be fighting — one day after forces aligned with the National Unity Government (NUG) launched a major operation against his Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA) bases in Pale Township, Sagaing Region.

In the days that followed, junta airstrikes and troop deployments around Pale and Yinmabin increased, with independent outlets warning of heightened risks for civilians and resistance units.

From Pale villagers to NUG field commanders, from the Sagaing Forum to the Spring Revolution Alliance (SRA) and critical think-tank analysts, this episode has drawn sharply different reactions — but also revealed more common ground than first appears.

## Five vantage points, one shared worry

### Pale township residents: trapped between two fires

For ordinary people in Pale, life under BNRA has, by many accounts, been a journey from initial hope to deep unease.

Early on, Bo Nagar's forces were widely viewed as part of the local resistance against the coup. Over time, however, residents began to share stories and even receipts from BNRA checkpoints, where "taxes" collected on the roads felt increasingly like coercive levies imposed on already struggling communities.

Independent reporting describes rising tensions between BNRA and NUG-aligned PDFs, including an incident in which BNRA fighters admitted to killing a PDF member during a dispute over a firearm. The NUG later cited this killing and other alleged "criminal activities," including extortion and sexual violence, as the basis for opening an investigation.



Media hype - Bo Nagar in the field. Photo: Social media

While some of these allegations are difficult to verify independently amid war conditions, enough concern had accumulated among local people and allied units that the status quo had clearly become unsustainable.

When NUG-aligned forces and partner units attacked BNRA positions on 17 February, many Pale residents felt torn: some welcomed a challenge to a force they no longer trusted, others feared that open armed clashes between resistance actors would invite junta attacks into their villages. After Bo Nagar's surrender and the subsequent airstrikes, many felt newly exposed — as if someone who knew every route and hideout had just handed the junta a detailed map.

Few in Pale would argue that nothing should have been done; the unease is about how it was done, and whether civilian safety and communication were adequately prioritized.

## **NUG MOD commanders: discipline or collapse**

From the vantage point of NUG's Ministry of Defence (MOD) field commanders, BNRA's trajectory posed a direct challenge to the idea that this revolution is fighting for a rules-based future.

According to international coverage and NUG statements, the immediate crisis followed BNRA fighters' admission that they had killed a PDF member in a quarrel over a firearm. The MOD also pointed to complaints about extortion at checkpoints and allegations of sexual violence when it announced action against "offenders" within BNRA.

For NUG commanders, allowing a prominent armed group to continue operating while ignoring repeated calls for investigation would have sent a dangerous message: that those with enough guns and reputation are effectively above any law.

They maintain that they tried engagement and warnings, then authorized the Pale operation only after these avenues failed — with two goals: to neutralize those directly responsible for serious abuses, and to offer rank-and-file BNRA fighters a way to realign under NUG-linked units rather than treat all of them as irredeemable.

In their reading, Bo Nagar's rapid surrender to the junta — via military helicopter extraction — confirms that when confronted with accountability, he chose to

align with the regime rather than face an internal process.

At the same time, serious NUG figures acknowledge that his defection has handed the junta potential intelligence and propaganda advantages, and that this underlines the need to tighten procedures, information security, and communication with local communities.

## **Sagaing Forum: federal politics left on the sidelines**

The Sagaing Forum was created to bring together PDFs, PaKaPha, civil society and political actors across Sagaing, with an eye toward building a future federal unit rather than a mosaic of armed fiefdoms.

Forum participants broadly agree that no single armed group should be allowed to run quasi-tax regimes at checkpoints or clash with allies without accountability — BNRA's record had clearly become problematic in that regard.

Yet from their perspective, the way the Pale crisis unfolded revealed a different failing: when a serious dispute between two "revolutionary" actors erupted on Sagaing soil, there was no recognized, structured role for the Forum — or any similar regional political body — to mediate or de-escalate before bullets flew.

The conflict effectively jumped from accusations and informal warnings to a live operation, and then to junta exploitation, without going through any visible, shared regional conflict-resolution process.

For the Forum, this is less about assigning blame to one side than about highlighting how thin our federal political architecture remains in the heartland.

## **SRA: a unity project watching a stress test**

The Spring Revolution Alliance — a coalition of 19 forces — was formed to overcome fragmentation among anti-junta actors and to coordinate strategy across Anyar, Rakhine and other frontlines.

From an SRA viewpoint, BNRA is an extreme example of a broader structural risk: local commanders in central Myanmar operating semi-autonomously, funding themselves through local revenue and only loosely tied into any shared accountability system.

SRA actors understand why the NUG felt compelled to enforce some form of discipline. At the same time, they worry that a unilateral, kinetic operation, undertaken without a clearly agreed national or regional mechanism involving alliances like SRA, will deepen suspicion among other groups that future disagreements with the NUG might be “resolved” by force rather than through common rules.

For SRA, Pale is a warning that emerging alliances and the NUG must move quickly toward harmonized codes of conduct and joint decision-making, not parallel chains of command.

## **Critical NGO / think-tank analysts: a predictable symptom**

For NGO-linked analysts who are not aligned with the NUG, the Bo Nagar affair looks less like a shocking aberration and more like a predictable outcome of under-developed governance in resistance-held areas.

Research on “governance challenges in resistance-controlled areas” notes that administration in much of Sagaing, Magway and other regions is carried out by a patchwork of local committees, armed units and community groups, with wide variations in taxation practices, justice mechanisms and transparency.

These analysts argue that while the NUG has claimed national leadership, it has not yet built sufficiently inclusive, grounded oversight structures to regulate and discipline semi-autonomous armed actors — and that moving straight to a “clearance” operation against BNRA, in this context, amounted to enforcement before institution-building.

Bo Nagar’s defection is thus read as a symptom of a deeper design flaw: in a fragmented landscape with multiple centers of power, commanders under pressure may seek protection from whichever center they believe will preserve their position — especially when no trusted, independent accountability mechanism exists.

## **Where everyone agrees**

Despite their different starting points, these perspectives converge on several key observations that are well supported by available reporting and analysis:

- BNRA’s trajectory had become untenable

Multiple sources document BNRA’s collection of

“taxes” at road checkpoints in Pale and surrounding areas, which many locals experienced as coercive. International and NUG accounts also confirm that BNRA fighters admitted to killing a PDF member, and that further allegations of abuse were formally raised.

While the full extent of all allegations remains to be judicially established in any future legal process, there is broad consensus that the situation posed serious problems for both civilians and allied forces.

- Bo Nagar’s surrender is a strategic setback for the resistance

Outlets such as Development Media Group, DVB and others report that the junta dispatched a helicopter to evacuate him and his family, and analysts have warned that his knowledge of routes, structures and supply lines in the heartland could significantly benefit regime operations.

Subsequent reporting describes increased airstrikes and troop deployments in Pale and Yinmabin, suggesting that the junta is exploiting the opportunity his defection created.

- Fragmentation is a central challenge

ACLED analysis documents hundreds of distinct resistance groups involved in political violence in central Myanmar and at least 300-plus instances of infighting between non-state actors since the coup, with Sagaing a major hotspot for competition over resources and legitimacy.

Think-tank studies similarly warn that without stronger, shared governance architecture, the anti-junta coalition risks drifting toward a prolonged, fragmented conflict economy even as the military loses ground.

These shared points are robust and can anchor a common diagnosis, even when proposed remedies diverge.

## **Where interpretations differ — and how to say so responsibly**

The major differences are about responsibility, timing and method.

- On whether the NUG “had to” launch an operation

NUG commanders argue that, after repeated attempts at engagement and investigation, they saw no viable alternative to a forceful operation if they were to uphold any meaningful standard of accountability.

Pale residents, the Sagaing Forum, SRA and critical analysts tend to accept the need for some response, but question whether moving to a kinetic operation — in the absence of a widely understood, shared dispute-resolution framework — was the best or safest option.

- On how to interpret the defection

For NUG actors, the rapid helicopter evacuation confirms that when faced with accountability, Bo Nagar ultimately chose the junta and may have had channels to the regime well before the final clash — though the timing and nature of any such contacts remain a matter of inference rather than proven fact.

Others focus less on his personal motives and more on what his choice reveals about the structural vulnerability of a fragmented resistance: commanders under pressure can play one power center off against another in the absence of trusted, common rules.

- On sequencing: enforcement vs. architecture

MOD voices emphasize that some enforcement cannot wait, or impunity will spread.

Regional forums, alliances and many analysts insist that enforcement without shared, transparent architecture risks deepening mistrust and making future coordination harder.

Acknowledging these differences openly — and clearly distinguishing facts from interpretations — strengthens, rather than weakens, the impact of the debate.

## What went wrong

Across the different vantage points, several missteps emerge:

- Lack of a visible, shared process

Even if the NUG did conduct internal inquiries and issue warnings, there was no clearly articulated, public, step-by-step process — from allegation to investigation to potential sanction — that civilians and other armed

actors could see and reference.

In a context already marked by distrust and fragmentation, this opacity makes it easier for opponents to cast the operation as arbitrary or politically motivated, regardless of its underlying justification.

- Underestimation of defection and propaganda risk

Given Myanmar's long history of divide-and-rule tactics, the possibility that a pressured commander might defect to the regime should arguably have been treated as a central planning scenario, not a surprise.

The fact that the junta could swiftly turn Bo Nagar's surrender into both an intelligence opportunity and a propaganda tool underscores the need for more robust risk analysis before internal enforcement actions.

- Civilian-protection and messaging gaps

Reporting from Pale indicates that civilians were again caught in the middle — first by the clash itself, then by subsequent airstrikes.

This highlights how far all resistance actors, including the NUG, still have to go in translating civilian-protection commitments into operational planning and joint communications.

## What went right

At the same time, there are aspects of the NUG's response that deserve recognition and preservation:

- A refusal to normalize warlordism

Allowing any armed group, however prominent, to continue unchecked after killing allies and allegedly abusing civilians would have set a dangerous precedent for the entire revolutionary movement and for any future federal order.

The decision to confront BNRA signaled that there are at least some red lines the NUG is prepared to defend.

- A path offered to rank-and-file fighters

According to NUG and media reports, a significant number of BNRA fighters chose to join NUG-aligned units once the operation unfolded.

This suggests that the effort was not aimed at collectively punishing all BNRA members, but at separating those willing to accept a unified command and code of conduct from those who were not.

- Forcing overdue debates into the open

Whatever one's view of the Pale operation, it has forced long-delayed debates about governance, accountability, and internal conflict-management to the surface — not only within the NUG but across alliances, forums and civil society.

In the long run, that reckoning is unavoidable if the revolution is to become more than a military struggle.

## What each of us should do now

If this episode is to become a turning point rather than just another wound, different actors will need to move beyond blame toward shared reforms.

- NUG leadership and MOD
  - o Codify and publish clear disciplinary procedures for all forces under its umbrella: investigation steps, thresholds for mediation, graduated sanctions, and criteria for last-resort force — with participation from regional bodies and, where possible, independent actors.
  - o Institutionalize consultation with township-level representatives and forums before any major internal operation, except in true emergencies, and embed civilian-protection planning (warnings, safe corridors) into every such action.
  - o Communicate frankly about both successes and mistakes, making it clear that accountability mechanisms apply upward as well as downward.
- Regional political bodies such as the Sagaing Forum
  - o Work with armed actors and civil society to develop a Sagaing-wide code of conduct and dispute-resolution mechanism that all major resistance groups endorse.
  - o Seek formal recognition of a mediating role in intra-resistance conflicts in the region, so that future crises have political channels to flow through before they reach the battlefield.

- Alliances like SRA and EAOs
  - o Harmonize their own codes of conduct with NUG-PDF and EAO standards to establish a minimum common “federal floor” on civilian protection, anti-extortion norms, and internal discipline.
  - o Use their leverage to make respect for shared accountability mechanisms a condition for deeper cooperation, not just focus on battlefield coordination.
- NGOs, think-tanks and civil society
  - o Continue independent monitoring and analysis of governance practices in resistance-controlled areas — including NUG-aligned forces, EAOs and local militi-as alike.
  - o Offer practical models and technical support for joint investigative bodies, transitional justice mechanisms, and federal-style civil administration that can function even in wartime.
- Civilians and diaspora supporters
  - o Resist the temptation to invest blind faith in any individual commander. Focus political and financial support on institutions and processes that demonstrate transparency and civilian accountability.
  - o Demand that all actors — NUG, EAOs, local forces — explain how they will prevent the next “Pale” from unfolding in the same way.

Throughout, one point must remain clear: the junta remains the primary perpetrator of mass atrocities and the core obstacle to peace.

The purpose of criticizing resistance governance is not to equate the oppressed with the oppressor, but to ensure that those fighting the military do not reproduce, in liberated areas, the very patterns they rose up to replace.

If Myanmar's revolution can turn the Bo Nagar episode into a catalyst — moving from personalities to procedures, from ad hoc enforcement to shared law, from competing chains of command to a minimum common charter — then this painful moment may yet mark the point at which the movement stopped merely fighting the old state and began, in earnest, to build a new one.

## ANALYSIS &amp; INSIGHT



NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La in the field.  
Photo: NUG

## TRYING TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN THE SPRING REVOLUTION

As the National Unity Government (NUG) repeatedly stresses the importance of unity among Myanmar's revolutionary forces, a series of recent incidents across multiple regions highlights the continuing challenges to maintaining cohesion within the anti-junta movement. From inter-alliance tensions in northern Shan State to unresolved disputes in Chin State and controversy surrounding the Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA), internal fractures remain a significant test for the resistance.

In northern Shan State, tensions escalated in the second week of February after the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) installed CCTV cameras in Kutkai Township, an area under the control of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). The move triggered armed clashes between the two alliance members. TNLA forces reportedly raided MNDAA civilian offices and removed MNDAA flags, while MNDAA troops blocked major access roads into the town, preventing TNLA reinforcements from entering. Local reports suggested that at least one MNDAA member may have been killed, though neither side officially confirmed casualties.

Both groups were also accused of restricting civilian movement, with some measures perceived as targeting specific ethnic communities. As tensions intensified, six civil society organizations issued a joint statement urging restraint and calling on both sides to resolve

disputes through dialogue rather than force. Online images showing wooden rods studded with nails, allegedly prepared for clashes, further underscored the fragility of alliance cohesion.

Elsewhere, controversy has surrounded the NUG's handling of the BNRA. The group, which once enjoyed strong local support, became the subject of rapid military operations by allied forces. Critics questioned the scale of manpower and firepower used against a fellow revolutionary organization rather than the junta. According to NUG statements, more than 150 BNRA fighters defected following clashes and after their leader, Bo Nagar, defected to the military. Several BNRA commanders were reportedly detained. Some veteran activists warned against repeating past revolutionary-era incidents in which internal purges weakened resistance movements.

In Chin State, divisions between the Chin Brotherhood Alliance and the Chinland Council — largely centered on administrative authority and representation — remain unresolved, though recent joint defensive efforts in Falam against advancing junta troops have shown signs of pragmatic cooperation.

Revolutionary stakeholders have publicly cautioned against internal conflict. The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) warned that armed clashes among resistance forces ultimately benefit the junta, while Pa'O National Liberation Organization (PNLO) Chairman Khun Thu Rein noted that military regimes have historically exploited divisions within opposition movements.

Taken together, these developments illustrate the complex balancing act facing the NUG: promoting unity as a strategic necessity while navigating regional rivalries, leadership disputes and overlapping territorial claims. While battlefield pressures have at times encouraged cooperation, sustaining long-term unity remains one of the revolution's most pressing challenges.

### The problems of unity in Chin State

Clashes among revolutionary forces intensified last year, at times leading to armed clashes between rival factions. Although civil society organizations, political actors and religious leaders attempted to



Chin fighters

mediate, a comprehensive political settlement was not fully achieved. At present, however, tensions have not escalated into renewed physical confrontations. Differences remain largely internal and political, rather than manifesting on the battlefield.

Recent military developments have instead created space for cautious cooperation. Since October 2025, junta troops have been advancing toward Falam Township in an attempt to retake the area, closing to within roughly 10 miles of the town. In response, members of the Chin Brotherhood Alliance (CB) and the Chinland Council (CC) — previously divided by territorial control, sub-ethnic representation and strategic differences — have coordinated defensive efforts in the Falam area. Within the CC, some leaders view this joint resistance as a crucial opportunity to rebuild trust and gradually strengthen cooperation between the two sides.

Political messaging has also emphasized unity. In December, the Chinland Council elected its second-term leadership. The newly appointed General Secretary, Salaing Kepchin Htan, pledged to prioritize reconciliation among divided Chin revolutionary forces. He highlighted the potential for expanded cooperation in sectors such as education, healthcare and humanitarian assistance, arguing that practical collaboration could help ease lingering suspicions.

At the national level, similar calls were made during the 78th Chin National Day ceremony held virtually on February 20. National Unity Government (NUG) Acting President Duwa Lashi La stressed that the liberation and long-term stability of Chinland require both coordinated military action and political dialogue. Unity among Chin forces, he noted, is essential for successful implementation.



Arakan Army fighters. Photo: AFP

Chinland Council Chairperson Puzim Kyone echoed this sentiment, acknowledging that fragmentation has slowed progress despite a shared objective of dismantling military rule. He urged organizations to prioritize collective achievements over institutional competition.

While differences over administration and representation persist, the current situation suggests a gradual move toward cautious, interest-driven cooperation.

## Arakan Army expands areas of operation

The Arakan Army (AA) is currently conducting offensives in two of the remaining three junta-controlled urban centers in Rakhine State. In recent days, fighting in Sittwe has intensified, with AA targeting outposts under the Regional Military Command as well as naval headquarters positions. The escalation signals a strategic push to further weaken the junta's remaining foothold in the state.

Beyond Rakhine, the AA has expanded operations into Magway, Bago and Ayeyarwady regions. Along the Rakhine–Magway border, AA forces are assaulting the junta's fortified Natyekan strategic post. The position is reportedly defended by two brigade commanders, underscoring its importance to the military. In Bago Region, the AA has re-seized a key junta stronghold known as Point 666. The group initially captured the hilltop position last October, but the junta later retook it using heavy aerial bombardment and artillery fire. By the end of January, however, AA forces regained control. The junta is now attempting to recapture the post to secure its critical weapons factories No. (6) and No. (16). In early March, AA and allied forces advanced to within two miles of Factory No. (16), raising concerns within military circles about the security of the arms production facilities.

In Ayeyarwady Region, junta troops have launched counteroffensive operations in Ingapu, Laymyatna, Yekyi and Tharbaung townships in an effort to block further AA penetration into the delta. Military analysts note that the junta's Southwestern Military Command, which oversees operations in this theater, is widely regarded as one of the weakest among its fourteen regional commands.

Among resistance forces, perceptions of the AA's expansion are largely positive, particularly in operational areas. In Ayeyarwady Region, local People's Defense Forces (PDFs) have warmly welcomed the AA's presence. Due to geographical constraints, delta-based resistance groups have faced significant challenges in accessing training and weapons supplies from eastern-based ethnic armed organizations such as the KNU. In contrast, the AA's relative proximity has enabled more direct support, including combat training and battlefield coordination.

A similar dynamic is observed in Bago Region, where AA units are reportedly cooperating with local PDFs in Padaung Township. In Magway Region, the Chin Defense Force-Asho (CDF-Asho) and other local resistance groups are fighting alongside AA troops in the assault on Natyekan strategic post. These joint operations reflect growing tactical coordination on multiple fronts.

However, reactions are not uniformly enthusiastic. In Chin State, while the Chin Brotherhood Alliance maintains friendly relations with the AA, members of the Chinland Council (CC) have expressed quiet concerns regarding the AA's capture and control of Paletwa Township in southern Chin State. Publicly, the CC has refrained from criticizing the AA, likely weighing the group's recent military achievements in Rakhine and its rising prominence within the broader revolutionary movement.

Overall, while minor political sensitivities exist, the AA's expansion has, for now, been largely welcomed by local resistance forces seeking stronger military partnership against the junta.



## **MYANMAR JUNTA DEPLOYS AI-POWERED RUSSIAN AND CHINESE TRACKING SYSTEM TO TARGET 50,000 INDIVIDUALS FOR NEW WAVE OF ARRESTS**

**T**he Spring Revolution Database (SRD) has issued an urgent public security warning, revealing that the Myanmar junta is utilizing a sophisticated "Person Scrutinization and Monitoring System" (PSMS) to track and arrest activists, Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) participants, and resistance members.

According to the SRD's five-year anniversary report, "Records of War Crimes Committed by the Military Commission," the system integrates facial recognition and biometric data provided by Chinese tech giant Huawei with a software application developed by Russia.

Currently operating on version 1.2, the PSMS reportedly contains the private personal data of approximately 50,000 targeted individuals, allowing security forces at checkpoints, airports, and city gates to identify and detain travellers in real-time.

The SRD added that the technology is being used by junta military force, police, and immigration officials at checkpoints, airports, seaports, and city entry and exit gates to track down and arrest civilians and members of resistance groups.

According to the SRD, Ma Nan Cherry Tun who has been charged under Section 50(j) of the Counter-Terrorism Law was arrested on 25 May 2025, at the Htin Shu Myaing checkpoint in Namhsan Township through the use of PSMS technology.

The SRD also reported that a family involved in the CDM was detained on 23 June at the Kywe Tat Sone checkpoint in Tharsi Township, Mandalay Region, allegedly through the same system.

Similarly, in Shan State, a 29-year-old woman, Ma Thet Htar Thuzar, was arrested on 20 December at the Nant Pan Tak checkpoint in Kalaw using the PSMS system. In another case, a young man traveling from Yangon to Tachilek was reportedly apprehended through PSMS while enroute.

According to the SRD report, the junta is preparing to initiate a new wave of arrests targeting CDM participants and activists through the use of this technology.

The SRD urged everyone to ensure that personal information on mobile phones and private data does not leak or become accessible to authorities.

The SRD's report, released to mark the fifth anniversary of the coup, documents a total of 19,047 incidents involving extrajudicial killings of civilians and other war crimes committed nationwide by the junta between 1 February 2021, and 1 February, 2026.

The Spring Revolution Database (SRD), established in 2024, aims to collect and preserve records, photographs, and video evidence of war crimes attributed to the military junta, with the objective of supporting legal action in both domestic and international courts.


 A photograph of Soe Win, the deputy leader of the Myanmar military junta, speaking at a podium. He is wearing a green military uniform with a peaked cap and several medals on his chest. The podium is covered with a yellow cloth. Behind him are several Myanmar national flags.
 

Junta Deputy Leader Soe Win

## MYANMAR JUNTA DEPUTY LEADER SOE WIN CONFIRMS APRIL TIMELINE FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND GOVERNMENT HANDOVER FOLLOWING SHAM POLLS

Junta deputy leader Vice Senior General Soe Win announced on 24 February that Myanmar will appoint a new president and form a formal government in early April, following military-led general elections that were widely condemned by the international community as a sham.

Speaking to military personnel and their families at bases in Nawngwoe, Kengkam, and Mongpying in Shan State, Soe Win confirmed that state responsibilities would be transferred to the newly formed administration according to the schedule.

This follows the official convening of the third Pyithu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw, slated for 16 and 18 March respectively, where the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) is set to dominate after winning the majority of parliamentary seats.

"We will elect a president in early April, form a new government, and transfer state responsibilities accordingly," the deputy junta chief said.

In the junta's election which excluded 67 of the country's 330 townships and more than 4,000 wards and village tracts, the military-backed USDP won the largest number of seats.

Under the 2008 Constitution still enforced by the junta, the Presidential Electoral Body must be formed from three groups of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw representatives: the Pyithu Hluttaw, the Amyotha Hluttaw, and the military representatives.

Each group must nominate one vice president, and the president will be chosen from among those three nominees.

There is also speculation that junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, currently described as the acting president, may formally assume the presidency.

President Win Myint and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi have now spent more than five years in imprisonment following the military's seizure of power on 1 February 2021, citing voter-list irregularities.



New recruits for the Myanmar junta.

# JUNTA DEFENCE MINISTER ADMITS RECRUITMENT OF MINORS AND OVERAGE CIVILIANS AMID SYSTEMIC CORRUPTION AND FORCED ENLISTMENT

**G**eneral Maung Maung Aye, Chairman of the Central Body for Summoning People’s Military Servants and the junta’s Minister of Defence, admitted on 26 February that the military has been recruiting individuals who fall outside the legal age limits.

Speaking at a high-level committee meeting, the general acknowledged that a number of recruits sent to collection points were found to be either underage or over the legal age for service and had to be returned.

He called for a more stringent screening process and announced that legal action is being taken against officials and intermediaries who have "exploited legal loopholes" or engaged in unfair recruitment practices for financial gain.

The rare admission comes as the military regime completes its 19th training batch, attempting to

maintain a quota of 5,000 recruits per intake to offset heavy battlefield losses.

Since the conscription law was activated in February 2024, human rights groups and the National Unity Government (NUG) have documented widespread "snatch and recruit" operations, where young people are abducted from streets or homes.

While the law mandates service for men aged 18–35 and women 18–27, reports indicate that families are often forced to pay bribes of up to 1 million MMK to avoid the draft, leading administrators to fill quotas by seizing anyone available, including minors.

General Maung Maung Aye also warned that "false complaints" against village administrators would be prosecuted, even as displaced families report that local officials frequently use the threat of conscription to extort money from the rural poor.



Photo: Supplied

## MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS AND PYU SAW HTEE MILITIAS LOOT PALE TOWNSHIP VILLAGES AS 1,200 HOUSEHOLDS FLEE FOLLOWING RESISTANCE SURRENDERS

Approximately 100 Myanmar junta troops and allied Pyu Saw Htee militiamen from Zee Phyu Kone village launched a series of raids on Chin Pyit Kyin and Nwe Inn villages on 24 and 25 February, systematically looting homes and forcing the displacement of over 1,200 households.

Witnesses reported that a convoy of 30 carts and several vehicles, protected by the military, entered the villages to seize motorcycles, food supplies, and livestock.

This military escalation in Pale Township follows the significant 18 February surrender of Burma National Revolutionary Army (BNRA) leader Bo Nagar. Local sources report that former resistance members are now acting as guides for the military columns.

A source close to the township's People's Administration said the military advance has displaced around 1,200 households across seven villages, including Naw Roe, Thet Kyal Kyin, Chin Ma Kyin, Nwe Inn, Pyaw Bwe Kyin and Tha Pyay Hla.

"The military is urging residents to refrain from any resistance, while at the same time warning that heavy weapons will be used against them if they fail to return," he said.

As thousands of displaced persons from seven different villages seek refuge in nearby forests, the military has begun using scouting drones and threatening the use of heavy weaponry against any civilians who refuse to return to their homes.



TNLA fighters. Photo: AFP

## TA'ANG CIVIL SOCIETY CALLS FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN TNLA AND MNDA

On February 25, the Ta'ang Civil Society Network (TCSN) called on the Palaung State Liberation Front / Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) and Myanmar National Truth and Justice Party/ Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNTJP/MNDAA) to stop targeting civilians in Kutkai, Shan State. They urged both sides to resolve disputes through dialogue and to halt violence, arrests, and restrictions on local communities.

The statement is as follows.

We take great pride in the fact that the PSLF/TNLA and MNTJP/MNDAA are ethnic armed organizations that have fought against the military dictatorship, liberated ethnic minorities from oppression, and protected the people within their respective regions. We also pay tribute to all the martyrs and heroes who sacrificed their lives during the revolutionary struggle.

It has been more than a week since a military standoff began between PSLF/TNLA and MNTJP/MNDAA forces in Kutkai, northern Shan State, on

13 February 2026. During this period, tensions have escalated, leading to mutual hostilities, including injuries and the arrest of soldiers from both sides.

Consequently, the local population is being held hostage by this ongoing tension. Civilians have been subjected to targeted beatings, arbitrary arrests, movement restrictions, and blockades on the flow of goods. Furthermore, we have observed the spread of hate speech on social media platforms, using fabricated photos and videos to incite ethnic conflict and public violence.

As the MNTJP/MNDAA and PSLF/TNLA have undertaken an armed struggle to protect the people, we strongly urge them not to project inter-organizational disputes onto the public. We call for an immediate end to arrests, beatings, travel bans, goods restrictions, and all forms of violence against civilians. The TCSN urges both parties to resolve their disputes through dialogue and negotiation to reach a mutually acceptable solution as soon as possible.



Vehicle check.

## MNDAA AND TNLA TENSIONS IN KUTKAI TRIGGER TWO-WEEK TRADE SUSPENSION AND SHARP RISE IN COMMODITY PRICES

Inter-ethnic tensions between the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) have paralyzed trade in Kutkai Township for nearly two weeks, leading to a surge in the cost of basic necessities.

According to local reports on 24 February, a blockade enforced by MNDAA forces on the town's outskirts has restricted the entry of rice, fuel oil, and coal since 13 February, forcing supply trucks arriving from Lashio to turn back.

Although the MNDAA's trade ban has not yet caused a shortage of goods in town, prices have begun to rise.

"One example is that rice trucks coming from Lashio are being turned back. There is currently no shortage of goods in the town, but the prices of vegetables and other basic food items have increased significantly because the roads are closed," a Kutkai resident said.

Fuel and coal transported from Namtu and Lashio are also being blocked from entering Kutkai.

The dispute between the two former allies both key members of the Three Brotherhood Alliance reportedly escalated after TNLA troops positioned within the town removed MNDAA-installed CCTV security cameras

along Union Road. The situation deteriorated further on 20 February, when MNDAA personnel entered Ngawngar village to demand a TNLA withdrawal, resulting in an altercation where two civilians were beaten. One victim remains hospitalized with serious injuries.

Military sources say the MNDAA has been reinforcing its troops via Hsenwi and Tamoenye, while the TNLA has also been sending reinforcements through Mongyulay and Namhkam.

In response to the deteriorating humanitarian situation, the Ta'ang Civil Society Network (TCSN) issued an urgent appeal on February 24, calling on both armed groups to immediately cease the abuse of civilians and resolve territorial disputes through dialogue. The network warned that the use of movement restrictions and commodity bans as leverage in political disputes is "punishing the very people the revolution claims to protect."

Both the TNLA and MNDAA are members of the Three Brotherhood Alliance that jointly launched Operation 1027, an offensive in which they previously fought together and achieved significant military gains.



Photo: AFP

## CHINA'S DOUBLE GAME IN MYANMAR — GUNS, MINERALS, AND RED ROSEWOOD

SUN LEE

Myanmar today stands at the crossroads of civil war, authoritarian entrenchment, and foreign exploitation. At the centre of this storm is China, a neighbour whose influence stretches across Myanmar's political, economic, and ecological landscape. Beijing's strategy is not one-dimensional; it is a calculated double game. On the one hand, China supplies arms and ammunition to both the junta and certain rebel factions, ensuring that conflict remains unresolved. On the other, it invests heavily in infrastructure, industries, and resource extraction, positioning itself as Myanmar's indispensable partner.

This duality reveals a troubling truth: China thrives on Myanmar's instability, using it as leverage to expand its presence and secure access to lucrative resources.

### Arming Both Sides of the Conflict

China's military footprint in Myanmar is subtle but undeniable. Reports indicate that Chinese-made weapons flow into the hands of both the junta and ethnic armed groups. By keeping the battlefield balanced, Beijing ensures neither side collapses completely. This

strategy allows China to maintain influence over the junta while simultaneously cultivating ties with rebels who control resource-rich territories. For Beijing, instability is not a problem to be solved but a condition to be managed one that guarantees its role as mediator, supplier, and ultimate power broker.

### Infrastructure as a Trojan Horse

While weapons fuel the conflict, infrastructure projects provide China with legitimacy. Pipelines, railways, and port developments under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are pitched as engines of growth for Myanmar. In reality, they serve China's strategic interests: securing direct access to the Indian Ocean, bypassing the vulnerable Strait of Malacca, and embedding Chinese companies deep into Myanmar's economy. These projects are less about uplifting Myanmar and more about tethering it to Beijing's geopolitical ambitions. The junta, desperate for international recognition and investment, welcomes these projects, even if they come at the cost of sovereignty.

## Exploiting Mineral Wealth

Myanmar is the world's third-largest producer of rare earths, a critical component for China's green technology and defence industries. Rebel forces, particularly the Kachin Independence Army, have seized control of vast mining territories, complicating Beijing's supply chain. Instead of abandoning these ventures, China has adapted by negotiating with both rebels and the junta. This pragmatic approach ensures uninterrupted access to rare earths, even as mining devastates local environments and communities. The mineral conflict illustrates how China leverages Myanmar's fractured political landscape to secure resources vital to its global ambitions.

## The Red Rosewood Rush

Beyond minerals, China's appetite extends to Myanmar's forests. Red Rosewood, prized in China's luxury furniture market, has become a symbol of ecological exploitation. Smuggling networks, often operating with the tacit approval of local authorities, funnel massive quantities of rosewood into China. The trade is devastating Myanmar's biodiversity, stripping forests and threatening wildlife reserves. For Beijing, the profits outweigh the ecological costs. For Myanmar, it is another example of how foreign demand accelerates deforestation and undermines conservation efforts.

## Wildlife and Environmental Exploitation

China's influence also extends into Myanmar's wildlife reserves. Reports of poaching and trafficking of endangered species, driven by demand in Chinese markets, highlight another dimension of exploitation. Combined with deforestation and mining, Myanmar's ecological systems are under siege. The junta, reliant on Chinese support, has little incentive to enforce environmental protections. Rebels, meanwhile, often tax or regulate these trades to fund their operations. In both cases, China benefits from the extraction of natural wealth, regardless of the long-term damage to Myanmar's environment.

## A Calculated Strategy of Instability

Critics argue that China's actions amount to deliberate destabilization. By arming both sides,

Beijing ensures the conflict drags on. By investing in infrastructure, it secures strategic footholds. By exploiting minerals, forests, and wildlife, it enriches its industries. This is not chaos for chaos's sake; it is instability engineered to maximize leverage. Myanmar's sovereignty is eroded not only by its internal divisions but by the external hand that manipulates them.

## The Human Cost

Behind these geopolitical manoeuvres lies a human tragedy. Communities near rare earth mines suffer from toxic waste and environmental degradation. Villagers in forested regions lose livelihoods as rosewood logging devastates ecosystems. Wildlife trafficking undermines cultural and ecological heritage. And ordinary citizens, caught between junta repression and rebel taxation, see little benefit from the billions flowing into Chinese projects. For them, China's presence is not a promise of development but a reminder of exploitation.

## Myanmar as a Pawn

China's engagement in Myanmar is a masterclass in opportunism. By playing both sides of the conflict, Beijing ensures it cannot be excluded from any future settlement. By embedding itself in infrastructure and industry, it secures long-term influence. By exploiting minerals, forests, and wildlife, it feeds its domestic markets and global ambitions. Myanmar, fractured and vulnerable, becomes a pawn in China's larger strategy. The question is not whether China destabilizes Myanmar — it is how long Myanmar can endure this destabilization before its sovereignty, environment, and society are irreparably damaged.

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



Photo: AFP

## JFM CALLS ON WESTERN GOVERNMENTS TO TARGET JET FUEL SUPPLY CHAIN TO MYANMAR MILITARY

On 23 February, Justice For Myanmar urged the EU, UK, Canada, US, and Australia to impose coordinated sanctions on vessels and companies supplying jet fuel to Myanmar's military junta. They warned that these imports facilitate deadly airstrikes on civilians and support the junta's campaign of terror.

The statement is as follows.

The continued trade in aviation fuel with the military junta is sustaining the junta's aerial campaign of terror against the people of Myanmar, which involved an unprecedented number of airstrikes in 2025 alone, ahead of the junta's preparation for its sham election. These airstrikes destroy schools, hospitals and whole communities, kill children and drive mass displacement.

Data published by the Myanma Port Authority, which is under the junta's illegal control, shows that jet fuel imports to Myanmar almost doubled between 2024 and 2025, from 64,562 metric tonnes to 106,604 metric tonnes.

Recent publications by Amnesty International and Reuters provide new evidence that these imports are now being enabled by the supply of aviation fuel from Iran's "shadow fleet".

Governments must act now to urgently expand sanctions on the vessels, the owners, commercial and international safety management (ISM) managers, a fuel terminal and a state-owned enterprise illegally controlled by the junta that is central to this supply chain of terror. This would not only disrupt the junta's ability to continue to launch airstrikes against civilians, but it would also strengthen existing sanctions aimed at limiting Iran's ability to export fuel at a time when the Iranian regime has brutally cracked down on peaceful protests with mass killings.

Based on recent research by Amnesty International, Justice For Myanmar calls for sanctions on the following vessels for their role in transporting aviation fuel to Myanmar:

BARAAWE 1 (previously named MT. HUITONG 78 / ZHOU HAI YOU 78), IMO Number 9646479, which delivered 9 shipments of aviation fuel to Myanmar in 2023 and 2024.

LS MERCURY (previously named MT. YONG SHENG 56), IMO Number 9657507, which delivered a shipment of aviation fuel to Myanmar in 2024.

REEF (previously named BALTIC HORIZON and PETRA), IMO Number 9263382, which delivered three

shipments of aviation fuel to Myanmar in 2024 and 2025.

NOBLE (previously named ASTRA, TRAA3 and HURON), IMO Number 9162928, which delivered four shipments of aviation fuel to Myanmar in 2025.

Since the EU, UK, Canadian, US and Australian governments first began sanctioning the junta's aviation fuel supply chain in 2023, the junta and its enablers have been going to new lengths to evade sanctions and hide aviation fuel shipments.

To counter tactics of sanctions evasion and send a strong message of deterrence, Justice For Myanmar also calls for sanctions on the owners and managers of the above vessels, based on publicly available information, in addition to a fuel terminal and the junta's central body for aviation fuel import, storage and distribution, based on public information:

Abu Marine Co. Ltd., domiciled in the Marshall Islands, is the owner of BARAAWE 1.

Pacific Light Operation and Ship Management, domiciled in the UAE, is the ISM manager of BARAAWE 1.

Allsea Management JSC, domiciled in Vietnam, is the commercial manager and ISM manager of MERCURY.

Legendsea Co. Ltd., domiciled in Vietnam, is the owner of MERCURY.

Sea Route Ship Management FZE, domiciled in the UAE, is the ISM manager and commercial manager of NOBLE and REEF.

Amethyst Maritime Ventures SA, domiciled in the UAE, is the owner of REEF.

Sea Hill Maritime SA, domiciled in the UAE, is the owner of NOBLE. Amethyst Maritime Ventures SA and Sea Hill Maritime SA are registered at the same address in the Hamriyah Free Zone, Sharjah.

Hai Linh Co. Ltd., a Vietnamese company that operates Cai Mep Petroleum Terminal, which Amnesty International found to have been used to transship aviation fuel to Myanmar and obscure its real destination.

Myanma Petrochemical Enterprise (MPE), a state-owned enterprise illegally controlled by the military junta that controls the aviation fuel supply chain in Myanmar, operates the Mann Refinery which produces aviation fuel, and jointly owns businesses that import, store and distribute aviation fuel with the heavily

sanctioned Myan Oil group (formerly known as Shoon and Asia Sun).

REEF and NOBLE are reported to be part of Iran's network of vessels used to covertly transport illicit cargo, and both vessels have a history of transporting sanctioned fuel from Iran.

NOBLE, REEF, along Sea Route Ship Management FZE, were sanctioned by the US Government in 2024 for trading in Iranian petrochemical products.

In November 2022, Amnesty International produced a report "Deadly Cargo" with research supported by Justice For Myanmar, revealing the Myanmar military's jet fuel supply chain and its links to commission of atrocity crimes. Subsequent Amnesty reports in January and July 2024 detailed how jet fuel shipments continued with methods shifting from direct sales to buying and reselling of fuel multiple times to obscure its origin.

Justice For Myanmar has previously welcomed the sanctions designations of military jet fuel suppliers and repeatedly called on governments to enforce jet fuel sanctions on Myanmar.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "A supply chain that stretches from Vietnam to Iran is fuelling the Myanmar military's international crimes, enabling airstrikes that terrorise the people of Myanmar.

"The involvement of Vietnam also underscores the failure of ASEAN, which continues to impede an effective international response to the Myanmar crisis while some of its members profit.

"Every aviation fuel shipment that reaches the Myanmar military enables its warplanes to terrorise Myanmar people from the skies. But these operations can be stopped through coordinated action. The vessels, their owners, managers and other entities involved can and must be sanctioned in all jurisdictions.

"To date, only Canada has moved to ban the export, sale, supply and shipment of aviation fuel and provision of shipping insurance for aviation fuel to Myanmar. Other governments must follow Canada's lead to end this bloody trade.

"The lives of the people of Myanmar depend on urgent action against these vessels and companies enabling and profiting from the junta's barrage of killings."



Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA POWERED PARACHUTES KILL NINE CIVILIANS IN UNPROVOKED STRIKE ON MYINMU VILLAGE

In a lethal continuation of the military's recent "parachute warfare" campaign, nine civilians including two five-year-old children were killed when junta-operated powered parachutes bombed Shwe Kyaung Kan village in Sagaing Region on the evening of 23 February.

The attack, which targeted a densely populated residential area 20 miles northeast of Myinmu, involved two aircraft dropping four bombs at approximately 7:00 pm, catching residents without bunkers or shelters in a village that had previously seen no active combat.

"They dropped four bombs using two powered parachutes. The strike at the top of the village, a densely populated area, killing children and women," said a resident of Myinmu.

The casualties included four women and five men, with at least five others seriously injured. The bombardment continued into the morning of 24 February as three gyrocopters from the Monywa-

based Northwestern Military Command were sighted in strikes between Myinmu and Ayadaw.

"They carried out the bombing despite there being no military targets. The village had never been attacked before. There were no bunkers or shelters and nowhere to hide, so many people were killed," a local man said.

At around 9:30 am on 24 February, residents said three gyrocopters deployed by the Monywa's Northwestern Military Command continued bombing areas between Myinmu and Ayadaw towns.

The circumstances surrounding the attack are still under investigation.

According to the Spring Revolution Database (SRD), this unconventional use of mechanized parachutes has now claimed 163 lives nationwide since 2024, with Sagaing Region bearing the brunt of the fatalities.



## MYANMAR JUNTA AIR STRIKE NEAR SITTWE KILLS AT LEAST 17: LOCAL GROUPS

**A** Myanmar military air strike on a village market in the country's westernmost state killed at least 17 people, two local sources said on Wednesday.

Myanmar has been consumed by civil war since the military staged a coup five years ago, provoking armed resistance from democracy activists and ethnic minority factions that have long held sway in the nation's fringes.

The western coastal state of Rakhine is among the worst-hit regions. Controlled almost entirely by the ethnic minority Arakan Army (AA), it has been blockaded by the junta and pummeled with regular air strikes.

The junta's air force hit the village of Yoe Ngu in Ponnagyun township, around 33 kilometres (20 miles) northeast of state capital Sittwe on Tuesday, according to the AA and a local volunteer group.

A Myanmar military spokesman could not be reached for comment.

AA statements listed the names of 17 "innocent civilians", including three children, killed in the strike on a marketplace around 2:00 pm (0730 GMT) on Tuesday. It said 15 more people had been wounded.

Pyae Phyo Naing, chairman of the Ponnagyun Youths Association, said: "In our list, there are 18 confirmed deaths and 16 injured people."

Arriving at the scene after the strike, he described its aftermath as "really bad, four or five buildings were burnt down and many buildings were destroyed".

"Some people were crying, while many dead bodies were scattered over the area," the 23-year-old added.

"Some people were running away from the scene as there were also houses still burning when we arrived."

Aid groups regularly sound alarms over the spiralling crisis in Rakhine, which borders Bangladesh.

The military blockade on top of the conflict and recent sweeping cuts to international aid have driven a "dramatic rise in hunger and malnutrition" in the state, the World Food Programme warned last year.

While the military has been accused of atrocities in the state, the AA has its own track record of rights abuses, according to monitors who have tallied incidents of alleged abduction, torture and execution.

The AA has emerged as one of the most powerful factions opposing the junta's rule -- pushing troops to a handful of encircled positions in Rakhine, including Sittwe.

The military has been able to hold out thanks to supply airlifts and strikes carried out by its fleet of Chinese- and Russian-made jets.

AFP



Damaged property. Photo: Supplied

## MYANMAR JUNTA JET FIGHTERS AND GYROCOPTERS LAUNCH RETALIATORY BOMBINGS ON KACHIN AND SAGAING VILLAGES FOLLOWING AIRPORT DRONE SHOOTDOWN

In a series of deadly aerial attacks across northern Myanmar, junta forces killed at least eight civilians and two resistance members on 22 February. The strikes appear to be direct retaliation for a drone which hit a civilian passenger plane at Myitkyina Airport on 20 February. The military has officially labelled the incident a "war crime" by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and People's Defence Forces (PDF).

At approximately 11:30 pm on 22 February, a junta jet fighter bombed Bum Ka Htaung village, located near the KIA's second headquarters in Mai Ja Yang, Kachin State. Colonel Naw Bu, the KIA spokesperson, confirmed that the strike killed U Zaw Taung (78 years old) and injured four others.

"We currently know of four injuries. We are still trying to collect the information," the source said.

This attack follows intensive lobbyist-led calls on pro-military social media channels to bomb KIA strongholds in Laiza and Mai Ja Yang in response to the Myitkyina airport incident. A kamikaze drone reputedly hit a Mandalay-bound Myanmar National Airlines

(MNA) passenger aircraft when it was shot down by airport security forces.

Previously, at around 3:00 pm on 22 February, the junta bombed Pe Noke Swat village using a gyrocopter, resulting in the immediate deaths of seven civilians, including one woman, and injuring five others.

In addition to the seven civilians, reports indicate that two members of the PDF also lost their lives during the attack.

"Many people died in the Homalin airstrike. We've confirmed two PDF members and seven civilians so far, and the rest are still being compiled," the source said.

Immediately following the attack, the junta bombed the Ananpa area of KIA Brigade 9 and the Htai Ra Yang area of KIA Brigade 8 on 21 February, followed by airstrikes on the Bar Par area of Brigade 3 and the territory of Battalion 11 on 22 February, according to the KIA.



Aerial view of the bombing damage.

## MYANMAR JUNTA MI-17 HELICOPTER BOMBS ALLIED GOLD MINE IN HOMALIN IN "FRIENDLY FIRE" INCIDENT, SPARKS CIVILIAN TERROR

In a chaotic and potentially accidental aerial operation, a Myanmar military Mi-17 helicopter dropped three bombs on the Naung Hmaw gold mine at 11:30 am, 23 February. The site, located just 10 miles from Homalin town, is currently a joint stronghold controlled by the junta army and its ally, the Shanni Nationalities Army (SNA).

Local residents report that the explosions triggered a massive fire across the densely populated work site, leading many to fear significant casualties among the miners and soldiers, though verified numbers have not yet emerged.

"The bombs struck an area controlled by both the military and the SNA. It remains unclear whether this was a tactical error or a deliberate strike. The explosion triggered a massive fire, and given that this is a densely populated work site, we fear there could be many

casualties, though we cannot confirm the numbers yet," a local resident said.

The gold mine is notably larger than the nearby Pinnokesut mine, which is currently held by resistance forces.

"The two mines are located in close proximity, and both have been targeted by successive bombings. It appears the military is determined to systematically destroy these mining operations," a source close to the resistance groups said.

On the afternoon of 22 February, the junta also carried out an airstrike on gold mining sites near Pinnokesut village in Homalin Township. The attack resulted in the deaths of seven local residents, including several women.



## SAC-M URGES ASEAN TO BACK TIMOR-LESTE'S LEGAL MOVE ON MYANMAR MILITARY

The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar on 23 February praised Timor-Leste for leading ASEAN in exploring legal action against Myanmar's military junta, urging regional support and cooperation with international justice to hold junta leader Min Aung Hlaing accountable.

The statement is as follows.

In early February, Timor-Leste appointed a prosecutor to explore potential proceedings against the Myanmar military junta, including junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, for war crimes and crimes against humanity. According to the Myanmar Accountability Project, it is the first time an ASEAN member has initiated such action against a fellow member, marking a turning point for the bloc.

Timor-Leste's universal jurisdiction initiative joins a growing list of efforts to put Min Aung Hlaing in the dock. Last February, an Argentine Court issued arrest warrants for 25 senior Myanmar officials, including Min Aung Hlaing, in connection with genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya. This followed a November 2024 request by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing for the alleged crimes against humanity of deportation and persecution of the Rohingya. Just last month, the International Court of Justice held public hearings and heard oral arguments in The Gambia's case against Myanmar under the Genocide Convention.

Predictably, the junta's reprisals against Timor-Leste have been swift and petty. It has ejected Timor-

Leste's chargé d'affaires from the country, complaining that Timor-Leste breached ASEAN's principle of non-interference in each other's affairs. But the military junta's flagrant atrocities and the regional crisis it has triggered deeply impacts all ASEAN members, individually and collectively.

ASEAN's response to Timor-Leste's initiative should therefore be straightforward – back Timor-Leste and crackdown on the junta. For more than five years, ASEAN has endured relentless humiliation at the junta's hands. Its Five-Point Consensus lasted all of 48 hours before Min Aung Hlaing reneged on his commitments. The years since have seen the junta commit mass atrocities, weaponize starvation and natural disasters, block humanitarian aid, displace millions of people, and forcibly conscript tens of thousands of Myanmar youths to fight their own people. The junta has unleashed a multifaceted crisis that has bled across borders and enabled transnational crime to thrive.

The Philippines, now ASEAN Chair, showed its commitment to international law when it facilitated the arrest and transfer of former President Rodrigo Duterte to the ICC for the alleged crimes against humanity of murder, torture and rape. A hearing will take place in The Hague this week to confirm the charges against Duterte.

The Philippines must now lead ASEAN in these same principled steps on Myanmar. When the ICC – as widely expected – issues an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing (assuming it has not already done so on a "Secret" basis), the Philippines should publicly confirm that it will cooperate with the Court in securing his arrest and transfer to The Hague. Timor-Leste will join them. Malaysia and Singapore must add their support. So too should Indonesia as current President of the UN Human Rights Council, and given that its new Criminal Code (KUHP) provides for universal jurisdiction over the most serious international crimes, including genocide and crimes against humanity.

After holding firm in rejecting the junta's fraudulent elections, ASEAN members must bring even stronger resolve to securing justice for the people of Myanmar.

Holding Min Aung Hlaing and his accomplices to account would open new opportunities for a future that fully respects the Myanmar people's aspirations, interests and democratic will. It would also lift ASEAN's standing and send a sharp warning to other power-hungry military men in the region.

# BURMA CAMPAIGN UK SAYS BRITISH GOVERNMENT MUST IMPOSE SANCTIONS ON ARAKAN ARMY

**B**urma Campaign UK issued a statement on 25 February calling on the British government to impose sanctions on the Arakan Army (AA). The group says the AA – referred to as the Arakha Army – is responsible for committing a variety of human rights violations in Rakhine State including violations of international law.

The text of the statement continues below.

Burma Campaign UK is also calling on the British government to do more to support international justice and accountability avenues to hold the Arakha Army and its leadership accountable for their crimes, and to convene a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in Arakan State, including human rights violations being committed by the Arakha Army and Burmese military. A senior UN human rights official should be invited to brief the meeting.

Following the military coup in 2021, the Arakha Army (formerly called the Arakan Army) (AA) has been fighting to free the state from Burmese military occupation. They have been incredibly successful, and have freed almost the entire state, making them heroes for many people in Burma.

However, in many ways they act like the Burmese military, and are committing numerous human rights violations. Links to some of the reports documenting their human rights violations are at the end of this media release.

In July last year the United Nations Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar stated in an update to the UN General Assembly: "During the reporting period, the Mechanism initiated investigations into crimes allegedly committed by members of the Arakan Army, in military or civilian attire. These included summary executions, torture and beheadings of military soldiers and civilians suspected of being military

informants. In addition, the Mechanism continues to collect information on sexual violence, including rape, against Chin women."

In January this year the British government stated: "The Rohingya are likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from non-state actors, namely the Arakan Army in Rakhine state."

Documented crimes by the Arakha Army include massacres, (in one instance they killed hundreds in a drone attack on fleeing civilians), mass detention, torture, beheadings, mass forcing of people from homes and villages, looting, blocking people from work or gathering food, extortion, forced recruitment, aid restrictions, forced labour and burning people alive who were locked into their homes.

The AA have also taken over part of neighbouring Chin State, where there have been accusations they have committed rapes, executions and abductions.

The Arakha Army isn't just killing and oppressing people of different ethnicities and religions, it is also oppressing ethnic Arakanese people as well. People are afraid to publicly criticise the AA. They restrict access to the internet and have arrested a journalist for activities "going beyond the rules."

The AA have also been breaking international law by executing captured Burmese Army soldiers, including by cutting their throats or burning them alive.

"Allowing the Arakha Army to continue to commit human rights abuses with impunity only encourages them to think they can get away with more abuses," said Mark Farmaner, Director of Burma Campaign UK. "Private dialogue with the Arakha Army has not resulted in significant change in their behaviour. It is time that they faced consequences for their actions."



Children play games at the Good Life Club event.  
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

## **THE GOOD LIFE CLUB - FREE BURMA RANGERS PROGRAM OF LOVE FOR IDP CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**ANTONIO GRACEFFO**

**A**t an IDP camp hidden in the jungle, about two hundred children and many of their parents crowd into a central hut made of plastic tarps, which serves as the camp's general meeting house and a Catholic church on Sundays. Along the road leading to the camp, heavily armed guards in body armor watch the skies for signs of airplanes or drones, as large gatherings of civilians are a favorite target of Burma's military junta.

Inside the tent, if it were not for the camouflage uniforms of the entertainers, one would hardly know there was a war. Music plays and children laugh as they dance and take part in activities and games in a program called the Good Life Club (GLC), led by the Free Burma Rangers.

The Free Burma Rangers are best known for their work as frontline medics, evacuating and treating the wounded under fire. An image of the Rangers' leader, David Eubank, rescuing a young girl while pinned down by ISIS in Iraq went viral, reinforcing the perception that the Rangers are hardened war veterans whose lives revolve around combat. While it is true that they routinely risk and sometimes lose their lives to save others, it is more accurate to say they exist in a world of war, but their lives revolve around faith and love. The

first rule of being a Ranger is to "do this for love," and nowhere is that more evident than in the Good Life Club.

Even in Burma, battles do not happen every day in every state, so between engagements the Rangers drive or walk from IDP camp to IDP camp, putting on a half-day program to bring joy to children who have been robbed of a carefree childhood.

At every Good Life Club program, the team conducts medical and dental checks so that villagers and internally displaced people can receive care. The most severe cases are referred and evacuated to a hospital. FBR also gives out free haircuts, one of those needs the rest of the world takes for granted but which displaced people often cannot access.

Throughout the four-hour program, the Rangers and foreign volunteers perform songs, skits, and other activities to engage the children. One Ranger performed a comedic hand-to-hand combat demonstration that made the children laugh. Another Ranger and his wife led the children in singing, but first had them do silly vocal warm-up exercises that brought down the house.

Two Rangers then taught the children how to play limbo. At first, volunteers were hesitant, so the Rangers

went into the crowd and brought forward adults and children. Once the game began, the crowd sang and laughed as participants took turns going under the bar. In the final round, a small child was lifted up and declared the winner. He was so excited, you would think he had won the Olympics.

The program also included an anatomy lesson led by two female Rangers, as well as additional skits on malaria prevention and hygiene. In one demonstration, Rangers dressed as mosquitoes while wearing their uniform trousers, load-bearing equipment, and helmets. They removed their shirts and painted mosquito images on their chests and faces. Children acted as mosquito nets, standing around people pretending to sleep.

The Rangers portraying mosquitoes tried to enter but were blocked, illustrating the importance of sleeping under mosquito nets. When the people inside the nets woke up, they were shown to be healthy.

Before the GLC, David Eubank said, "You have to watch our malaria skit. It's hilarious, with the most inept mosquitoes you have ever seen." Then he added, "Like Mr. Bean."

If you spend time around the Rangers, you find that David uses that comparison often for anything he thinks is funny. "It's like Mr. Bean." In this case, he was correct. It was easily the most entertaining malaria skit I have ever witnessed.

The mastermind behind the GLC is David's wife, Karen Eubank, co-leader of Free Burma Rangers. Trained as a schoolteacher in the United States and a mother of three, she homeschooled their children on missions in war zones from Burma to Iraq, Syria, and Africa until they went off to university.

She said her involvement with children on the front line began before she had her own family. In 1999, she visited villages that had experienced recent Burma Army activity. In one village, she saw bullet holes in wooden houses and children hiding behind trees and buildings. "I tried to play with them, but I just couldn't make any games there," she said. She began asking what she could do to help children living in fear.

At the same time, she observed medical clinics that provided short-term care and then moved on. She began thinking about preventative health care and whether she could communicate it through a show or skit. As a teacher, she believed she could teach any subject, but she wanted to focus on what mattered most. In 2001, while traveling through Dubai after visiting Afghanistan, she reflected on a school shooting in Chechnya and asked herself what the last thing a child should hear might be. "The most important thing I need to tell them is that God loves them, has a purpose for their life, and that they are not alone," she said.

She described the concept of "abundant life" as rooted in John 10:10 in the Bible. Reflecting on that earlier village, she said she felt unable to take the children home or change their circumstances. Instead, she sensed a call to introduce them to Jesus. "Introduce them to me, and I will give them abundant life," she recalled. Since then, she has viewed that as her marching order.

From that foundation, she developed programs combining Bible stories with lessons on hygiene and health relevant to each village. Rangers act out skits and plays. A friend, Steve Gomer, suggested that ethnic Rangers should lead the teaching so it would



A doctor provides medical consultations at the event. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

have greater impact. Some Rangers were not Christian and were unfamiliar with the stories, which required distilling each message to its core. She said this built capacity among local teams rather than relying solely on outside teachers.

Today, the GLC, like Ranger School and many FBR programs, is about 80 percent run by Burma ethnic people rather than foreign volunteers. Over the years, this became central to FBR's mission: not only teaching skills, but teaching leadership and allowing local leaders to teach and operate according to their own culture and language. Ranger training, including the GLC as part of basic Ranger School, became a force multiplier, with graduates teaching others and passing on the knowledge.

GLC events always include lessons on love and forgiveness because an underlying theme in the Rangers' interactions with IDPs and resistance soldiers is that Burma will only heal if people learn to stop hating. Even though the resistance is fighting the junta, which at this time is the morally right thing to do, they must do so without hate.

The IDPs have suffered immeasurable loss at the hands of the generals, but the Rangers encourage them to abandon hate because hate destroys, love conquers. Part of the Ranger motto is, "Forgive, and don't hate each other."

The day after the Battle of Moby last year, the Rangers attended the funeral of Benedicto, a 19-year-old Karenni Ranger who died while evacuating his wounded comrades. At the GLC the next day, David told the crowd about Benedicto and how his life symbolized living and dying for love. He shared John 15:13: "No

greater love hath any man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

He then asked another young Ranger to come forward. Po-Aung hobbled up on his crutches, having been hit by the same mortar as Benedicto but surviving. David awarded him two medals, one for being wounded in the line of duty and one for bravery. They prayed for the soul of Benedicto and for Po-Aung's leg to heal.

Although Free Burma Rangers is built on Christian foundations and led by Christian principles, members are free to hold any religious view. Many in Burma are Buddhist, and a few are animist. In the Middle East, most are Muslim. The only requirement is that they act out of love.

It is easy to say you want to serve others, and easy to tell those who suffer that they should forgive. But when the crowd saw that Benedicto had given his life for them and that Po-Aung stood wounded before them, the message was no longer just words. It was real.

At that same GLC, Po-Aung was publicly presented with his baptismal certificate, as he had recently converted to Christianity.

The GLC ends with the children receiving a colored bracelet and a Good Life Club hoodie. The children then form a parade, led by the Rangers, carrying the flags of the countries and ethnic groups represented in FBR. They march through the streets, conduct a flag run, and then share a snack together.

And after the GLC finishes, the war starts again.

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



A Free Burma Rangers medic checks a child. Photo: Antonio Graceffo



David Eubank, right, and Karen Eubank, second left, at the event. Photo: Antonio Graceffo



Wong Chen

## AN UPHILL BATTLE

# A MALAYSIAN LAWMAKER ARGUES WHY MYANMAR'S RESISTANCE FACES A LONG CLIMB

*INSIGHT MYANMAR*

“I think people underestimate how resilient the Myanmar military is, and how little moral pressure actually moves them,” opines Wong Chen, a Malaysian Member of Parliament active in international relations as Malaysia held the ASEAN chair. He spoke on the Insight Myanmar Podcast just after Kuala Lumpur had taken on the role, noting that his country had a narrow window to push for a Myanmar ceasefire by leveraging ties with China and Thailand, cutting weapons and funding flows to pressure all sides into negotiations, while acknowledging ASEAN’s weak political will and the fragmented, underpowered state of the democratic opposition.

This is the first episode of a three-part series for the Insight Myanmar Podcast, and was recorded inside the Malaysian Parliament. The conversations reveal a tension between ASEAN’s norms of non-interference and the limits of diplomatic engagement with the junta, and the far more immediate realities Malaysia faces as Myanmar’s collapse arrives in the form of Rohingya and other displaced communities living in legal limbo.

Following the experience of the past year, Wong Chen now argues that the Myanmar crisis cannot be resolved through moral appeals, symbolic diplomacy, or repeated Western advocacy. His central thesis on

this second appearance is that peace will only emerge when the military junta faces sustained pressure from unified internal resistance and coordinated regional pragmatism. Without leverage, he maintains, dialogue becomes theater, and international engagement only prolongs the conflict.

Wong Chen grounds his assessment in Malaysia’s experience as ASEAN chair. The organization operates by consensus and rotates its chairmanship annually, and when Malaysia assumed the role, Wong Chen was cautiously optimistic. Its Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, was widely regarded as a human rights reformer, and many observers expected Malaysia to take a firmer stance against Myanmar’s military rulers. ASEAN already had developed a framework—the Five-Point Consensus—intended to stop violence, facilitate dialogue, and allow humanitarian access. Although it had never been effectively enforced, Wong Chen initially believed Malaysia might push this framework toward real implementation.

By midyear, that optimism faded, however. Malaysia pursued what Wong Chen describes as a pragmatic policy, engaging both the junta and Myanmar’s armed opposition. He opposes legitimizing the military, but accepts that communication is unavoidable if

any settlement is to be reached. His concern is not dialogue itself, but its asymmetric consequences; meetings involving ASEAN officials are repeatedly reframed by junta-controlled media as recognition and endorsement. Arguing that silence in ASEAN diplomacy is often weaponized by authoritarian actors, Wong Chen has repeatedly pressed Malaysian officials to publicly clarify the nature of its meetings with the junta, so far with mixed results.

Another issue affecting ASEAN's ability to mediate Myanmar's crisis is that, unlike other bilateral disputes it has attempted to resolve (such as the Cambodia–Thailand border conflict last year), it requires sustained, multi-year engagement, rather than shifting priorities produced by its rotating annual chair. In this context, recurring global distractions—trade disputes, Trump-era tariffs, and competing international breakdowns—have repeatedly pulled focus away from Myanmar, highlighting the limits of ASEAN's institutional design.

Expanding on how ASEAN's rotating leadership undermines long-term crisis management, Wong Chen explains that it reshapes initiatives institutionally by relocating operational control to new national bureaucracies, resetting staff, priorities, and risk tolerance. Because ASEAN lacks a permanent, empowered mechanism to preserve continuity in long-term crises, issues like Myanmar lose sustained leverage, creating recurring, predictable, diplomatic reset points. The junta has repeatedly exploited this institutional weakness by quickly reframing routine ASEAN engagements as endorsements, re-litigating issues previously settled, and manufacturing a narrative of ASEAN's acceptance of its legitimacy through the cumulative quantity of contacts necessitated by the cascading effects of its rotating chair.

Instead, Wong Chen argues for a permanent, well-resourced ASEAN secretariat dedicated exclusively to Myanmar. Such a body, he believes, would preserve continuity across chairmanships, counter misinformation immediately, and negotiate from accumulated experience rather than annual reinvention. "It's not good if you change the goalkeeper every year," he says, emphasizing that authoritarian negotiators benefit from facing new counterparts repeatedly.

This critique leads directly to Wong Chen's broader argument about power. He believes ASEAN's diplomatic culture is fundamentally ill-suited to dealing with the Myanmar military. ASEAN diplomats are trained to be conciliatory, discreet, and consensus-oriented, which implies good faith. The junta, by contrast, is not concerned with acting in good faith; it is coercive and

adept at manipulating appearances. Wong Chen argues that transparency, speed, and firmness are essential, and that politeness without pressure only strengthens the military's hand.

Beyond ASEAN, Wong Chen identifies China as the single most important external actor in the Myanmar crisis. He rejects the common idea that China is driven by ideological expansionism, arguing instead that Beijing's primary objective is stability and uninterrupted trade along its borders. From China's perspective, Myanmar's fractured opposition offers no reliable negotiating partner. As long as resistance forces remain divided, China defaults to dealing with the junta, which at least presents a single authority capable of guaranteeing infrastructure security.

Wong Chen insists that this dynamic will not change until Myanmar's opposition unifies politically and militarily. Ethnic armed organizations, the National Unity Government (NUG), and other resistance actors must present themselves as a coherent bloc capable of negotiating guarantees on pipelines, trade routes, and resource extraction, or, he argues, appeals to Beijing will continue to be futile. "If you're China, who do you talk to?" he asks. "One bloc can sign something. Seven blocs arguing cannot."

This assessment underpins Wong Chen's sharp critique of the NUG, the parallel civilian administration formed after the 2021 coup and composed largely of former elected officials. He respects the NUG's early efforts to document atrocities and raise international awareness, but he believes its strategy has stagnated. Continued appeals to Western governments, he argues, misunderstand current geopolitics. Western powers have little incentive to resolve Myanmar quickly because prolonged instability absorbs Chinese attention along its border. As a result, Wong Chen urges the NUG to pivot away from moral persuasion and toward regional realpolitik.

He is particularly critical of the NUG's internal structure. Wong Chen suggests that leadership decision-making appears rigid and personality-driven, discouraging strategic adaptation. Many capable figures in the Myanmar diaspora—doctors, lawyers, academics—contribute funding but remain excluded from meaningful leadership roles. Wong Chen argues that this is a structural failure. Money, he says, is power, and movements that ignore this reality weaken themselves. He believes diaspora contributors should demand transparency, accountability, and real participation rather than functioning solely as financial backers.

For Wong Chen, a deeper issue is the absence of a clearly articulated vision. He contrasts Myanmar with Ukraine, where even critics can identify a clear leader, a cohesive narrative, and a defined objective. In Myanmar, he sees only fragmentation and inconsistent messaging. Resistance forces, he argues, must clarify what they are fighting for: federalism, autonomy, revenue sharing, or eventual self-determination through referendum. Without shared goals, military action lacks coherence and negotiations lack substance. "If you don't know what you're fighting for, you can't negotiate when the time comes," he warns.

This leads to Wong Chen's most controversial position: that armed resistance is unavoidable. When he says "you have to fight," he means both literal battlefield resistance and coordinated political struggle. He argues that if the international community refuses to intervene militarily, it has no moral standing to criticize how resistance groups acquire weapons or resources. War, he insists, forces brutal choices, and selective moralism only prolongs suffering. "If you're not willing to send soldiers, you can't lecture people on how they survive a war," he says. Wong Chen does not romanticize violence, but says the reality is that negotiations only become meaningful when opposing parties possess real leverage: that could be credible political organization... or coordinated military pressure. ASEAN, he says, cannot itself provide armed force as leverage; its role is limited to facilitating negotiations once such leverage exists.

In this context of leverage, Wong Chen turns to the Rohingya crisis. He recounts meetings with Rohingya representatives and describes them as earnest but politically unprepared; while they garner sympathy, they lack organized leadership, and without that, they have no real negotiating power. As with Myanmar's broader opposition, he maintains that credible political representation must emerge, again pointing to the diaspora as a potential source of resources, organization, and strategic direction.

Wong Chen is careful not to present himself as a Myanmar specialist. He describes himself instead as a policymaker whose views have been shaped by exposure to the crisis rather than deep scholarly expertise. His continued engagement stems from a belief that solutions remain possible if the parties rethink entrenched positions. In discussing potential political frameworks, he references the Panglong Agreement as a historical example of ethnic autonomy within a federal union, suggesting that a future settlement might include autonomy arrangements and even the option

of referenda after a period of stability.

Wong Chen's cautious optimism ultimately rests not on moral progress but on the possibility of a change in geopolitical balance in the region being a catalyst for pressure to end the conflict in Myanmar. He believes that shifting U.S.-China dynamics, competition over rare earth minerals and changing ASEAN leadership may create openings for decisive intervention. Here he introduces an unconventional possibility: Donald Trump. Wong Chen openly disagrees with Trump's politics, particularly his rejection of climate science, but he argues that from a power-politics perspective, Trump's transactional style, appetite for coercion, and desire for spectacle could succeed where conventional diplomacy has failed. Myanmar's rare earth resources, which are valuable for advanced military technologies, give the United States a concrete incentive to engage. "I'm not a fan at all," Wong Chen says of Trump. "But sometimes, to deal with a bully, you need someone the bully fears."

In the end, however, Wong Chen places responsibility squarely on the various factions of the Myanmar resistance to coalesce around a shared vision and leadership, to generate the leverage necessary to move the conflict toward resolution. External actors can facilitate, pressure, and mediate, but they cannot substitute for internal unity and resolve. ASEAN has limits, the West has competing interests, and China responds only to leverage. "You have to do it yourself," he says of the resistance. "There's only so much we are willing and able to do. The solution must come from you."

#### LISTEN TO THE PODCAST

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/2/23/episode-492-an-uphill-battle>

## MYANMAR'S THIRD PARLIAMENT TO CONVENE IN MARCH FOLLOWING CONTROVERSIAL USDP LANDSLIDE VICTORY

**M**yanmar's National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) has officially scheduled the first sessions of the country's third Parliament to begin in mid-March, signalling the military's intent to finalize a new government framework by April 2026.

According to the announcement issued on 23 February 2026, the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) will convene at 10:00 am on 16 March, followed by the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) on 18 March. The first regular sessions for regional and state legislatures are slated to follow on 20 March.

The Pyithu Hluttaw session will be opened by Speaker U T Khun Myat, while the Amyotha Hluttaw session will be convened by NDSC Chief Executive Aung Lin Dwe.

In addition, the first regular sessions of the third regional and state Hluttaws are scheduled to be held on 20 March.

The upcoming sessions follow a three-phase general election held between December 2025 and January 2026, which the military-backed Union

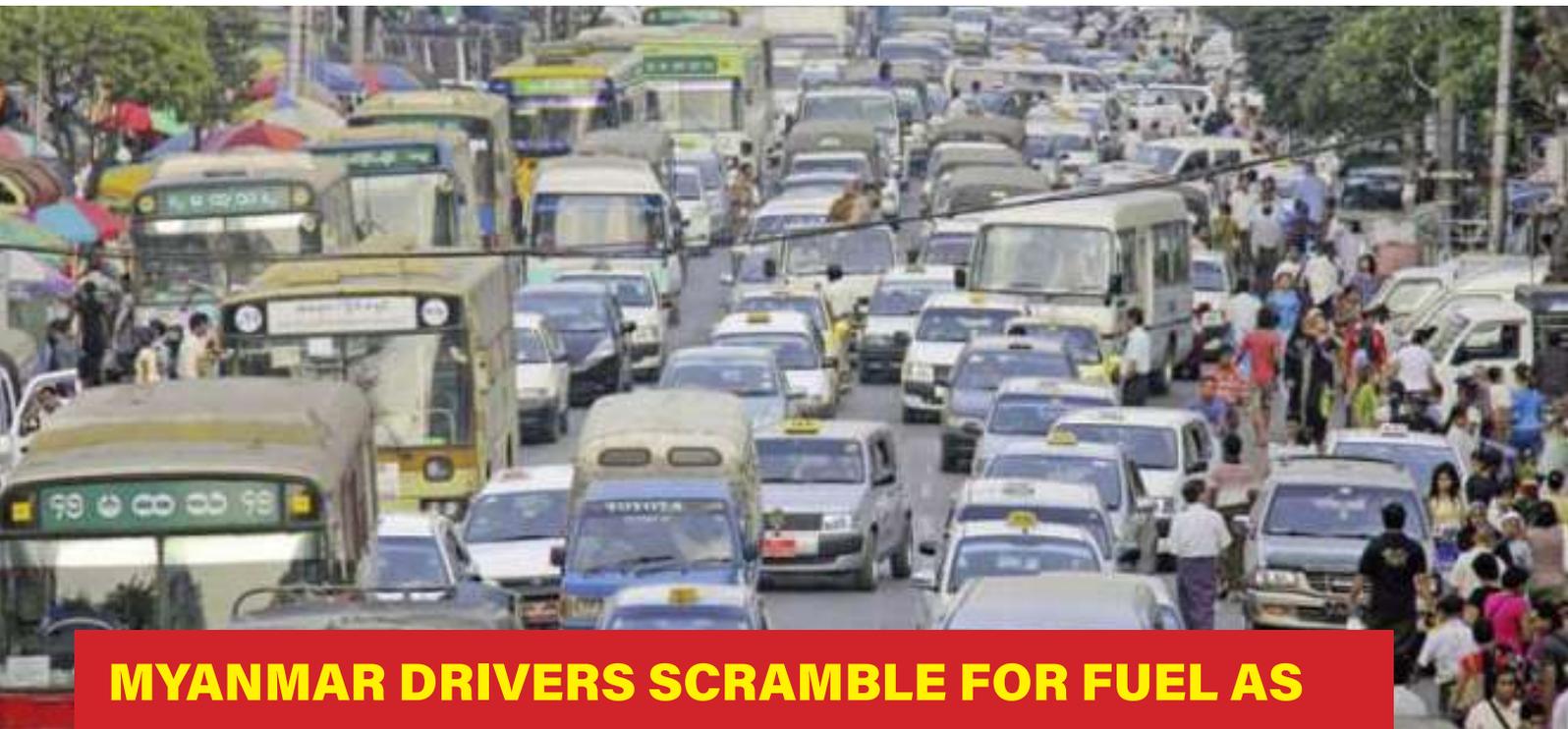
Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) claimed to have won in a landslide.

The Myanmar junta stated that the Hluttaws are being convened in accordance with Articles 427 and 154(b) of the 2008 Constitution, as well as Article 34(b) of the 2012 Amyotha Hluttaw Law.

Incoming representatives have been instructed to report to Naypyidaw as early as 10 March to undergo security screenings and finalize accommodation at designated parliamentary guesthouses.

After talks on 18 February between the junta's Foreign Minister U Than Swe and Thailand's foreign minister, Thai officials said Myanmar would appoint a new president, prime minister, and commander-in-chief before the Thingyan festival in mid-April.

However, the election and parliamentary process taking place amid ongoing armed conflict and the displacement of millions of people, has been criticized by revolutionary forces and the international community as an attempt to legitimize power without reflecting the will of the people.



## MYANMAR DRIVERS SCRAMBLE FOR FUEL AS MIDEAST WAR CUTS SUPPLY

**S**naking queues of vehicles waited in Myanmar for shrivelling petrol supplies on Wednesday, with some gas stations shuttered as fuel stocks dried up due to the war in the Middle East.

The US-Israeli attacks on Iran over the weekend and wider war across the Middle East have hampered oil supplies from the resource-rich region and sent global prices rocketing.

Myanmar imports 90 percent of its fuel oil, according to 2024 figures, and has long suffered from a fragile energy supply chain owing to the civil war consuming the country since the military staged a coup five years ago.

The junta has announced half of private vehicles will be ordered off the roads each day, based on licence plate numbers, starting this weekend in order to preserve fuel.

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said Wednesday that Myanmar has 40 days' worth of fuel stockpiles.

The traffic curbs were meant to ensure the country is "able to get through the oil difficulties facing the world by using it systematically", he added in an audio message to reporters.

But in the largest city Yangon, an AFP journalist saw roughly 50 vehicles queued outside each of the five petrol stations they visited on Wednesday.

One south Yangon gas station was shut, with a handwritten notice telling customers fuel tankers were

queueing to dock in the harbour and "petrol sales are suspended until they arrive".

Neighbouring Thailand has said it secured two months' worth of oil supplies but would suspend exports to conserve its holdings.

Elsewhere in the region, petrol stations in the capital of Laos -- which imports nearly all of its oil and gasoline from Thailand, according to official data -- were packed with queues of idling vehicles throughout Monday.

Bangkok swiftly announced an exemption for Laos, easing the panic-buying, and by Wednesday morning the lines of cars and motorbikes had disappeared from forecourts in Vientiane.

But in the Myanmar frontier town of Tachileik, an AFP reporter saw signs cross-border supplies from Thailand had been cut -- with some petrol stations shut on Wednesday after an up-to-threelfold price spike the day before.

Outside the gates of one closed filling station, dozens of motorbike riders still queued expectantly.

Electric vehicles, buses, taxis, cargo vehicles, emergency services and garbage trucks will be exempt from the junta's new rules, but it is not clear how they will be enforced with huge parts of the country in the hands of rebel factions.

AFP



## UK TO STOP ISSUING STUDY VISAS FOR AFGHANISTAN, CAMEROON, MYANMAR AND SUDAN

The British government announced Tuesday that it would stop issuing education visas to nationals from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan and work visas for Afghans as part of its broader clampdown on asylum seekers.

The Home Office said there had been a surge in asylum applications by students from those countries and almost 135,000 asylum seekers in total had entered the UK using legal routes since 2021.

"Britain will always provide refuge to people fleeing war and persecution, but our visa system must not be abused," said Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood in a statement. "That is why I am taking the unprecedented decision to refuse visas for those nationals seeking to exploit our generosity."

The Home Office said the number of asylum applications by students from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar and Sudan had "rocketed" by more than 470 percent between 2021 and 2025.

Migration has become a major issue in British politics with the hard-right Reform UK surging in opinion polls with its anti-migration stance.

Successive governments have struggled to contain small boats crossing the Channel from France, which bring large numbers of undocumented migrants. But the authorities also face pressure to reduce numbers of asylum seekers entering on other routes.

The Home Office said the government has "reduced student asylum claims by 20 percent over the course of 2025, further action is needed as those arriving on study visas still make up 13 percent of all claims in the system".

AFP



## FBI VOWS TO ESCALATE PURSUIT OF SCAM SYNDICATES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has vowed to aggressively pursue Chinese organised crime syndicates operating scam compounds across Southeast Asia, warning that “geographical borders will not protect criminals” who target American victims.

“We know where you are and we are coming for you,” Deputy Assistant Director Scott Schelble said during a virtual press briefing hosted by the US State Department’s Asia Pacific Media Hub on 24 February.

Schelble spoke after official travel to Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, where he met senior law enforcement officials and observed what he described as the scale of transnational fraud networks operating in the region.

The compounds, he said, are not isolated operations but “entire facilities dedicated to fraud on an industrial scale,” underscoring what US authorities view as the organised and systematised nature of the threat.

According to the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Centre (IC3), more than 80,000 complaints were filed in 2025 linked to online fraud schemes, with reported losses exceeding US\$2.9 billion. Schelble described the figures as “staggering,” reflecting what he called a global criminal enterprise.

“These are not small or isolated crimes,” he said, characterising the networks as “sophisticated, well-

resourced criminal enterprises” that exploit technology, vulnerable individuals and jurisdictional gaps to generate enormous profits.

He also linked the scam centres to human trafficking and forced labour, saying the activity is “no longer just cybercrime. It’s organised crime. It involves human trafficking, money laundering, and corruption all wrapped into one”. Victims include Americans who lose life savings, as well as trafficked individuals allegedly coerced into carrying out online fraud.

While authorities in Cambodia and Thailand have intensified crackdowns in recent years, Schelble cautioned that enforcement pressure in one location often leads syndicates to relocate. “This is not a Cambodian problem... not a Vietnamese problem or a Thai problem. This is regional,” he said, stressing that no single country can address the issue alone.

The FBI is working alongside the Royal Thai Police, Cambodian National Police and Vietnam’s Ministry of Public Security in joint task force settings. Schelble said Washington’s strategy focuses on disrupting criminal networks and dismantling the financial infrastructure underpinning them.

“The fight is far from over,” he said, signalling sustained US engagement in Southeast Asia’s battle against transnational scam operations.



## US JUDGE RULES TRUMP THIRD-COUNTRY DEPORTATIONS 'UNLAWFUL'

**A** US federal judge ruled on 25 February that the Trump administration policy of deporting undocumented migrants to countries that are not their own is unlawful.

District Judge Brian Murphy put his ruling on so-called "third-country deportations" on hold for 15 days to allow the government to file an appeal.

"This case is about whether the Government may, without notice, deport a person to the wrong country, or a country where he is likely to be persecuted, or tortured," Murphy wrote.

The Department of Homeland Security has said it is "fine" to deport a migrant to a third country so long as DHS knows they will not be shot on arrival, Murphy said.

"It is not fine, nor is it legal," he said.

The judge noted that Congress has made it US policy not to deport people to countries where their lives would be in danger or they could be subject to torture.

Under the DHS policy, however, "immigration officers need not give notice or any opportunity to object before removing someone to an unfamiliar and potentially dangerous country," Murphy said.

A person may be deported if the government has received "'assurances' that no persecution or torture will happen there," he said.

"This new policy -- which purports to stand in for the protections Congress has mandated -- fails to satisfy due process for a raft of reasons, not least of which is that nobody really knows anything about these purported 'assurances,'" Murphy said.

"Whom do they cover? What do they cover? Why has the Government deemed them credible? How can anyone even know for certain that they exist?" he asked.

Murphy, an appointee of Democratic president Joe Biden, previously sought to block the deportation of a group of migrants to war-torn South Sudan but was overruled by the conservative-dominated Supreme Court.

According to the US authorities, the eight men -- two from Myanmar, two from Cuba, and one each from Vietnam, Laos, Mexico and South Sudan -- were convicted violent criminals.

The Trump administration has defended third-country deportations as necessary since the home nations of some of those who are targeted for removal sometimes refuse to accept them.

Donald Trump campaigned for president promising to expel millions of undocumented migrants from the United States, and he has taken a number of actions aimed at speeding up deportations since returning to the White House.

AFP



Bombing in Tehran. Photo: AFP

## MIDDLE EAST WAR SPIRALS AS IRAN HITS KURDS IN IRAQ

Israel pounded Tehran with fresh strikes and Iran targeted Kurdish guerilla groups in Iraq on 5 March as a spiralling war in the Middle East engulfed the entire region.

A conflict ignited Saturday with US-Israeli attacks that killed Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has spread rapidly, snarling global shipping and energy markets, and sowing panic and chaos in previously safe-haven Gulf nations.

In Lebanon, AFPTV images showed buildings in rubble and plumes of black smokes drifting over Beirut after Israeli strikes aimed at Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah.

AFP reporters in Tehran heard fighter jets screaming across the skies in the west of the city and several explosions as Israel launched a fresh barrage.

Earlier Thursday, Tehran said it had hit Iraq-based Kurdish groups, as the United States reportedly seeks to arm Iranian Kurdish guerillas to infiltrate Iran.

The strikes which killed a member of an exiled Iranian Kurdish group, according to a representative, followed a warning from Iranian officials.

"Separatist groups should not think that a breeze has blown and try to take action," said Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council.

"We will not tolerate them in any way."

The strikes were further evidence of how the war is drawing in parties across the region and also further afield.

Australia deployed two military aircraft to the theatre while Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney said he could not rule out his armed forces taking part in hostilities.

The war has also dragged in NATO member Turkey after a missile launched from Iran was destroyed by NATO air defences as it headed towards its airspace.

While a Turkish official said the missile appeared to have been aimed at a British base in Cyprus, Turkey summoned the Iranian ambassador over the incident.

The conflict even reached the coast of Sri Lanka, where a US submarine sank an Iranian warship, Washington's first torpedoing of a vessel since World War II.

The strike killed at least 87 people, Sri Lankan officials said, with 61 remaining missing. Thirty-two sailors were rescued, many wounded, said Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath.

"Mark my words: The US will come to bitterly regret the precedent it has set", said Iranian Foreign Minister Abas Araghchi about the attack that he described as "an atrocity at sea."

Iran's official IRNA news agency said 1,045 military personnel and civilians have been killed since the war began, a toll AFP could not independently verify.

**'We will not surrender'**

In the early hours of Thursday, AFP reporters in Jerusalem heard explosions following warnings of incoming Iranian missile fire, but residents were quickly cleared to leave their shelters.

Across the border in Lebanon, Israel said its forces had hit "several command centres belonging to the Hezbollah terrorist organisation" in south Beirut.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) said a separate pre-dawn Israeli drone strike hit an apartment in Beddawi, a Palestinian refugee camp near Tripoli, killing senior Hamas official Wassim Atallah al-Ali and his wife.

Hezbollah's leader vowed Wednesday to step up its fight against Israel, saying the group had targeted Israeli positions as far as Tel Aviv in at least 15 attacks.

"We are facing aggression... our choice is to confront it until the ultimate sacrifice, and we will not surrender," Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem declared in his first speech since the latest round of fighting broke out.

Lebanese authorities said at least 72 people had been killed, 437 wounded and 83,000 displaced from their homes since Monday.

Iran has retaliated by hitting US-linked interests in its Gulf neighbours, as well as energy infrastructure.

Thirteen people, seven of them civilians, have been killed in countries around the Gulf since the war began, including an 11-year-old girl in Kuwait.

Qatar said Thursday it was evacuating residents living near the US embassy in Doha, after earlier announcing it had thwarted attacks on Hamad International Airport.

The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar all said they had intercepted Iranian missiles on

Wednesday, including a drone set to hit the Saudis' huge Ras Tanura refinery.

**'Catastrophic'**

In Washington, the US Senate rejected a resolution aimed at limiting US military action, voting largely along party lines, with Republicans backing Trump.

Even if the measure had cleared the Senate and the House -- where a vote on a similar resolution is expected Thursday -- Trump would have been able to veto it.

The war could usher in a "prolonged period of flux" for the global economy, International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva warned on Thursday.

Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards have claimed the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf chokepoint through which a fifth of the world's crude oil flows, with oil tanker transits down 90 percent, according to market intelligence firm Kpler.

A tanker in the waters off Kuwait became the latest casualty of the conflict, after it was hit with a "large explosion" that caused an oil spill, the British maritime security agency UKMTO reported.

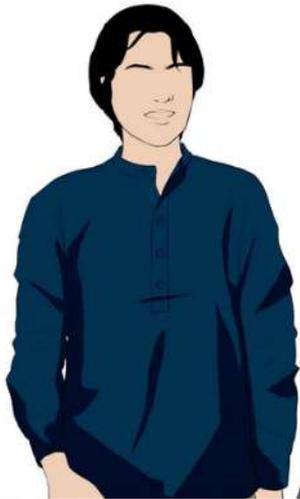
Facing energy shortages, South Korea said it was activating a \$68-billion market stabilisation fund, while China reportedly told oil refiners to stop exporting diesel and gasoline.

With flights scrapped and travellers stranded or hastily repatriated, the war is also hammering tourism in a region that has become a prized destination for holidaymakers worldwide.

"My last group of tourists left three days ago, and all the other groups planned for March have been cancelled," said Nazih Rawashdeh, a tour guide near Irbid, in northern Jordan.

"This is the start of the high season here. It's catastrophic," he told AFP.

AFP



## THE CENTER HOLDS

“I am not talking as a representative of Anya [Myanmar’s central “dry zone”]. I am just a normal person from Anya,” says Saw Bosco, a Myanmar peace process practitioner, grassroots educator on federalism, and researcher of political economy. In this interview, he reflects in on decades of personal history, national failure, and ongoing struggle, weaving together faith, identity, violence, and economics into a single argument: peace in Myanmar cannot exist without dignity, inclusion, and material survival for ordinary people

Saw Bosco was raised in a small Catholic community in central Myanmar, part of the Bayingyi people, who were descendants of Portuguese settlers who had been exiled centuries earlier and absorbed into Burmese culture. While the community spoke Burmese, farmed like their neighbors and identified culturally as local, their Catholic faith marked them as different. Growing up, Bosco lived the reality of being a “double minority”: Christian in a Buddhist-majority state and culturally peripheral within a political system that rigidly tied race, religion, and citizenship together. These early experiences formed his understanding that marginalized groups in Myanmar have to try to blend in to survive, even if that does not mean a commensurate level of protection within society and under the law.

Bosco expands on this point, explaining that Christian identity in Myanmar is experienced differently depending on where one lives. In ethnic-majority Christian states—such as Chin, Kachin, and parts of Karen—religious life can be practiced more publicly, though still under state constraint. Elsewhere, the experience is more fraught and complex. In practice, Myanmar’s administrative system operates as though ethnicity and religion are

fixed, mutually reinforcing categories. Those whose identities do not align with these expectations often become administratively suspect; Bamar or mixed-heritage Christians, in particular, do not fit the state’s standardized race-religion templates, leading to recurring bureaucratic scrutiny. National identity cards, citizenship status, passports, university access, and employment eligibility are frequently questioned, delayed, or denied when religious identity does not correspond with the ethnicity the system expects. While similar obstacles exist in Christian-majority ethnic states, recognized ethnicity there provides an administrative legibility that makes Christian identity more intelligible to the system—and therefore less fraught.

After the 2021 coup, this general vulnerability of non-Buddhist Bamar or mixed heritage Christians intensified into targeted violence. Christian villages in Sagaing were burned not only for resisting military control but also because religious differences became an excuse for soldiers to justify more destructive action, even if the victims shared ethnicity or kinship with them. Boscos careful to note that military brutality has affected communities across religious and ethnic lines, and often in more deliberate, overt and brutal ways, most famously the terrible violence against the Rohingya; at the same time, however, he wants to highlight this lesser known kind of violence against non-Buddhist Bamar/mixed-heritage Burmese, which has affected him and his family directly.

Bosco then turns to identity politics more broadly. He situates authorities’ obsession with race and religion within colonial-era classification systems that were later weaponized by the military. Over time, the state promoted rigid ethnic categories, encouraging communities to cling to identity for survival while simultaneously denying protection. Mixed-heritage individuals, like Bosco, often found no political home. He recalls hesitating to work under any single ethnic banner during peacebuilding efforts, aware that mistrust could surface at any moment.

### CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/2/11/episode-485-the-center-holds>



# MYANMAR EMBASSIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST ISSUE A WARNING TO NATIONALS IN THE WAKE OF US AND ISRAELI ATTACKS ON IRAN

**M**yanmar embassies in Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have issued urgent advisories calling on Myanmar nationals to strictly follow local security instructions as tensions escalate in the Middle East.

In separate statements released over the past few days, the Myanmar Embassy in Tel Aviv urged citizens to comply with real-time emergency alerts issued by Israel's Home Front Command and to remain in close contact with the embassy during heightened security conditions.

The advisory follows a series of airstrikes and missile exchanges involving the United States, Israel, and Iran that began on 28 February.

The Myanmar embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel, provided a hotline and email address for emergency assistance and instructed nationals to closely monitor official security guidance.

Similarly, the Myanmar Embassy in Riyadh advised Myanmar citizens in Saudi Arabia to exercise caution, avoid unnecessary travel, and follow announcements issued by local authorities.

On 28 February, the Myanmar Embassy in Abu

Dhabi issued a related statement advising Myanmar nationals in the UAE to remain in secure residences or shelters and to refrain from unnecessary outdoor movement or travel.

The embassy urged citizens to comply with instructions issued by relevant local authorities and to follow official announcements from the UAE government as well as other reliable sources.

The coordinated advisories come amid broader regional instability, with some countries implementing precautionary security measures, including restrictions on public gatherings and temporary closures of workplaces and schools.

Myanmar nationals residing in affected areas have been encouraged to prepare essential documents and remain alert to rapidly changing conditions.

No casualties involving Myanmar citizens have been reported by the embassies at the time of the statements.

Myanmar generally avoids taking a stance on geopolitical issues unless they directly affect its efforts at diplomatic recognition.



Nurul Amin Shah Alam.  
Photo: Supplied

# ROHINGYA REFUGEE'S DEATH IN NEW YORK SPARKS OUTRAGE ONLINE

**A** 56-year-old Rohingya man from Myanmar — Nurul Amin Shah Alam — was found dead in Buffalo, New York, after being released by U.S. immigration authorities, sparking strong criticism from politicians, activists, and social media users.

On social media, many users expressed shock and anger. Some comments called the incident “absolutely horrible” and demanded public accountability, saying it was wrong to abandon a vulnerable man.

Another user described the incident as similar to a known abusive policing practice, arguing that leaving someone in need in winter conditions is a form of neglect.

Several comments also drew attention to how the man’s inability to speak English and his disability should have meant extra care was needed, not abandonment.

Across social media, many users used strong language — calling the situation a failure of humanity and protection — reflecting deep concern over how migrants and refugees are treated by authorities in practice.

# 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.