

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

## BY HOOK OR BY CROOK

What next after coup-maker  
Min Aung Hlaing fraudulently  
snares the Myanmar presidency?

## ELECTION UPDATE

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Analysis & Insight



# DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

# MYANMAR'S MAGICIAN

New Myanmar president Min Aung Hlaing is grinning. He has pulled off a magic trick, swapping his role of coup-maker and commander-in-chief of Myanmar's armed forces for the civilian role of president in the wake of his sham 2025-26 election. With the backing of major players China and Russia, this former general seeks to crush the Spring Revolution resistance and attempt to woo international and South East Asian sentiment in his favour.

Min Aung Hlaing's transition from uniformed commander-in-chief to civilian president is less a transformation than a recalibration of power, designed to consolidate military control while softening its international image. The choreography of the 2025-26 elections - widely dismissed as neither free nor fair - provides a thin veneer of legitimacy, allowing him to claim a constitutional mandate while maintaining the coercive backbone of the armed forces under the military-written 2008 Constitution. His strategy hinges on three overlapping ambitions - crushing domestic resistance, stabilizing elite alliances at home, and reshaping external perceptions abroad.

At the core of his plan is the continued militarization of governance under a civilian façade. By stepping into the presidency, he can argue that Myanmar has formally returned to constitutional rule, even as the military's corrosive influence remains deeply embedded in political institutions, security structures, and the economy.

This duality enables him to justify ongoing crackdowns on the Spring Revolution resistance as matters of "law and order," reframing a political uprising as a security threat. Intensified surveillance, targeted arrests, and coordinated offensives against resistance strongholds are likely to persist, but now under the language of civilian authority rather than outright martial rule.

Equally important is his effort to fragment and exhaust the opposition. By leveraging ceasefire offers, selective amnesties, and divide-and-rule tactics

among ethnic armed organizations, he aims to prevent the emergence of a unified opposition front. Economic pressure will also play a role: controlling access to resources, trade routes, and business opportunities allows the regime to reward compliance and punish dissent, gradually eroding the resistance's operational capacity.

On the international stage, Min Aung Hlaing is betting on pragmatic acceptance. Backing from major powers such as China and Russia provides diplomatic cover, arms supplies, and economic lifelines, reducing the impact of Western sanctions. At the same time, he is likely to recalibrate his messaging toward members of ASEAN, emphasizing stability, non-interference, and regional economic integration. By presenting himself as the guarantor of order in a strategically located region of Asia he seeks to persuade neighbouring governments that engagement, rather than isolation, is the more practical path.

Humanitarian gestures and controlled political concessions may also be deployed to soften criticism. Limited prisoner releases, tightly managed dialogues, or promises of future reforms can create just enough ambiguity to divide international opinion and weaken coordinated pressure. These moves are unlikely to signal genuine liberalization - rather, they serve as tactical adjustments to buy time and legitimacy.

Ultimately, Min Aung Hlaing's "magic trick" depends on sustaining a delicate balance: projecting civilian normalcy while preserving military dominance, suppressing resistance without triggering unmanageable backlash, and securing enough public acceptance to keep the country functioning - the magician safe in his ivory castle of Naypyidaw - a capital built to protect military power. Whether this balancing act can endure will depend not only on his ability to control events, but on the resilience of those determined to resist him.

## EDITORIAL

# mizzima

WEEKLY

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Cover photo by AFP



Coup-maker Min Aung Hlaing hopes the world will be fooled by his civilian clothes. Photo: AFP

# BY HOOK OR BY CROOK

## WHAT NEXT AFTER

## COUP-MAKER MIN AUNG

## HLAING FRAUDULENTLY

## SNARES MYANMAR'S

## PRESIDENCY?

There was little surprise. Former military leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing was officially elected as the 11th President of Myanmar on 3 April, during a session of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) in Naypyidaw.

Securing 429 votes, the 70-year-old former Commander-in-Chief successfully transitioned to the presidency through a military-steered parliamentary process following the 2025-26 three-part general election.

The election ceremony took place at the Union Parliament Assembly Hall, where the Presidential Election Committee composed of 586 representatives, voted to select the President from among three qualified Vice Presidents.

The parliament consists of 263 elected Pyithu Hluttaw members, 157 elected Amyotha Hluttaw members, and 166 military appointees.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing was nominated by the Pyithu Hluttaw, while the Amyotha Hluttaw put forward female candidate Nan Ni Ni Aye. The military representative group nominated Nyo Saw. In the final tally, Nyo Saw was designated as Vice President (1) and Nan Ni Ni Aye as Vice President (2).

## MILITARY-ALIGNED FIGURES

The new leadership reflects a tight-knit circle of military and military-aligned figures – men in green changing their clothes for white or black. Vice President Nyo



Clapping his own success. Photo: AFP

Saw, 67, is a fellow graduate of the Defence Services Academy's 19th intake alongside the President. A former General and Chairman of the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC), Nyo Saw served as a key advisor to the Senior General before winning a seat for Cocogyun Township in the 2025-26 election.

Vice President Nan Ni Ni Aye, 57, brings a background in academia and civil service. A veteran of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) since 2010, she has served two terms in the Amyotha Hluttaw and was elected via the proportional representation system in Kayin State.

## CHANGE IN POWER DYNAMICS

The political landscape resulting from this transition has seen notable shifts in power dynamics. While the USDP emerged as the dominant party in the 2025-26 election - which notably excluded the National League for Democracy (NLD) - its chairman, Khin Yi, secured only the position of Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw - effectively limiting his ability to exercise power.

Meanwhile, Min Aung Hlaing, who did not personally contest a seat in the general election, sneakily ascended to the presidency - a move many Myanmar pundits prophesied. Other contenders, including Dr. Kyaw Swe of the National Unity Party and Dr. Manam Tu Ja of the Kachin State People's Party, were defeated in preliminary voting sessions held on 31 March.

## NEW MILITARY COMMANDER

This formalization of power follows a strategic military reshuffle on 30 March, when Min Aung Hlaing stepped down from his 15-year tenure as Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's armed forces. He transferred the

military's top post to his confidant, General Ye Win Oo, a graduate of Officer Training School (OTS) Intake 77.

This move was widely viewed as a necessary constitutional maneuver to allow the Senior General to assume the civilian-clothed role of President while maintaining deep-rooted influence over both the legislative and defense apparatuses of the state - his finger on the trigger of the military war against the Myanmar people.

Min Aung Hlaing may be heavily criticized by opponents but these moves indicate he is a wily operator, intent on maintaining a critical hold on the levers of power. At the same time, he has his eye on changing international sentiment, including ASEAN's approach to his regime.

## REBRANDING OR REFORM?

As Burma Campaign UK notes, too many times in the past the international community has been unable to distinguish between rebranding and reform in military-run Myanmar. Or if they do, they take a "something is better than nothing" approach even though it's something they would never dream of accepting in their own country. This is the danger now.

"The lack of institutional memory in foreign ministries around the world also benefits the Burmese military. They recycle the same tricks over and over again and diplomats, mostly in post covering Burma for only two to four years at a time, think something new is happening," the NGO notes.

Despite warnings from the campaign and other NGOs, governments don't listen, Burma Campaign UK says. They deploy the phrases that democracy and

human rights activists have been hearing for decades: “We have to wait and see,” “We have to look for any opening and encourage it.”

This is problematic. A predication that the Burmese military cannot be defeated and therefore have to be accommodated has underpinned international policy making towards Burma for years. Instead of seeing their role as assisting the people of Burma to remove a corrupt oppressive criminal institution which has undermined the country for decades, they tell the people of Burma they have to have dialogue and compromise with their oppressor, even though their oppressor never compromises themselves.

This is what General Min Aung Hlaing and his fellow generals will be counting on now. They have the strong backing of China, Russia and India. But it is unli-

kely that the USA, UK and EU will fall for their costume change.

And the majority of the people of Burma will not. Despite the pressures, the Myanmar resistance and people will keep fighting and protesting, with the aim to build a bottom-up federal democracy.

This will not be easy. But after decades of horrific military rule, now offers the only chance to push back against the brutal dictator, whatever the colour of his costume.

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## ANALYSIS &amp; INSIGHT



Min Aung Hlaing even takes the USDP for a ride. Photo: AFP

## THE ROAD OF AN OPPORTUNIST

The Myanmar junta leader has sought to justify the military's seizure of state power in 2021 by repeatedly alleging widespread fraud in the 2020 general election. However, his subsequent rise to the presidency through the 2025–2026 electoral process - widely criticized by observers as lacking credibility - has reinforced accusations of political inconsistency and opportunism.

Despite denouncing the National League for Democracy (NLD)-led election as unfair, the junta chief has now assumed the highest civilian office through a process that domestic and international critics have described as a "sham election." Notably, criticism has not been limited to opposition groups. Some pro-military supporters have also voiced dissatisfaction over his decision to take on the presidency, suggesting unease even within the regime's broader support base.

The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M), a group formed by former senior United Nations officials, has gone further, alleging that the junta leader was deeply determined - "almost to the point of death" - to secure the presidency. In preparation for this transition, he relinquished his position as commander-in-chief to a trusted general, widely regarded as a close confidant and key intelligence figure within the military establishment.

Meanwhile, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), despite claiming a landslide victory in the elections, has not been proportionately rewarded

with top political posts. Party chairperson and former general Khin Yi was appointed speaker of the lower house, a position seen by some within the party as falling short of expectations. This perceived imbalance in the distribution of power has reportedly caused discontent among USDP members, even as the party leadership continues to align closely with the military, which organized the electoral process.

Under the current parliamentary system, three blocs - the upper house, the lower house, and military-appointed members of parliament - each nominate a vice-presidential candidate. Lawmakers then vote, with the highest vote-getter becoming president, while the second- and third-place candidates assume the roles of first and second vice-president, respectively.

In the latest vote, the lower house nominated the junta leader Min Aung Hlaing alongside a candidate from the National Unity Party. As widely anticipated, the junta chief secured an overwhelming majority,

receiving all but 10 votes. The current prime minister, Nyo Saw, was elected as first vice-president with 126 votes, while Nan Ni Ni Aye, the USDP chairwoman for Kayin State, became second vice-president with just 29 votes.

The outcome underscores the military's continued dominance over Myanmar's political system, with key leadership positions consolidated among loyalists and allies despite ongoing questions over the legitimacy of the electoral process. All of this appears to have been deliberately engineered by the military coup-maker, Min Aung Hlaing.

### Myanmar junta seeks to protect fuel and power supplies

Since early March, Myanmar's junta has introduced a series of increasingly restrictive fuel control measures, reflecting mounting pressure on domestic supplies and efforts to manage consumption amid ongoing



Myanmar is trying to cope with the fuel crisis prompted by the war in the Middle East. Photo: AFP

shortages, largely as a result of the Middle East war – now temporarily on hold.

Beginning on March 3, authorities issued initial directives to limit fuel sales, aiming to preserve remaining stocks. One of the earliest measures included a vehicle usage restriction system based on license plate numbers: vehicles with odd-numbered plates were prohibited from driving on even dates, and vice versa.

On March 11, the junta tightened controls further by requiring vehicle owners to present official ownership documents or wheel tax receipts when purchasing fuel. Sales were limited to once per day per vehicle. Authorities said the documentation requirement was designed to curb the widespread use of unlicensed vehicles, which remain common across the country, including in parts of Yangon.

Additional restrictions followed on March 13, when authorities imposed strict daily fuel quotas based on

vehicle type. Motorcycles were limited to three litres per day, while private cars were permitted 15 litres of gasoline or 25 litres of diesel. Public transport vehicles such as shuttle buses and highway coaches were allowed up to 50 litres daily, while container trucks were capped at 150 litres.

On March 22, the system was further revised to allocate weekly fuel quotas based on engine power, with distribution managed through wheel tax records and QR code verification systems. Just days later, on March 26, authorities imposed another layer of restriction by limiting fuel purchases to once per week. By April 3, the policy had evolved again, with fuel allocations tied to the number of journeys a vehicle could demonstrate it had completed.

In parallel, the junta introduced administrative measures to reduce fuel consumption. Public sector employees were instructed to work from home every Wednesday, while fuel sales were restricted for unlicensed vehicles, as well as for operations in gold



Screengrab of the foreigners arrested in India.  
Photo: Supplied

and mineral mining and some oil field activities.

Despite these efforts, the impact on the public has been severe. Long queues at fuel stations have become a daily reality, often stretching for hours under intense heat. Farmers have reportedly transported water pumps to stations to secure fuel allocations for agricultural use, underscoring the widespread disruption to livelihoods.

A taxi driver told BBC Burmese that waiting times have worsened significantly. "We have to wait five to six hours in the sun. Some even queue overnight. It's not convenient at all. I think the waiting time is longer than before," he said. The introduction of barcode and QR code verification, along with manual checks of fuel tanks, has further slowed the process.

Nevertheless, the junta leadership has framed the measures as a success. At a recent meeting, officials claimed that daily fuel consumption had dropped from an average of 3.56 million gallons to 2.5 million gallons. The Energy Ministry projected that maintaining this reduced consumption rate could save up to \$2 billion. It also stated that domestic reserves were sufficient for 40 to 50 days, with 26 fuel shipments planned from allied countries.

While authorities highlight these figures as evidence of effective management, many citizens continue to grapple with the harsh realities of restricted access, prolonged waiting times, and rising economic strain. Although a ceasefire by the US and Iran has been put in place, fuel supplies will remain critical in the short-term.

## Cases against foreigners held by the Indian authorities ongoing

Indian authorities have arrested six Ukrainian nationals and one American citizen in connection with alleged support to Myanmar's resistance forces, according to multiple reports. The arrests were carried out at separate airports during the second week of March, with all individuals reportedly having traveled to Mizoram State, which borders Myanmar's Chin State.

India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) has accused the group of involvement in facilitating the

transfer of European-made drones to Myanmar-based revolutionary forces via Indian territory. Investigators also allege that the detainees crossed into Myanmar and made direct contact with resistance groups operating along the border. Initial charges include unauthorized travel to Mizoram - where special permits are required - and illegal cross-border movement.

According to India-based outlet The Federal, the arrests were prompted by intelligence shared by Russian authorities. Reports suggest that Russian intelligence agencies, which have been closely monitoring Ukrainian nationals abroad, alerted India about the group's travel plans. The detainees are suspected of providing technical and military training, particularly in drone operation and assembly.

Indian authorities are now reportedly preparing to pursue more serious charges under the Foreigners Act and other national security laws. Meanwhile, Ukraine's ambassador to India has rejected the accusations, maintaining that the detained citizens are innocent and not involved in any unlawful activities.

The case comes amid growing evidence of drone warfare capabilities among Myanmar's resistance forces. In early 2026, groups active in Chin State released video footage showing precision strikes using first-person-view (FPV) drones against junta positions. One such unit, identified as WITCH, has reportedly collaborated with an international anti-authoritarian network known as Anti-Fascism.

However, independent Myanmar media outlets say they are unable to verify any direct links between the detained foreign nationals and resistance forces inside Chin State.



Photo: AFP

## ASEAN PARLIAMENTARIAN GROUP CONDEMNS MYANMAR JUNTA'S MOVES TO ENSURE JUNTA LEADER'S RISE TO PRESIDENCY

The ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) condemned the Myanmar junta in a statement released on 31 March for what it called “well-orchestrated manoeuvres” to ensure Min Aung Hlaing becomes the country’s new president.

The move comes after his resignation as commander-in-chief of Myanmar’s military and subsequent placement as vice president following a junta-controlled vote in parliament.

The text of the statement continues below.

Since the 2021 coup, the junta has overseen mass killings, arbitrary detention, airstrikes on civilian communities, and the systematic persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, including the genocide of the Rohingya. His ascension to the presidency would formalise the same violent system that has already caused immense suffering, deepened social fractures, and undermined democracy and human rights.

Gen. Ye Win Oo has been installed as the new commander-in-chief, a loyal ally of Min Aung Hlaing who ran interrogation centres where thousands of political prisoners were tortured. With Ye Win Oo in command, the military remains tightly aligned with Min Aung Hlaing, securing his dominance over both the presidency and the armed forces and cementing the continuation of repression and impunity.

The recent elections and their orchestrated results—held amid continued airstrikes, bombings, and displacement—are fundamentally illegitimate. They do not reflect the will of the Myanmar people and are a

further attempt by the junta to consolidate power while evading accountability.

APHR reiterates its unwavering support for pro-democracy groups, ethnic organizations, and people’s movements who continue to resist military rule at the frontlines, defending their communities, advancing human rights, and striving toward a federal democratic transition in Myanmar.

APHR calls on ASEAN, the United Nations, and the international community—including the Philippines in its capacity as ASEAN chair—to take urgent and decisive action by condemning the junta’s consolidation of power, upholding international human rights and humanitarian law, and supporting Myanmar’s democratic forces.

It is critical to avoid a return to “business as usual,” as the junta has repeatedly used superficial civilian transitions to project an image of reform while continuing repression, prompting premature re-engagement by regional and international actors.

APHR emphasizes that the response to the Myanmar crisis must be guided by the will of the Myanmar people, respect for human rights, and the pursuit of democracy. Any recognition of Min Aung Hlaing’s presidency would legitimize atrocities and impunity that undermine the rights of peoples across Myanmar. Democracy, human rights, and justice demand international solidarity and coordinated action to support the people’s struggle against dictatorship.



Campaigning for  
Human Rights  
and Democracy

## GENERAL OR PRESIDENT, MIN AUNG HLAING REMAINS JUNTA LEADER, SAYS BURMA CAMPAIGN UK

The Burma Campaign UK released a commentary on 3 April on the continued role of Min Aung Hlaing as leader of the Myanmar junta no matter his title. The commentary argues that whether he is Senior General or President the junta remains in power and Min Aung Hlaing remains its leader.

The text of the commentary is as follows.

General Min Aung Hlaing, who ran the military regime in Burma yesterday, is running the military regime in Burma today.

The new title of President could be viewed as a story about General Min Aung Hlaing's personal ambitions. He does like his titles. Military-controlled media have recently been calling him: "Chairman of the State Security and Peace Commission Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Thadoe Maha Thray Sithu Thadoe Thiri Thudhamma Min Aung Hlaing."

In fact, while General Min Aung Hlaing's personal ambitions obviously play a key role in his decisions, this latest rebranding is all about preserving the rule of the military as an institution. (Note: Min Aung Hlaing retains the title of General even though he has retired as commander in chief).

The Burmese military have ruled Burma for 59 years (from 1962, not including five years of a government led by the National League for Democracy). They have survived this long in part because they are flexible,

employing many different forms and systems of military rule.

This includes political party fronts such as the Burmese Socialist Program Party and Union Solidarity and Development Party, and numerous front administrations including the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), front regimes such as that led by General Thein Sein, State Administration Council (SAC), and State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC).

It does not matter who happens to be head of the Burmese military at any given time, or what name they use for their proxy administration, it is the military as an institution which has ruled Burma for almost 60 years. They will always prioritise their own power and control and pursue their own racist Bamar Buddhist nationalist extremist vision of Burma.

At the same time, the leadership of the Burmese military are always corrupt and nepotistic, enriching themselves and the business cronies they depend on. It is not just a brutal military dictatorship, it is a massive criminal enterprise which has for decades stolen the natural resources of Burma, has been involved in the drugs trade and scam centres, illegal international arms trading, and which has distorted the entire economy of Burma for its own benefit.

The Burmese military will never reform. The only thing that changes are the forms of political system it uses to ensure its survival, and the tactics it uses to try to relieve pressure from the domestic population and international community.

In a great many ways, the military appear to be trying to replicate some of the success they achieved with the sham reform process of 2010-2021. We detailed this in our briefing paper, *The Burmese Military's 'Elections': New Date, New Danger, Same Sham*, warning of tactics the military is likely to employ. Sure enough, the military is already using some of these tactics, including the mass release of political prisoners.

Too many times in the past the international community has been unable to distinguish between rebranding and reform. Or if they do, they take a 'something is better than nothing' approach even though it's a something they would never dream of accepting in their own country.

The lack of institutional memory in foreign ministries around the world also benefits the Burmese military. They recycle the same tricks over and over again and diplomats, mostly in post covering Burma for only 2-4 years at a time, think something new is happening.

We tell them it's groundhog day, old wine in an old bottle, or history repeating itself, but they don't listen. They deploy the phrases that democracy and human rights activists have been hearing for decades: "We have to wait and see," "We have to look for any opening and encourage it."

Burmese activists have compared the Burmese military to a carnivorous plant found in Burma, the pitcher plant (often called the water jug plant in Burma), which has a liquid which smells sweet to insects but digests them when they get too close. In this analogy, United Nations and other envoys are the insects being devoured.

A predication that the Burmese military cannot be defeated and therefore have to be accommodated has underpinned international policy making towards Burma for years. Instead of seeing their role as assisting the people of Burma to remove a corrupt oppressive criminal institution which has undermined the country for decades, they tell the people of Burma they have to have dialogue and compromise with their oppressor, even though their oppressor never compromises themselves.

This is what General Min Aung Hlaing and his fellow generals will be counting on now. That diplomats will accept the superficial rebranding and public relations

gestures and wipe the slate clean.

There is a significant change in the playbook though compared to post 2010 efforts. At that time a lot more effort was made to try to persuade the international community that there was significant change coming. More effort with the elections and political party participation, and more effort with international media. And of course, Than Shwe stepping down and being replaced by General Thein Sein, who has a brutal history of human rights abuses and sexual violations by soldiers under his command, but also experience in sweet-talking diplomats.

This time round the same general is in charge. It's much harder to present yourself as a reforming regime when yesterday's dictator is today's dictator.

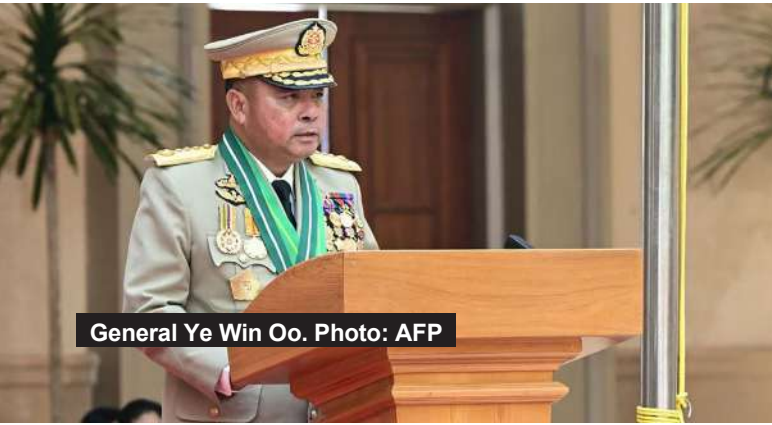
What does the limited effort in presenting elections as credible, and the continued role of Min Aung Hlaing mean?

Part is of course his ambition, but part must be that the military have calculated they can get away with it. They have the strong backing of China, Russia and India, three regional allies that are much more assertive internationally than they were 16 years ago. The military may feel they don't need to make as many concessions as they did last time round, as they don't need western countries.

They may also be calculating that the way in which western countries are no longer prioritising human rights and democracy in Burma means they don't need to make concessions, western countries will go along with their sham and start normalising relations. The Burmese military have watched how implementation of sanctions slowed to a dribble and then stopped altogether. They are watching European countries close embassies, and how mentions of Burma have fallen off joint statements at international venues like the G7.

It might be that the USA, UK and EU are willing to give the genocide general, as Rohingya activists call Min Aung Hlaing, another chance, but most people in Burma will not. They will keep fighting, keep protesting and keep building new local administrations and institutions in areas freed from Burmese military rule. They will keep building a bottom-up federal democracy.

The Burmese military, with all its different forms, titles and leaders over almost sixty years, and with all the backing from China, Russia, India and others, has never been able to defeat the people of Burma, and it never will.



General Ye Win Oo. Photo: AFP

## 'EYES AND EARS' OF JUNTA BOSS: MYANMAR GENERAL YE WIN OO

Known as the "eyes and ears" of Myanmar's junta chief, former spymaster Ye Win Oo has been spotted in top-level junta meetings, actively taking notes while his boss lectures from the head of the table.

Army chief Ye Win Oo is a close confidant of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing -- leader of a 2021 coup that plunged the country into civil war -- and was tapped on 30 March to take over his role as commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Min Aung Hlaing is expected to soon swap his military uniform for civilian dress, becoming president in a move critics call an attempt to maintain power by crafting a democratic facade.

General Ye Win Oo, who often accompanies Min Aung Hlaing on official foreign visits, typically remains discreet and behind the scenes.

But in recent months he has been seen in public more, alongside other top generals, including at an event in the capital Naypyidaw this weekend marking one year since a massive earthquake killed more than 3,800 people in the country.

AFP journalists also saw Ye Win Oo in traditional civilian clothes, guarded by military police, as he voted at a polling station in Naypyidaw alongside his wife and daughter during the first phase of a junta-orchestrated election in December.

All three have been sanctioned by the United States and the European Union over his alleged role in the putsch.

Local media has reported Ye Win Oo personally led a raid on the Naypyidaw residence of democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi on the first day of the

February 2021 coup, which saw the Nobel Peace Prize laureate detained and her popular party dissolved.

Just this month, Min Aung Hlaing promoted Ye Win Oo to the army's top leadership position, after he had served as head of military intelligence for years.

This put Ye Win Oo in one of the nation's highest military roles, taking over from Soe Win, who was deputy military chief until he was replaced on Monday.

### 'Dark history'

Ye Win Oo's advancement had sparked speculation among analysts and the public that he was being groomed to become the armed forces commander -- just as the country prepares to form a new government after pro-military parties handily won the heavily restricted election.

"Defined by his unwavering loyalty and close personal ties to the Senior General, Ye Win Oo will likely steer the military to prioritize Min Aung Hlaing's interests," said Naing Min Khant, a researcher at the Institute for Strategy and Policy Myanmar think tank.

Their close relationship dates back more than two decades to Ye Win Oo's time as a battalion commander serving under Min Aung Hlaing, who was then a regional commander of forces tasked with defending the borders with Thailand and Laos in eastern Shan state.

Ye Win Oo, 60, has been widely described by analysts and local media as the "eyes and ears" of Min Aung Hlaing, having served as chief of military intelligence from 2020 until this month, according to local media reports.

"General Ye Win Oo has a dark history," Naing Min Khant told AFP, explaining that he "earned a reputation for brutality against the democratic opposition" during his time as spymaster.

Ye Win Oo's ascent within the junta has been rapid, beginning with his appointment as joint secretary of the State Administration Council just one day after the February 1, 2021 coup.

He was promoted to the rank of general in August 2024 and became the secretary of the 10-person State Security and Peace Commission junta body in July.

While thousands of young people have fled Myanmar following the enactment of the conscription law, Ye Win Oo's son, Htet Ye Naung, reportedly completed his own military training last year alongside drafted recruits -- with his parents attending the graduation ceremony.



Photo: AFP

## LIEUTENANT GENERAL KYAW KO HTIKE APPOINTED AS MYANMAR'S NEW MILITARY INTELLIGENCE CHIEF

Lieutenant General Kyaw Ko Htike has been appointed as the Chief of Military Security Affairs (CMSA), taking over the critical military intelligence portfolio for the junta. He succeeds General Ye Win Oo, a key loyalist who was recently promoted to Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services as Senior General Min Aung Hlaing transitioned toward a civilian presidential role.

A graduate of the Defence Services Academy (DSA) 38th Intake, Lt. Gen. Kyaw Ko Htike's ascent to the top of the intelligence apparatus is described by military observers as a rapid and unexpected career turnaround.

After his advancement stalled for several years, he saw a swift series of high-level assignments, serving first as the Regional Commander of the Mandalay-based Central Command and most recently as the Chief of Military Training.

Analysts from the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) suggest his rise was bolstered by the support

of influential DSA-38 classmates and his perceived reliability in managing the Central Command after his predecessors faced disciplinary action.

"His rise was unexpected. After being stuck in his rank for a long time, he became the Central Command Commander. Shortly after, he became the Chief of Training, and now, the Intelligence Chief. He went from a stalled career to unexpectedly becoming the Chief of Military Security Affairs," said Major Naung Yo, a CDM member.

Major Naung Yo said, "Support from fellow DSA-38 graduates in top positions likely played a role. They seemed pleased with his performance as the Central Command Commander. While the two commanders before him were penalized for problems, Kyaw Ko Htike was promoted instead."

He was also awarded the Medal for Excellent Military Service in 2023.



Jakarta. Photo: Supplied

## INDONESIAN PROSECUTORS TO RECEIVE GENOCIDE CASE AGAINST MYANMAR MILITARY CHIEF

On 3 April, the Myanmar Accountability Project (MAP), Rohingya Maiyafuinor Collaborative Network, and Themis Indonesia released a joint statement concerning a new legal complaint against Myanmar leader Min Aung Hlaing. A Rohingya genocide survivor and ten Indonesian figures, including former Attorney General Marzuki Darusman, will file a complaint against Myanmar military leader Min Aung Hlaing in Jakarta on April 6. The complaint accuses him of genocide, citing evidence and linking specific military divisions as he assumes the presidency.

The text of the statement continues as follows.

The criminal complaint names the specific Light Infantry Division responsible for the genocide. It sets out clear genocidal intent and traces command and control responsibility to Myanmar's military dictator,

Min Aung Hlaing. Ms Ullah's testimony gives a first hand account of the escalation of violence and repression against the Rohingya People beginning in 2016, the events of August 2017 when the genocide engulfed her own family and the continuing harm and restrictions imposed on those Rohingya who have remained in Rakhine State until today. These acts amount to crimes clearly defined in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.

Yasmin Ullah appealed to Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, to take action in the face of the ongoing genocide against a defenseless Muslim population. "This genocide is being inflicted right now against hundreds of thousands of unarmed civilians. In the name of humanity and Islamic solidarity, on behalf of all my sisters and brothers, I urge the Indonesian authorities to uphold the rule of law and hold

the Myanmar dictatorship to account. The junta has become a regional embarrassment and this genocide case sends a powerful signal that impunity for the crime of crimes must end”

Chris Gunness, Director of the Myanmar Accountability Project, (MAP), which supports cases against the junta particularly in the ASEAN region, said it was “extraordinary that these fresh genocide allegations against Min Aung Hlaing come as he claims the fake presidency following sham elections. What brazen disdain for the wishes of the Burmese people and for the rule of law, that this mickey mouse dictator commits genocide against his own people while simultaneously claiming to be their president”

The Jakarta case is filed under to the principle of universal jurisdiction, according to which certain crimes are considered so serious that all states have an obligation to bring their perpetrators to justice, regardless of the nationality of the victims or perpetrators, and regardless of where the crime was committed. Indonesia’s new penal code which came into force in January this year, explicitly permits universal jurisdiction for certain atrocity crimes, such as genocide.

Feri Amsari, one of the complainants and Director of Themis Indonesia which is representing Yasmin Ullah, said “the evidence of genocidal acts and genocidal intent is overwhelming. In addition to Yasmin’s testimony, we are filing evidence gathered by grass-roots investigators in Myanmar’s northern Rakhine State of the junta’s systematic forced displacement, and a degrading denial of rights and basic services, born out of deliberate state policies of racial discrimination and segregation. These policies make it impossible for hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to return to their homes. All of our evidence is backed up by UN and other investigations, and reports by the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar. Beyond all

reasonable doubt we have evidence of genocide writ large, and Indonesia has an obligation to act now”

The Rohingya genocide has been ongoing for decades, but reached a peak in 2017, when the Myanmar military initiated a campaign of mass killings, rape and industrial-scale arson attacks on entire villages, which drove over 700,000 people across the border into Bangladesh. Today, there are some 1.2 million Rohingya in refugee camps where they are denied the right to work and to education, and where they face the threat of starvation because the UN is unable to feed them. Hundreds of thousands have been forced to undertake perilous journeys by sea driving up numbers in a regional refugee crisis that worsens by the week. Meanwhile, in Myanmar’s Rakhine State the Rohingya face an apartheid system, denied the right to education, the right to work, and the right to freedom of movement. Many Rohingya inside Myanmar also face the threat of starvation because the junta and Arakan Army are unlawfully impeding the flow of food and other essential items, and are attacking humanitarian objects, in clear violation of international humanitarian law.

“The Myanmar junta is the most potent source of transnational crime in South East Asia”, said Chris Gunness. “In addition to genocide, dictator Min Aung Hlaing and his clique have become a prime driver of international crime, such as scam centres, drugs, human trafficking, and an ever-growing refugee crisis, affecting all ASEAN members. It is time for ASEAN to admit that its five-point plan for Myanmar has achieved nothing. The Association must give new ideas a chance, and accountability under the principle of universal jurisdiction is gaining ground. Civil society groups across South East Asia are setting the “UJ agenda” and it is time for governments to catch up”



Rohingya refugees. Photo: Supplied

## **BROUK SAYS MEANINGFUL CONCLUSION TO ROHINGYA CRISIS REMAINS OUT OF REACH AS MYANMAR CHOOSES PRESIDENT**

**T**he Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) released a statement on 3 April warned that the Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's moves towards Myanmar's presidency, while human rights abuses by the Arakan Army (AA) continue against the Rohingya, will not meaningfully solve the Rohingya crisis. The statement calls on the international community to, instead, speed up international justice processes.

The text of the commentary is as follows.

The Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) today warned that General Min Aung Hlaing's move towards the presidency, alongside ongoing human rights violations by the Arakan Army against the Rohingya, leaves any meaningful solution to the Rohingya crisis out of reach. The international community must drastically shift its approach, including by significantly

speeding up international justice processes.

The Burmese military and Min Aung Hlaing face multiple international legal actions for genocide and crimes against humanity, including the Rohingya genocide case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), with a ruling expected by the end of the year. The International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor has sought arrest warrants against senior military officials, and courts in Argentina have issued arrest warrants under universal jurisdiction, including against Min Aung Hlaing himself.

"Min Aung Hlaing is a wanted criminal evading an arrest warrant in Argentina for his role in genocide against the Rohingya," said Tun Khin, President of BROUK.

"Just months ago, his military was forced to defend itself at the International Court of Justice. Any government that believes he can bring reform or change to Burma is deluding itself."

This move towards the presidency is not a surprise and does not represent any real political transition—only a continuation of military rule.

Since seizing power in the 2021 coup, the Burmese military continues to control all key state institutions, including the executive, legislature and judiciary. Changing titles or positions does not alter this reality or the daily experience of people across Burma. The military has a long history of using political processes to maintain its grip on power, repeatedly attempting to rebrand its rule while continuing widespread attacks on civilians.

"The lack of legitimacy is already clear -that is not the news here," said Tun Khin. "The real headline is the failure of the international community to act. There have been no new sanctions for more than a year, no enforcement of arrest warrants for General Min Aung Hlaing, and no sustained pressure on the military or the Arakan Army."

Across Burma, civilians continue to face widespread and systematic attacks by the military, including airstrikes, killings, arbitrary arrests and displacement, with no meaningful international action to stop these abuses.

In Rakhine State, the genocide against the Rohingya continues, with grave abuses by both the Burmese military and the Arakan Army. Rohingya civilians face violence from multiple actors, as the international community continues to fail to act. Recent UNHCR reporting shows that tens of thousands of

Rohingya have been forced to flee to Bangladesh in recent months.

BROUK calls for immediate and coordinated action by the international community:

- Enforce international arrest warrants and advance cases at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and International Criminal Court (ICC) to hold perpetrators accountable for genocide and other serious crimes.
- Impose targeted sanctions against the Burmese military and its sources of revenue to restrict its ability to carry out attacks against civilians.
- Increase diplomatic pressure to end abuses by all actors, including the Arakan Army, and ensure accountability for violations against the Rohingya.
- Cut the military's access to arms, aviation fuel and foreign revenue, which continue to fund attacks on civilians.

The UK, as penholder on Burma at the UN Security Council, must urgently lead efforts to hold perpetrators accountable and protect the Rohingya.

"Under the last sham reform process from 2010 to 2021, the international community stood by and failed to act on the genocide against the Rohingya for the so-called greater good of reforms," said Tun Khin.

"The question Rohingya are asking is this: if the genocide general releases more political prisoners and introduces superficial reforms, will the international community once again look the other way as the death toll rises?"



Photo: Supplied

## HISTORIC FORMATION OF STEERING COUNCIL FOR FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC UNION IN MYANMAR

**O**n the evening of 30 March, the National Unity Government (NUG) and four major ethnic revolutionary organizations, which are key players in the Spring Revolution, officially announced the formation of the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF).

Leaders described this formation as a historic step aimed at accelerating the revolution and paving the way for the establishment of a structured federal military.

The Steering Council has outlined six key political objectives. These include the complete removal of the military from politics and placing all armed forces under civilian government control, as stated by Duwa Lashi La.

The remaining objectives of the SCEF are to resist any attempts to fully abrogate and reinstate the 2008 Constitution, draft and enact a new federal democratic constitution acceptable to all stakeholders, build a federal democratic union in line with the emerging charter, and continue implementing transitional justice processes for victims of the conflict.

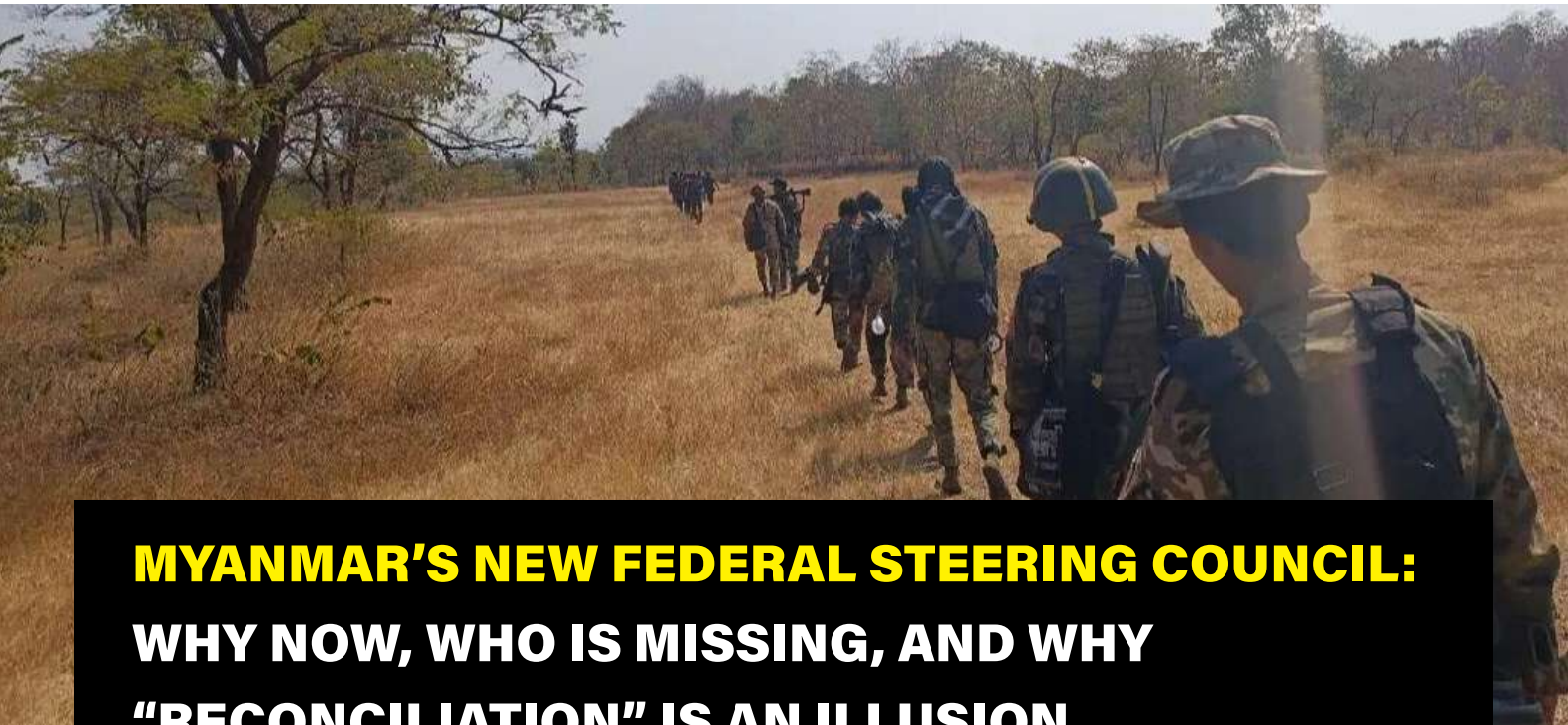
During the ceremony, Duwa Lashi La emphasized that this initiative is rooted in the principle of national

unity, with responsibility and accountability at its core, to enable the emergence of a new federal union.

The initial members of the council include the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), Karen National Union (KNU), Chin National Front (CNF), and Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), along with the National Unity Government (NUG) and the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH). KNPP Chairman Khu Oo Reh noted that efforts would be made to include other relevant parties within the next 60 days.

The SCEF will operate on the principle of “shared sovereignty,” positioning itself as a tighter military and political alliance among ethnic groups.

Among the speakers at the formation ceremony were KNU Chairman Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, KNPP Chairman Khu Oo Reh, CNF Chairman Pu Zin Cung, CRPH Chairman U Aung Kyi Nyunt, Acting President of the National Unity Government Duwa Lashi La, and Union Prime Minister Mahn Win Khaing Than, all of whom successfully concluded the event.



## MYANMAR'S NEW FEDERAL STEERING COUNCIL: WHY NOW, WHO IS MISSING, AND WHY "RECONCILIATION" IS AN ILLUSION

**JAMES SHWE**

The sudden emergence of the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) in March 2026 is the most serious attempt so far to give Myanmar's revolution a coherent federal political center. It comes after five years of scattered institutions, rising battlefield successes, and immense human suffering. For both international policymakers and the Myanmar public, three questions now demand attention: why this council appears only now; who remains outside it; and how it compares to the parallel "reconciliation" track being promoted around the junta's new civilian façade in Naypyidaw.

From a distance, many ask why such a council was not created in 2021 or 2022. The short answer is that the power realities and trust levels were not yet in place. In 2022 and 2023, many People's Defense Forces were in pure survival mode, scrambling for weapons, training and basic logistics. Several major ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) were hedging – testing the junta's strength, testing the new resistance, and protecting their own populations. Some maintained informal truces or "wait and see" positions in parts of the country. At that stage, they were not ready to subordinate their military and political autonomy to a new union-level steering body whose durability was uncertain.

Equally important, ethnic political leverage had not yet crystallized into something that could be translated into fair institutional arrangements. Movements such as

the Kachin Independence Organization, Karen National Union, Chin National Front and Karenni revolutionary structures carry decades of experience with broken promises from Bamar-dominated governments. In 2021–2022, the National Unity Government (NUG) and CRPH were important symbols of democratic continuity, but they were not yet widely trusted as equal federal partners. It took years of joint operations, humanitarian coordination and the emergence of state-level interim administrations before these movements were prepared to risk entering a shared union-level framework without fearing another cycle of centralization under a different flag.

On top of this sat a thick layer of institutional and personal mistrust. A genuine steering council is not just a new logo; it forces hard decisions. Who speaks for which territory. Who commands which units. How positions are divided between long-standing EAOs, new PDFs and politicians from the old parliamentary system. What becomes of NUG ministries and portfolios. No major actor wanted to surrender hard-won leverage in the middle of a war. The SCEF structure that now exists is therefore the product of long bargaining and of a shared recognition that the earlier configuration – with NUG at the apex and mostly ad hoc coordination around it – had reached its limits.

This delay is not only a technical matter; it is a moral one. The price for several years without a

strong, inclusive federal command structure has been paid in burned villages, mass displacement and avoidable deaths. Fragmented decision-making produced duplicated efforts, uncoordinated offensives and missed opportunities against a weakened but still ruthless junta. It allowed the military to keep exploiting divisions between EAOs, PDFs and political actors, while civilians absorbed the consequences. International policymakers should understand that this was not a delay born of indifference. Revolutionaries were fighting a heavily armed military, trying to rebuild trust across historic ethnic fault lines, and doing so with inconsistent external support. For people inside Myanmar, there is a painful double truth: leaders moved too slowly toward unity, and yet durable federalism cannot be drafted on paper in a few months; it must be negotiated in line with the actual distribution of forces.

SCEF's real significance lies in the new balance of power it reflects. On paper, it brings NUG and CRPH together with major EAOs and interim authorities, including Kachin, Karen, Chin and Karenni representatives, into a single steering council. This is more than a cosmetic reshuffle. It signals that strategic political decisions in the resistance camp can no longer be made only by Bamar politicians and former MPs. Movements that have held territory for decades, and that have absorbed some of the heaviest fighting since 2021, now claim their place inside a union-level decision-making body. At the same time, SCEF reflects a shared recognition that NUG's legitimacy and experience must now be embedded in a broader, more explicitly multi-ethnic federal framework. NUG remains indispensable, but now as a core component of a wider federal command rather than the sole apex.

For external actors, this should mark a shift in perspective. Supporting Myanmar's democratic future now means engaging with SCEF as the primary political framework, while recognizing NUG's role within it, rather than treating NUG in isolation as the only address. The test for SCEF will be practical, not rhetorical. It must prove that it can improve coordination on the ground and that it can speak with enough authority to function as a credible counterpart in any serious discussion about a democratic, federal transition.

Individuals matter in this story, not as saviors but as connectors. Dr Zaw Wai Soe is one such figure. Trained as a physician and reformist academic and later serving as a NUG minister, he has moved between professional networks in health and education, ethnic service providers, urban youth, diaspora communities and international policy circles. Over the last years he has consistently articulated a vision of federal

democracy, ethnic equality and civilian control of the military – messages that resonate strongly with ethnic constituencies when voiced by a Bamar leader who is not seeking personal safety abroad.

By working increasingly from inside the country and sharing the risks faced by local actors, he has strengthened his credibility. In conflict politics, shared danger creates a form of moral capital that cannot be generated through online conferences. A leader who operates under the same bombs and blockades as local commanders and civilians gains credibility that can be used to encourage compromise and to bring reluctant actors into a shared structure. Dr Zaw Wai Soe did not single-handedly create SCEF, but leaders of his type help make such a council possible by linking Bamar democratic circles, ethnic movements and external supporters into a more coherent whole.

Even so, SCEF is not yet a complete umbrella. Some of the most important armed actors remain outside. The Arakan Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and Ta'ang National Liberation Army – often grouped as the Three Brotherhood Alliance – have inflicted some of the junta's most serious defeats and now control significant stretches of territory in Rakhine and northern Shan. Their military weight is undeniable, but they have not chosen to enter SCEF. Their political projects lean toward very far-reaching autonomy or regional sovereignty for their own homelands. At the moment, they are focused on consolidating their gains, building local administrations and managing pressure from China along vital border trade routes. From their vantage point, joining a central union-level body designed elsewhere may constrain their room for maneuver without offering sufficient security or political guarantees.

In the far north, the United Wa State Army and its ally in Mongla have long stood apart from national opposition frameworks. They enjoy de facto independence, strong military capabilities and relatively stable economies. Formal participation in SCEF would put their special status at risk and could complicate their relationship with Beijing. In Shan State, organizations such as the Shan State Progress Party and Restoration Council of Shan State are entangled in intra-Shan rivalries and shifting frontline pressures, including advances by the Brotherhood Alliance and continued maneuvering by the junta. Committing to a union-level federal project while their own local positions are fluid is politically hazardous.

Alongside these headline actors, there are local and regional revolutionary administrations in areas such as

Sagaing, Magway and Mon. Some are closely linked to NUG; others are more autonomous and rooted in local community structures. Many are not yet formally represented at SCEF's top level. Taken together, these non-aligned forces govern large territories and millions of people, particularly in borderlands and ethnic regions. Any honest assessment of SCEF must therefore recognize it as a major step forward, but not yet a comprehensive political settlement within the resistance camp.

If we zoom out, Myanmar's anti-junta struggle is now moving along at least two genuine tracks, with a third path emerging as a dangerous illusion. The first real track is the federal-democratic one, anchored in SCEF, NUG and allied EAOs, whose goal is a multi-ethnic federal union with strong protections for minority rights and firm civilian supremacy over the armed forces. This track most closely reflects the aspirations of the Spring Revolution and fits within international democratic norms. The second real track is an ethno-national one, led by movements such as the Brotherhood Alliance and entrenched northern enclaves, focused on maximizing autonomy or near-independence for specific territories. These actors are indispensable militarily, but their preferred end-states may not align neatly with a single integrated federal union.

Alongside them, a third path has been re-launched in Naypyidaw: a top-down "reconciliation" process under military control. The junta has conducted tightly controlled elections under the 2008 constitution, from which the main democratic forces and many ethnic parties were excluded or unable to participate on any fair basis. The resulting parliament is dominated by the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party and allied parties, with a constitutionally guaranteed bloc of seats reserved for serving officers. Within this framework, a new cohort of "seasoned politicians" – retired bureaucrats, ex-ministers and minor party leaders – is now presenting itself as a pragmatic center that can gradually normalize relations between the armed forces and the population.

Their language is familiar: work within the existing system, avoid extremes, and nudge the military toward reform over time. It is understandable that some foreign governments, fatigued by a long war and concerned about regional spillover, look at this path with interest. Yet the underlying structure has not changed. The 2008-style military veto remains embedded in the constitution. There is no serious sign that the generals intend to surrender control over key ministries, economic monopolies or their impunity. The elections

themselves were conducted under conditions of war, heavy repression and large-scale disenfranchisement.

For the main forces of the revolution and for many ethnic communities, these "reconciliation" politicians do not represent a bridge to a just peace; they represent an attempt to stabilize military dominance under a softer label. At best, this track might produce a ceasefire that freezes current territorial divisions and fragments the resistance. At worst, it offers political cover while airstrikes, arrests and scorched-earth campaigns continue. In realistic political terms, the probability that this Naypyidaw-centered reconciliation project will deliver the core demands of the Spring Revolution – an end to military supremacy and the creation of a genuine federal democracy – is extremely low. It is not a path to justice; it is a strategy to manage and contain change on the military's terms.

Three conclusions follow. First, SCEF is both late and necessary. It arrived after an enormous human cost, but it reflects a serious attempt to move from symbolic unity toward a more grounded, multi-ethnic power-sharing arrangement. Second, the revolution is not yet structurally unified. Powerful armed and political actors remain outside SCEF, and bringing them into a wider settlement will require credible guarantees, patience and constitutional imagination, not just pressure. Third, the international community faces a clear choice. It can invest in the difficult work of supporting a messy but authentic federal-democratic process centered on SCEF, NUG and genuinely representative ethnic forces, or it can drift back toward a controlled "reconciliation" arrangement designed around the preservation of military dominance.

For Myanmar's people, the emergence of SCEF should be seen not as closure, but as the beginning of a new phase. If it becomes another arena for competition among elites, it will fail. If it is used as a practical mechanism to coordinate strategy, share risks and share authority across ethnic and regional lines, it can help turn battlefield gains into a political order that is worth defending. For external governments and institutions, responsibility is equally clear. They should recognize SCEF as the main political address for a democratic transition, maintain contact – but not confer legitimacy – with the junta's civilian façade, and support inclusive talks that bring in currently non-aligned armed actors. The alternative is to repeat the mistakes of the past: to chase quick "reconciliation" fixes that stabilize military power, while Myanmar's citizens once again pay the price.

Aung San Suu Kyi. Photo: AFP

## POLITICAL COORDINATION BODY ANNOUNCES FORMATION, DEMANDS IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS, INCLUDING AUNG SAN SUU KYI

The formation of the "Political Coordination Body (PCB)" was announced on the morning of 31 March, with the goal of resolving the country's fundamental issues and building a federal democratic union. After consultations that began in 2023, the body was officially established on 20 February, to collaborate with groups and individuals who share similar policies.

The PCB has issued a nine-point position statement calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all detained political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Win Myint. The spokespersons for the PCB include U Sai Nyunt Lwin, the Chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), U Mya Aye, a leader from the 88 Generation student movement, and U Thar Tun Hla, a politician from Arakan.

The statement also urges all relevant parties to recognize and guarantee the freedoms of expression,

writing, and association. It demands an end to forced recruitment and conscription.

Moreover, the PCB emphasizes the need to avoid military actions that could lead to civilian casualties, refrain from targeting public buildings, halt actions against civil servants participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), and remove restrictions hindering citizens' livelihoods and freedom of movement.

Additionally, the PCB advocates for political dialogues involving all relevant stakeholders to address the nation's critical problems. It also includes a commitment to cooperate with ASEAN, the United Nations, neighbouring countries, international governments, and organizations to ensure the success of these political dialogues.



## UK URGES UN COUNCIL TO ACT ON MYANMAR HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS

**O**n 31 March, the UK's Human Rights Ambassador, Eleanor Sanders, urged the UN Human Rights Council to support a resolution on Myanmar's ongoing crisis, highlighting severe human rights violations by the military since the 2021 coup.

This text sends a clear and consistent message: the human rights crisis in Myanmar remains one of the most severe and urgent situations on our agenda, and the international community cannot look away.

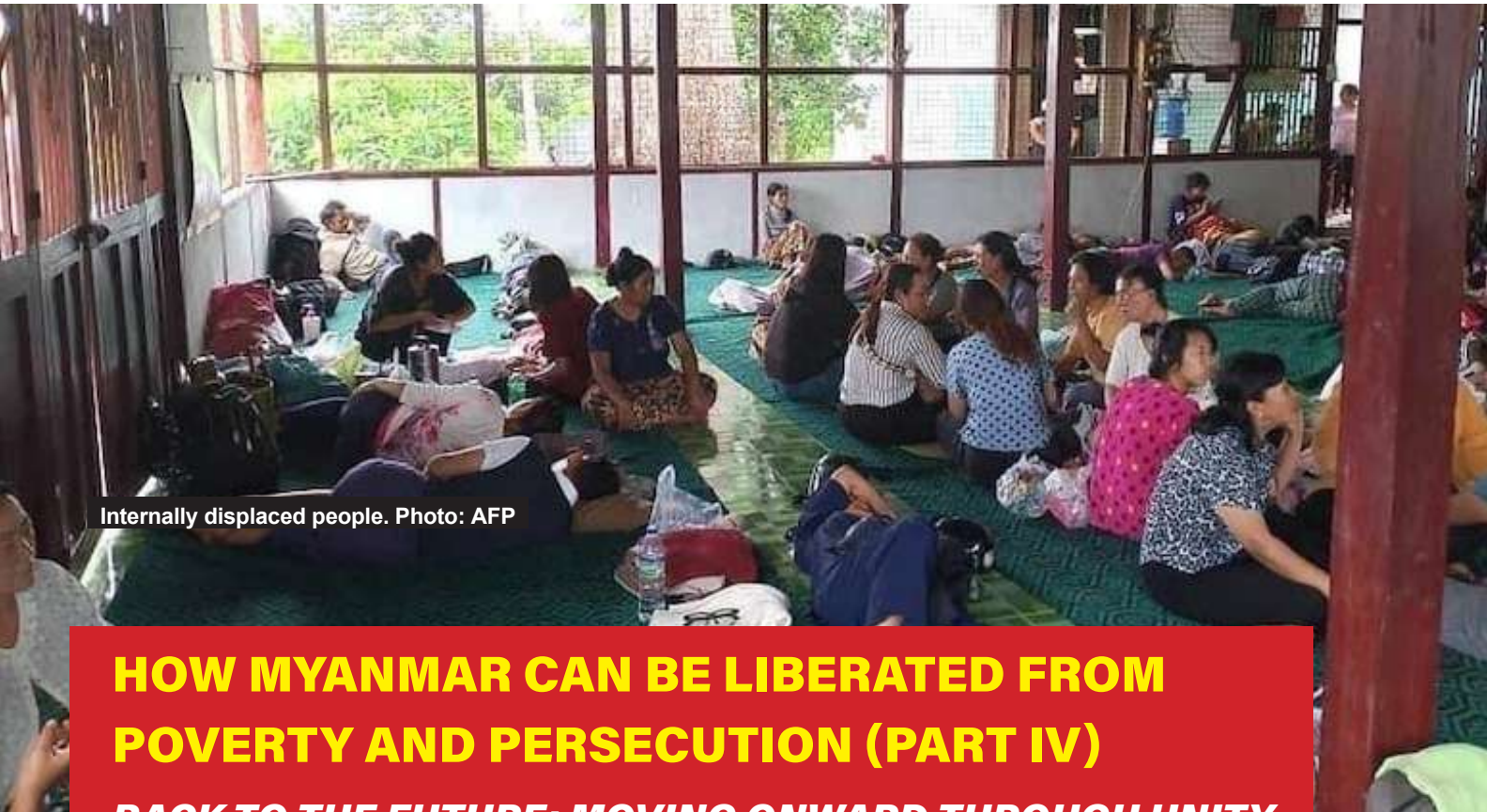
The resolution rightly documents the full scale of atrocities committed by the Myanmar military since the 2021 coup. It captures the deeply disturbing pattern of violations: indiscriminate airstrikes, the burning of villages, mass displacement, arbitrary detention, torture, systematic sexual- and gender-based violence, and the ongoing persecution of ethnic and religious minorities.

It highlights the military's recent unilateral elections, which excluded large parts of the country, including many key political actors, and were neither free nor fair. Far from offering a path out of the crisis, violence and instability have continued.

Events this past month underscore the urgency of this resolution. While the military held parades on Armed Forces Day, civilians across Myanmar continued to face horrific violence. Recent military airstrikes in Rakhine, Magway and Sagaing continue to destroy homes, religious sites and shelters for displaced communities. More than 16 million people now require humanitarian assistance, and at least 3.7 million remain displaced, unable to return home. These grave developments illustrate precisely why this Council must act.

We welcome this resolution which further strengthens the pressing need for accountability, the protection of civilians and unrestricted humanitarian access. We strongly support the resolution's emphasis on the urgent implementation of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus and its call for closer cooperation between ASEAN and the UN, including their respective Special Envoys, as essential to advancing a sustainable solution in Myanmar.

Today we reaffirm our unwavering support for the people of Myanmar in their pursuit of a peaceful, democratic and inclusive future. That's why the UK has co-sponsored this resolution which renews the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, and we urge fellow members of this Council to support.



Internally displaced people. Photo: AFP

## HOW MYANMAR CAN BE LIBERATED FROM POVERTY AND PERSECUTION (PART IV)

*BACK TO THE FUTURE: MOVING ONWARD THROUGH UNITY*

**NICHOLAS KONG**

**M**arch 30, 2026, may prove to be a defining moment in Myanmar's modern history. On that day, coup leader Min Aung Hlaing formally relinquished his position as Commander-in-Chief while assuming the vice presidency—an outcome not of reform, but of design. It was the final step in a long-calculated transition: repackaging himself from general to president, fulfilling the very ambition that precipitated the 2021 coup.

Yet, paradoxically, the same day marked the emergence of something far more consequential—the consolidation of resistance forces into a unified political and strategic alliance: the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF).

If the junta's move represents continuity of authoritarianism under a civilian mask, SCEF represents the long-awaited antidote: unity.

### **A Cycle Engineered, Not Accidental**

Myanmar's condition is not a historical accident. Since the 1962 coup, the country has been trapped in a self-reinforcing cycle of military domination, civil conflict, economic mismanagement, and repression.

From General Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism," through successive military juntas, to the façade of quasi-civilian rule after 2010, each phase preserved the same core reality: the armed forces remained the ultimate arbiter of power.

The 2021 coup was not an anomaly—it was a system defending itself.

Even after suffering major battlefield losses since 2023—losing control of large portions of the country—the military adapted. Backed by external

support, particularly from China, it escalated airstrikes against civilians while pursuing a parallel strategy: manufacturing legitimacy through sham elections.

### The Illusion of Transition

The so-called election was never about democracy. It was neither free nor fair. It was a carefully engineered “selection”—a mechanism to institutionalize military rule under civilian cover.

Opposition parties were dissolved. Leaders imprisoned. Millions of voters disenfranchised. Even the military’s own proxy structures were reshaped to consolidate loyalty around Min Aung Hlaing.

By installing a rubber-stamp parliament and maintaining control through loyal commanders and manipulating institutional mechanisms such as the National Defense and Security Council, the junta created a system where power is concentrated not merely in the military—but in one individual, supreme leader President Min Aung Hlaing.

This is not a transition. It is the old roadmap of military authoritarians and recycling of dictatorship.

### Cracks Beneath the Surface

Yet authoritarian systems carry within them the seeds of instability.

Internal fractures are emerging:

- Discontent among sidelined elites within the military-backed party,
- Promotions driven by loyalty rather than merit,
- Rivalries between factions linked to previous regimes,
- Institutional tension between different military training cohorts.

These fault lines—political, generational, and institutional—reveal a regime under strain.

The junta’s centralized structure, while appearing strong, is inherently brittle.

### The Turning Point: Unity Through SCEF

Against this backdrop, the formation of SCEF marks a historic breakthrough.

For the first time, major resistance actors—including ethnic revolutionary organizations, democratic forces, and political representatives—have converged under a unified framework.

SCEF is built on three foundational pillars:

- States, Federal Units, Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations
- The people
- Women

Its mission is clear:

- Dismantle military dictatorship,
- Establish full civilian control over armed forces,
- Abolish the 2008 Constitution,
- Build a federal democratic union grounded in equality and self-determination,
- Implement transitional justice.

This is not merely coordination—it is the architecture of a future state.

### From Resistance to Governance

The significance of SCEF lies not only in unity, but in transformation.

For five years, the resistance proved that the military could be challenged. The next phase requires proving that a new Myanmar can be governed.

SCEF provides that pathway:

- Politically, it creates a single voice, addressing international concerns about fragmentation.
- Militarily, it enables coordinated command structures and strategic coherence.
- Economically, it allows resource-sharing, unified financial systems, and institutional planning.
- Administratively, it lays the foundation for public services—law enforcement, healthcare, education—in liberated areas.

In essence, it shifts the struggle from rebellion to state-building based on the principle of shared sovereignty between the union and the States/ Federal Units.

### The Challenges Ahead

Unity declared is not unity achieved.

SCEF and the broader resistance must confront immediate challenges:

- **Credibility:** Promises must be translated into visible governance.
- **Transparency:** Public trust depends on accountability and communication.
- **Information warfare:** The junta's propaganda machine remains powerful and well-funded.
- **Internal discipline:** Fragmentation must not re-emerge under pressure.
- **Public engagement:** The revolution must remain owned by the people—not just led by established political elites.

The greatest danger is not defeat—it is delay.

Procrastination, dogmatism, and internal division would allow the military to regroup and reassert control.

### Back to the Future: A Strategic Path Forward

Myanmar's future will not be built on ideology alone. It requires pragmatic synthesis:

- Something old: lessons from past failures,
- Something new: innovative governance and economic models,
- Something borrowed: best practices from other democratic transitions,
- Something blue: resilience through adversity.

This is not poetic—it is strategic necessity.

### Conclusion: The Moment of Decision

Myanmar stands at a crossroads.

On one side is a military regime repackaging itself to survive—relying on coercion, manipulation, and external backing.

On the other is a unified resistance with potential—perhaps for the first time in modern history—to overcome the country's greatest weakness: disunity.

The question is no longer whether the military can rule. It has already failed.

The question is whether unity can succeed where division has always failed.

The emergence of SCEF suggests that, finally, Myanmar may be ready—not just to resist its past—but to outgrow it.



Photo: AA

## ARAKAN BETWEEN CONTROL AND CRISIS: WAR, GOVERNANCE, AND THE LIMITS OF POWER

**AUNG MARM OO**

**A**rakan today stands at a historic turning point. For the first time in decades, a single non-state actor, the Arakan Army (AA) has established control over most of the territory of Arakan State. What is emerging is not merely a military shift, but the outline of a new political order.

Yet this transformation is unfolding under the shadow of war, humanitarian collapse, and unresolved ethnic tensions.

The result is a paradox: Arakan is becoming more governable, but not yet more stable.

### How the Battlefield Shifted

The scale of the AA's territorial control cannot be understood without examining how the battlefield itself changed.

Testimonies from former Myanmar military commanders involved in the fighting for Ann reveal a decisive transformation in both strategy and capability.

According to Brigadier General Thaug Tun, the Myanmar military entered the battle with strong manpower, high morale, and an established command structure. Yet these advantages proved insufficient.

The AA did not rely on a single-front assault. Instead, it combined multi-directional offensives, territorial isolation, and technological adaptation.

Ann's geography divided into three key access routes from Sittwe, Taungup, and Magway became a vulnerability. The AA systematically applied pressure from multiple directions while cutting off reinforcement routes.

"They carried out cutting-off operations and used drones... everything was conducted in a well-coordinated manner," the former commander noted.

This was not a conventional engagement. It was a coordinated campaign of encirclement and attrition.

Air reinforcement, long a strategic advantage for the military was gradually neutralized. As fighting

closed to within range of heavy machine guns, aircraft and helicopter operations became increasingly risky and ineffective.

On the ground, AA forces targeted supply lines. Convoys were intercepted, and the limited number of access routes into Arakan became chokepoints. The result was strategic isolation.

### Collapse from Within

By the final stages of the battle, the situation had deteriorated sharply.

Brigadier General Kyaw Kyaw Than described a force reduced to a single remaining position, completely surrounded.

Ammunition had run critically low. Heavy weapons were no longer available. Water supplies had been cut for days, and medical supplies had run out. The number of wounded soldiers increased, while combat-capable troops steadily declined.

Reinforcements, even when deployed, could not break through. Units were halted miles away or forced to retreat. Air-dropped supplies proved largely ineffective.

“With no escape routes... we were ultimately captured,” he said. This was not simply defeat, it was systemic breakdown under sustained pressure.

### The Drone War and Tactical Adaptation

Another decisive factor was technological asymmetry.

Colonel Thet Htoo San highlighted the military’s lack of preparedness for drone-based warfare.

“We were not adequately prepared to defend against drone-delivered bomb attacks... many positions were abandoned due to drone strikes,” he said.

While the military possessed aircraft, its adaptation to drone warfare lagged behind. The AA, by contrast, integrated drones into coordinated ground operations.

- The impact was both physical and psychological:
- Positions became exposed and difficult to defend
  - Supply and reinforcement routes were disrupted
  - Defensive lines were gradually eroded

By the later stages of the fighting, some units were left defending with only minimal small-arms ammunition.

The battle for Ann illustrates a broader shift: control in Arakan was achieved not only through manpower, but through strategy, terrain control, and technological adaptation.

### Control Without Peace

These battlefield dynamics explain how the AA came to control most of Arakan State.

In many areas, military administration has collapsed and been replaced by governance structures under the United League of Arakan (ULA). Local systems of administration, taxation, and dispute resolution have emerged.

In places like Laymyochaung, residents report improved inter-ethnic relations among Chin, Mro, Khami, Maramargyi, and Arakanese communities. Increased mobility, cultural exchanges, and reduced discrimination suggest an attempt to build a more inclusive local order.

This represents a significant shift from decades of centralized control and marginalization. But control, however extensive, does not equal peace.

### War From Above

Even as the AA dominates the ground, the Myanmar military retains superiority in the air.

Airstrikes have become the junta’s primary instrument of power in Arakan targeting villages, markets, schools, hospitals, religious buildings, and civilians in AA-controlled areas.

This creates a fractured reality:

- On the ground: relative order and emerging governance
- From the air: persistent and unpredictable violence

The consequence is governance under constant threat where authority exists, but security remains fragile.

## Humanitarian Strain Beneath the Surface

At the same time, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate.

Large-scale displacement, limited access to healthcare, and collapsing livelihoods define daily life across much of Arakan. Communities are increasingly reliant on local coping mechanisms in the absence of sufficient humanitarian access.

This reinforces the central contradiction: Arakan is being governed locally, but with severely limited access to the resources of a functioning state.

## A Test of Inclusivity

Reports of improved inter-ethnic relations under AA administration are significant but not yet definitive.

The long-term stability of Arakan will depend on whether governance evolves beyond wartime pragmatism into genuinely inclusive political structures.

This includes:

- protection of minority rights
- equitable access to resources
- credible dispute resolution systems
- and the ability to manage complex identities within a shared political framework

Without this, current gains risk becoming temporary.

## The Strategic Question

The central question facing Arakan is no longer who controls territory.

It is whether that control can be transformed into:

- durable governance
- social legitimacy
- economic sustainability
- and long-term security

The AA has demonstrated military effectiveness and administrative capacity under pressure. But state-building is a deeper challenge, one that extends beyond the battlefield.

## Conclusion: Power in a Time of Uncertainty

Arakan today embodies both transformation and fragility.

The fall of positions like Ann was not accidental, it was the result of coordinated strategy, territorial isolation, and evolving warfare.

But the future of Arakan will not be decided by battlefield victories alone.

It will depend on whether the emerging system can survive sustained aerial warfare, address humanitarian needs, and build an inclusive political order.

For now, Arakan remains suspended between two realities: a territory largely controlled, but not yet secure and a new order emerging, but not yet fully formed.

*Aung Marm Oo is the Editor-in-Chief and Executive Director of Development Media Group (DMG), a news agency based in Arakan (Rakhine) State. He faces charges under Myanmar's Unlawful Associations Act and has been in hiding since May 2019.*



Photo: Supplied

## OVER 125,000 HOMES IN MYANMAR DESTROYED BY ARSON IN FIVE YEARS FOLLOWING COUP

Newly released data from Data for Myanmar reveals that a total of 125,328 civilian homes were destroyed across the country in the five years following the February 2021 military coup.

The report, released on 2 March, 2026, focuses specifically on residential properties burned through the end of February 2026, excluding non-residential structures such as schools and clinics to ensure data precision.

According to the findings, the military junta and its affiliated groups are responsible for 97 percent of the destruction, totaling 121,485 homes.

The report details a systematic pattern where junta forces and allied units burn civilian properties in conflict zones, loot valuables, and establish military bases on the remains of torched neighbourhoods. While the vast majority of arson is attributed to the military, the group noted that resistance forces have also engaged

in arson attacks, primarily targeting areas with a heavy presence of pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee militias.

Geographically, the destruction has been heavily concentrated in central Myanmar. Sagaing Region remains the hardest-hit area, accounting for over 63 percent of the national total with 78,896 houses burned. Magway Region followed with 18,059 destroyed homes, while Mandalay Region recorded 12,069.

Data for Myanmar concluded its report with an urgent plea to all armed actors to adhere to the rules of international humanitarian law and cease the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure.

The group also called on the international community to ramp up pressure on the junta and provide technical and financial support to media and civil society organizations tasked with documenting these war crimes for future accountability.



## MIZORAM POLICE SEIZE 7,620 LITRES OF FUEL BOUND FOR MYANMAR AMID EXPORT BAN

**M**izoram police intercepted a major fuel smuggling operation in Lunglei in the early hours of 3 April, confiscating over 7,620 litres of petrol and diesel intended for illegal export to Myanmar.

Acting on a specific tip-off, authorities carried out a raid at the Jedaz Fuel Station at approximately 1:00 am, discovering six individuals transferring fuel into plastic barrels under the cover of darkness.

The raid revealed highly organized efforts to evade detection - station staff had reportedly turned off all facility lights and covered fuel meters with cloth during the transaction to avoid attracting attention from nearby patrols.

"It's true that arrests have been made. This is a sensitive time right now, since the order was issued, I have stopped transporting fuel and am only sending other food items," a trader involved in moving fuel and goods to Myanmar told Mizzima.

The detained individuals included three buyers and three station employees, who claimed they were hired as transporters by third parties who managed the operation through GPay, an online payment system.

Police sources indicate that the fuel station owner and the financial backers of the smuggling attempt may also face legal action as the investigation expands. This crackdown follows an emergency two-month ban on fuel exports to Myanmar issued by district administrators on 20 March.

Fuel stations have been directed not to charge prices above government-set rates. They are also barred from selling more than 500 litres of petrol or 1,000 litres of diesel in a single transaction. Anyone seeking to purchase quantities beyond these limits must possess a valid storage license issued by the relevant authorities.

Violations of these regulations can result in penalties under Section 223 of the 2023 Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (Indian Judicial Code), including imprisonment ranging from six months to one year, fines between 25,000 and 50,000 rupees, or both.

"Since the government imposed the ban, transportation has declined. However, fuel shortages on the other side [Myanmar] have pushed prices higher, prompting some to continue despite the risk of arrest," a fuel trader said.

On 28 March, at around 2:00 am, police in Lunglei also arrested a man and a woman found in possession of 2,000 litres of petrol and diesel, which were being transported by car to Myanmar from the Mizo Fed fuel station. The confiscated fuel was later auctioned off, with a local company securing the winning bid.

According to members of the merchant community, fuel supplies from India have nearly dried up, leading to shortages in Myanmar's Chin and Rakhine states and driving prices sharply higher.



## MYANMAR MILITARY CONVOY DISPLACES 10,000 IN PAUK TOWNSHIP DURING STRATEGIC RESUPPLY MISSION

**N**early 10,000 villagers have been forced to flee their homes in Magway Region's Pauk Township as a large military convoy moved through the area to resupply pro-junta militias.

According to local humanitarian organizations, the convoy consisting of approximately 400 soldiers entered the township on 19 March, primarily to deliver food and ammunition to Pyu Saw Htee-controlled strongholds, including the villages of Tatkone, Pinhtaung, and Thitchokone.

During the advance, military forces reportedly utilized heavy artillery and drone strikes to clear the path, leading to the displacement of residents from 14 villages, including Kyathaik, Thaputsu, Thayetlaypin, Laelan, Tharaphi, and Ywartharaye.

An official from the Pauk Township Social Work and Humanitarian Affairs Department confirmed on the morning of 1 April that soldiers have been

systematically looting abandoned homes. Valuable household possessions and livestock were seen being collected and piled on a football field in Thaputsu village for transport.

The situation for the displaced population is critical, as many of these communities had already suffered from prior arson attacks in late 2025 and early 2026. With their remaining food stores and hidden belongings seized, the nearly 10,000 IDPs currently sheltering in nearby forests and fields are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including clean water, temporary shelter, and emergency food supplies.

Local resistance forces have reportedly engaged the convoy in several skirmishes along the southern Pauk highway, but the military continues to maintain control over the primary logistics routes.



Ko James

## PROMINENT STUDENT LEADER KO JAMES RELEASED FROM MYAUNGMYA PRISON AFTER SERVING SENTENCE

**K**o Lin Htet Naing, also known as Ko James, a former leader of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) and a well-known political activist, was released from prison on 1 April. His wife, prominent activist Ma Phyo Phyo Aung, confirmed to Mizzima that he was freed after completing his sentence and is currently at a local police station awaiting his final return home.

“Yes, I was informed that he is currently at the police station. He has been released,” Ma Phyo Phyo Aung said.

Ko James was arrested by junta forces on 18 June 2022, in Yangon’s Botahtaung Township during a period

of intensified crackdowns on urban activists. Following his arrest, he was hit with multiple charges, including a three-year sentence under Section 505(a) of the Penal Code for incitement and a five-year sentence under Section 52(b) of the Counter-Terrorism Law.

According to Ma Phyo Phyo Aung, the 505(a) charge was eventually dropped as part of a previous amnesty, while he served the remainder of his term for the counter-terrorism charge.



## Stop Online Harm calls on legislators to strengthen legal protection for women online

On 2 April, Stop Online Harm released a step of ten key points which they call on legislators to act on to strengthen legal protections against Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV).

The text of the press release is as follows:

The group has set out a framework for legislative action covering legal definitions, platform accountability, survivor protections, and enforcement. It calls on legislatures as well as governments to recognise TFGBV as a distinct and serious form of abuse, to update laws to cover the full range of digital harms — including harassment, image-based abuse, doxing, cyberstalking, and sextortion — and to ensure that those laws are actively enforced.

The points also call for special attention to the compounded vulnerabilities faced by women, LGBTQ+ people, and minorities, and for dedicated protections for women in politics, journalism, and public

life, who face disproportionate levels of online abuse.

"TFGBV is a growing threat and we must do all we can to counter it. Artificial intelligence is only amplifying

the danger," said Saijai Liangpunsakul, Founder of Stop Online Harm. "Legislators have the power to act. Our ten points give them a clear and practical framework to do so."

The ten points address the need for survivor-centred and trauma-informed approaches in legislation, for investment in research and data collection, and for laws to be backed by clear implementation protocols and dedicated enforcement bodies.

Stop Online Harm operates the Online Ambulance rapid response service and has provided mental health and digital safety support to more than 550 survivors of TFGBV. The organisation documents cases of online harm and advocates with governments, regulators, and technology platforms for stronger protections.

Stop Online Harm is a survivor-led initiative combating Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence. It is based in Southeast Asia and has active operations in Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Its work focuses on empowering those at risk, exposing the realities of online harm through documentation and research, and engaging governments, regulators, and technology platforms to drive change.



Photo: Supplied

## FOUR MEMBERS OF ONE FAMILY KILLED IN MYANMAR MILITARY AIRSTRIKE ON THANDWE

A devastating military airstrike on Thandwe Township, Rakhine State, killed four members of the same family, including two young children, on the morning of 1 April. According to a statement from the Arakan Army (AA), which has controlled the township since July 2024, the attack targeted a civilian area near the former base of Infantry Battalion 55.

The AA reported that the operation was carried out between 11:11 and 11:45 am by four fighter jets. During the sustained aerial bombardment, a military naval vessel positioned offshore also fired heavy artillery toward the township.

The victims were identified as 47-year-old Daw Ma Aye May, 26-year-old Daw Ma Aung Than, seven-year-old Ma Pyae Phyo Nwe, and two-year-old Ma Aye Nyein Hlaing.

In addition to the fatalities, a pregnant woman and two other children sustained serious injuries and are

currently receiving emergency medical treatment. The AA has formally characterized the airstrike as a war crime, noting that the deliberate killing of an entire family occurred under the military's newly appointed leadership.

The AA also noted that it had captured Thandwe in July 2024.

The AA warned that the military has recently been conducting airstrikes in Rakhine State using at least three fighter jets along with reconnaissance aircraft and urged local residents to remain alert to the dangers of aerial attacks.

Local residents have been urged to remain extremely vigilant and to monitor the skies for signs of impending aerial attacks as the conflict intensifies.



Photo: AFP

# **KACHIN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK DEMANDS PERMANENT SCRAPPING OF MYITSONE DAM PROJECT**

The Kachin State Human Rights Defenders Network (KSHRDN) issued a formal statement on 1 April, calling for the permanent cancellation of the Myitsone Dam project.

The appeal comes as the junta moves to revive the long-suspended \$3.6 billion megaproject, which has faced fierce national opposition since its inception in 2009.

The KSHRDN strongly condemned the military's attempts to restart the project during a period of intense political instability and nationwide conflict, urging the junta to respect the will of the general public and immediately cease all forms of intimidation, including threats of legal action against those who openly oppose the dam.

In addition, KSHRDN voiced deep concern that the Myitsone Dam Project could lead to further displacement, at a time when hundreds of thousands of people in Kachin State are already displaced due to armed conflict.

KSHRDN added that attempting to build the Myitsone Dam in Kachin State, a region long affected by armed conflict would further undermine trust among

various stakeholders and could spark unnecessary conflict in the future.

The KSHRDN, a coalition established in 2025 and made up of six member organizations, works to protect and promote the human rights of people living in Kachin State.

The Myitsone Dam Project was originally launched in 2009 under the previous military regime but was suspended in 2011 during President Thein Sein's administration due to widespread public opposition. Currently, the junta is seeking to restart the project and have warned that action may be taken against those who oppose it.

Regarding the project, Myanmar geoscientists also warned on 16 January that the Myitsone area's high earthquake risk makes it entirely unsuitable for dam construction.

The National Unity Government (NUG) has already declared any new agreements signed by the military junta to be legally void, warning that the project sacrifices the nation's heart and lifeblood for foreign backing.



## YANGON AMBULANCE SERVICES STRUGGLE UNDER SEVERE FUEL RESTRICTIONS AND LICENSING RULES

**A**mbulance services in Yangon and across Myanmar are facing critical operational challenges due to new fuel rationing measures and strict licensing requirements imposed by the junta.

Since the last week of March 2026, social welfare and non-governmental organizations have reported that fuel stations have been ordered to prioritize sales only to ambulances actively carrying patients. This directive has created a dangerous bottleneck for emergency responders, who are often unable to refuel their vehicles to reach the scenes of accidents or transport critically injured victims to hospitals.

"The requirement to refuel only when a patient is on board creates serious challenges, as some ambulances in Yangon must respond to accidents," said an official from a Yangon-based social organization. "In the event of a collision, these ambulances can only reach and transport victims if they have sufficient fuel. Without it, even patients lying injured on the road cannot be assisted."

In addition to the "patient-on-board" requirement, many fuel stations in Yangon have reportedly capped sales to ambulances at 50,000 kyats (approximately

\$12.50) per visit. This amount is often insufficient for long-distance transport or multiple emergency calls.

"Because most ambulances are unlicensed, around 95 out of 100 do not have QR codes. Only a small number are officially registered, including some under HSE," said an official from a Mandalay-based social welfare organization, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The situation is further complicated by a new mandatory verification system launched on 12 March, which requires vehicles to present a "wheel tax" certificate with a scannable barcode or QR code to authorize fuel purchases.

Social welfare organizations say refusals to refuel ambulances lacking wheel tax are more frequent in rural areas than in the cities of Yangon and Mandalay.

"In Yangon and Mandalay, if one station refuses to refuel, ambulances can try another, as there are many fuel stations. In rural areas, however, options are limited," said an official from a Mandalay-based social welfare organization. "In some cases, it also depends on the station manager—if the situation is clearly explained, they may agree to provide fuel, so communication is key."

The junta's directive allows fuel stations to supply ambulances and social welfare vehicles with the necessary fuel, but social organizations say enforcement on the ground remains inconsistent.

Social organizations are calling for urgent measures to ease fuel restrictions for emergency ambulances and ensure they can purchase the quantities they require.

The junta has introduced decrees and fuel-saving measures aimed at addressing the global fuel shortage caused by ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.

Authorities are cracking down on fuel stations for overcharging and illegal storage, yet local residents report that a thriving black market persists and long queues remain common at pumps.



Photo: AFP

## JFM URGES AUSTRALIA TO EXPAND SANCTIONS ON MYANMAR JUNTA, CITING FUNDING GAPS

In a 31 March submission to the Australian Parliament, Justice For Myanmar (JFM) urged sweeping new sanctions on Myanmar's military leadership and economic networks, warning that current measures have failed to cut off funding for ongoing abuses.

The submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into the State of Democracy and Human Rights in Myanmar said the junta continues to access funds, arms, and aviation fuel through international networks, allowing it to sustain operations despite years of conflict following the 2021 coup.

The group called on Canberra to expand targeted sanctions to include the military's governing bodies and key state-owned enterprises, arguing Australia lags behind sanctions imposed by allies such as the United States, Britain, and the European Union.

Australia has so far sanctioned a few junta-linked individuals and entities, and the submission describes the response as "slow and insufficient" compared to that of partners.

JFM highlighted gaps in Australia's sanctions, including the lack of restrictions on major state-owned enterprises in the extractive sector, which it says are the junta's largest source of foreign revenue.

These include Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), Myanma Gems Enterprise, and other

resource-linked entities sanctioned by some Western governments but not Australia, according to JFM.

The submission also criticised Australia for failing to sanction the junta's central governing bodies, including its rebranded executive structure formed ahead of elections held in late 2025 and early 2026.

JFM described those polls as a "sham election" that lacked credibility due to widespread violence, restrictions on political opposition, and low voter participation under coercive conditions.

The group called for Australia to explicitly reject the election results and any institutions formed through the process. JFM urged Australia to coordinate closely with allies to expand and tighten targeted sanctions, focusing on the military's governing bodies and state-owned enterprises, to increase financial pressure on the military regime.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the coup, with thousands killed and tens of thousands detained, according to rights groups and United Nations figures cited in the submission.

JFM said cutting off the junta's access to revenue and international support would be critical to advancing efforts toward a return to democratic governance.



Victims of the attack. Photo: Supplied

## MYANMAR MILITARY AIRSTRIKE ON CHIN STATE VILLAGE KILLS SEVEN CIVILIANS, INCLUDING FOUR CHILDREN

A deadly military airstrike targeted Kyaung Chaung village in Paletwa Township, Chin State, on the evening of 29 March, killing seven civilians.

According to a statement released by the Arakan Army (AA) on 30 March, the victims included four children under the age of 16, while four others, including an eight-month-old infant, sustained serious injuries.

At around 4:55 pm on 29 March, two Air Force jet fighters carried out multiple attacks on Kyaung Chaung village, dropping three bombs and firing rockets in at least five strikes, according to the Arakan Army (AA).

Local residents told the media there was no fighting in or around the village at the time of the attack.

Those killed in the bombing included four children: eight-year-old Maung Soe Pain Lin, 11-year-old Maung

San Lin Tun, 10-year-old Maung Nay San Aung, and 16-year-old Maung Aung Su Lin.

The victims also included three adults: 33-year-old U Than Kyaw, 30-year-old U Shwe Kyaw, and 48-year-old U Aung Hla, according to the statement.

Among the four seriously injured were an eight-month-old infant, Maung Aung Hla Sein, and five-year-old Maung San Kyaw Lyan, along with two women. The attack also left many homes destroyed by fire.

Paletwa Township has been under the control of the AA since January 2024. The group condemned the attack as a brazen “war crime,” accusing the military of deliberately targeting civilians.

Relief efforts for those affected are currently being carried out by the Arakan People’s Revolutionary Government (APRG), according to the statement.



Ma Thet Thet Mar

## PREVENTABLE DEATH OF FEMALE POLITICAL PRISONER HIGHLIGHTS MEDICAL NEGLECT IN SAGAING DETENTION CENTRE

**M**a Thet Thet Mar, a 54-year-old political prisoner, died in her cell at the Taze Detention Centre in Sagaing Region on the morning of 27 March, after reportedly being denied essential medical care.

"Ma Thet Thet Mar had been undergoing treatment for rheumatoid arthritis before her arrest. Afterward, she requested outside medical care, but it was denied making her death preventable," a PPNM spokesperson said.

According to the Political Prisoners Network-Myanmar (PPNM), Ma Thet Thet Mar suffered from severe rheumatoid arthritis, a condition she was receiving treatment for prior to her 2024 arrest. Despite repeated formal requests for outside medical attention as her health deteriorated, prison authorities consistently denied her access to a hospital, leading the PPNM to characterize her death as entirely preventable.

Ma Thet Thet Mar was arrested in 2024 after the junta failed to find her husband during a search. She was charged under Sections 505(a), 50(j), and 52(a) and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

"Even after her sentence was issued, she remained in detention instead of being transferred to prison. Her death resulted from inadequate medical care, and the responsible officials must be held accountable," PPNM News reported.

PPNM reported that Ma Thet Thet Mar died after being confined in Taze Detention Centre for over three years, without being transferred to Shwe Bo Prison as ordered. Prison staff feared interception or attack during the transfer. Although the junta confirmed her death, her body was not returned to her family.

Since the coup, political prisoners across the country have faced inadequate medical care, leading to frequent deaths. The junta, however, has released no information on these cases.

PPNM strongly condemned the junta's ban on medical treatment and other human rights violations against political prisoners, urging the international community to act to safeguard those still in detention.



Nurul Amin Shah Alam, captured in a screenshot of an officer's body cam.

## MYANMAR REFUGEE'S DEATH RULED HOMICIDE: US HEALTH OFFICIALS

Health officials on 31 March ruled the death of a Rohingya refugee from Myanmar who was found dead on a street in New York state after his release from immigration detention a homicide.

On February 24, the body of 56-year-old Nurul Amin Shah Alam was discovered in Buffalo, in northeastern New York state, sparking a public outcry against the Trump administration's harsh immigration crackdown to expel undocumented migrants.

Local media reported at the time that US Border Patrol agents had dropped off Shah Alam -- described as almost blind and unable to speak English -- in frigid weather five days earlier at a restaurant. He was found dead four miles (six kilometers) away.

After an investigation, the Erie County Medical Examiner's office determined that the cause of death was "complications of a perforated duodenal ulcer precipitated by hypothermia and dehydration," the county's Department of Health said in a statement.

The manner of death -- how the cause came about -- was homicide, it said.

"For death certification purposes, 'homicide' refers to death resulting from the volitional act of another, which may include negligent acts or omissions. The designation of homicide does not imply intent to cause harm or death," it said.

Shah Alam's next of kin were notified about the findings, the county health department said.

Buffalo Mayor Sean Ryan called it "deeply disturbing and a dereliction of duty" by immigration agents.

But Customs and Border Protection said immigration agents established that Shah Alam could not be deported and therefore offered him a lift to a "warm, safe location near his last known address."

"He showed no signs of distress, mobility issues or disabilities requiring special assistance," the agency said at the time.

AFP



Growing crops. Photo: Marco Brun del Re

# THE BURMA WAR'S IMPACT ON FOOD PRODUCTION

**ANTONIO GRACEFFO**

**W**hen asked about how the war is affecting food security, Marco Brun del Re, Technical Advisor at Earth Mission Asia's Natural Farm School, responded bluntly: "They're just bombing the farms. And they're killing farmers." He went on to explain that while a range of factors are negatively affecting food production, direct attacks on farmers by the Myanmar military remain one of the most blatant and immediate threats.

Dr. Ashley South of Chiang Mai University and Mon National College, a respected author on Burma-related issues, similarly emphasized the broader structural impact of military rule. He noted that "the centralized military state impacts negatively on agriculture in a number of ways, including through top-down policies set by [the] NPD, and more immediately through predatory and violent actions of the Myanmar military, which often targets civilian communities, including at harvest times."

A February 2026 investigation by Fortify Rights found that the Myanmar military junta carried out systematic attacks on farmers in Karenni State and along the Karenni-Shan border during the 2025 harvest season, targeting civilians, farmland, and food systems. Based on interviews with survivors and officials, the report documents drone strikes, artillery shelling, arbitrary detention, and torture. These

attacks disrupted agricultural production at critical stages, forcing many farmers to flee and leaving crops unharvested, which has worsened food insecurity in an already fragile region.

Multiple testimonies describe severe injuries and deaths caused by aerial and artillery attacks. Farmers reported being bombed while working in rice fields, with some losing limbs and others left permanently disabled. Survivors and their families have since been displaced, often unable to return to their land due to ongoing violence. The attacks have not only caused immediate casualties but have also destroyed livelihoods, leaving families dependent on aid while facing long-term uncertainty about food and income.

The investigation also details arrests and torture of farmers accused of supporting resistance groups. Detainees described beatings, suffocation, electric shocks, and threats of execution. Some individuals remain missing, raising concerns of enforced disappearance. Survivors said soldiers warned them not to return to their fields, reinforcing a climate of fear that has further reduced agricultural activity and deepened the humanitarian crisis.

Local officials reported that widespread displacement and continued fighting have prevented farmers from harvesting crops across key agricultural

areas, particularly around Moby. Landmines and repeated attacks have rendered farmland unsafe, while more than 150,000 people have been displaced into hundreds of camps. As a result, the region faces a growing risk of severe food shortages in the coming year.

Brun del Re described the crisis confronting farmers in Burma as complex and worsening. He explained that, apart from the direct impact of war, farmers are dealing with a combination of environmental disruption and ecological change. "The reason for the challenges the farmers are facing, is multifaceted," he said, noting that even the climate itself has become unpredictable. Monsoon rains last year were unusually heavy and "ended up washing away a lot of the crop," leaving farmers struggling to recover.

He added that weather patterns have become increasingly erratic, creating conditions that local farmers are not accustomed to managing. At the same time, pest infestations are rising as traditional pest-control methods fail. Brun del Re attributed this to deeper ecological disruption, explaining that natural predators are disappearing, likely due to food shortages and broader environmental imbalance. While he noted that some of these dynamics remain under study, he emphasized that the overall farmers are dealing with mounting pressure from both climate instability and ecological change.

Infrastructure and geography further complicate survival. Karen State's terrain and road networks were historically shaped to resist military incursions, but this also makes access to markets extremely difficult. As a result, villagers often pay double for goods by the time they reach remote areas, while receiving only half the value for what they sell. Brun del Re explained that rice or vegetables lose much of their value along the

supply chain, creating a severe economic imbalance. "There's a real issue in terms of supply chain inside of the country," he said, emphasizing how isolation undermines both income and food security.

Efforts are underway to introduce alternative sources of income, including coffee, cacao, tea, and other cash crops. However, Brun del Re stressed that limited access to international markets restricts these opportunities. Karen State has some advantage due to its porous border with Thailand and the relative stability provided by the Karen National Union, allowing limited trade routes to function. Other regions, such as Chin and Kachin States, face far greater barriers due to their borders with India and China, making market access even more constrained.

Despite these hardships, Brun del Re highlighted the resilience of Karen communities. As subsistence farmers, they are skilled at producing their own food and possess what he described as "an encyclopedic knowledge of edible and usable species within the forest environment." This allows them to survive even in difficult conditions. However, he emphasized that their reliance on rice remains a critical vulnerability. "If they don't have rice, then there's basically no food," he said, explaining that rice is central to both diet and the energy required for labor-intensive farming.

When rice harvests fail due to weather, pests, or conflict, communities must rely on markets to make up the deficit. Yet the same supply-chain disruptions that limit income also make rice more expensive and harder to obtain. With few crops to sell, locals have little money to purchase food. This creates a dangerous cycle in which shortages are compounded by lack of access.

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



Growing food is crucial in the battle to survive Burma's civil war. Photos: Marco Brun del Re



Photo: Supplied

## DKBA EXPANDS CYBER SCAM INFRASTRUCTURE AMID FIERCE BORDER CLASHES SOUTH OF MYAWADDY

*SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HAN HTOO ZAW*

**H**heavy fighting has intensified south of Myawaddy near Minletpan and Hpalu villages as junta forces launch renewed offensives to reclaim strategic bases along the Wawlay road.

Utilizing heavy artillery and kamikaze drones, the military has targeted resistance-held areas, with at least five explosions reportedly striking nearby compounds operated by the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA).

Despite these attacks and the resulting casualties, the DKBA has significantly ramped up the construction of new, large-scale facilities for online scam operations, according to satellite imagery and sources close to the group.

Since early 2024, junta forces have launched heavy attacks along the Wawlay road in an attempt to regain lost military bases.

Beginning in November 2025, they intensified attacks on resistance-held villages such as Minletpan

and Hpalu, using heavy artillery and kamikaze drones. At least five explosions have reportedly struck DKBA-controlled scam compounds, causing injuries and deaths.

Despite the ongoing conflict, the DKBA has not abandoned these operations. Instead, it has expanded them by building additional large compounds.

According to a DKBA family member, the group plans to relocate operations if bombed, and is now constructing facilities deeper in forested areas.

“They are continuing to build compounds with a plan to relocate to another place if this area is bombed. Now that the situation in the villages has worsened, they are even constructing buildings deep in the forest. I understand that this is being carried out under the orders of Phoe San Aung (Major General Saw San Aung),” said an anonymous family member of a DKBA soldier.

Two new scam compounds have been identified

in mountainous areas accessible via forest routes near Hpalulay village, while another is located along the Thaephyuchaung road.

In addition, as of March 2026, another compound is being rapidly constructed near Warmeehta village along the Wawlay road.

Construction is reportedly highly organized and efficient. Two-story buildings can be completed within two months, while larger four-story or luxury buildings take around four months. Materials are transported from Thailand into DKBA-controlled territory using container trucks and heavy vehicles.

Construction supplies are mainly imported by a group known as "Hayaek." Cement is transported in ready-mix concrete trucks.

"They transport all the construction materials using Hayaek-branded vehicles. Everything is brought in steel rods, roofing sheets, and concrete frames. For cement, they don't carry it in bags, instead, they use ready-mix concrete trucks, bringing it already mixed. If they transported cement in bags, they would have to pay taxes on the Thai side. So by bringing it in pre-mixed by truck, they only have to pay the crossing fee," said a local resident.

Chinese engineers reportedly oversee construction, including electrical and water systems, while Myanmar workers perform basic labour such as masonry, carpentry, and driving.

Additionally, at least three small cement factories have been built within DKBA-controlled areas, supplying materials directly for scam compound construction.

Equipment used inside the buildings of the online scam compounds is transported from China via container trucks through Laem Chabang Port near Bangkok, Thailand. From there, it is brought into Myanmar through the Thai-Myanmar border.

"When a container truck crosses the Thai border, it pays around 50,000 baht in taxes to the Thai customs

office. On the Thai side, it is legal and taxed properly. But on the Myanmar side, there are no taxes, and it is not legal. From Myanmar's side, the armed groups themselves are bringing it in," said a source familiar with the border smuggling operations between Thailand and Myanmar.

The items transported from China into Thailand and then into Myanmar include computers and related equipment needed to operate online scam businesses, as well as furniture such as tables and chairs. They also include supplies required for the various businesses inside the compounds, such as clubs, bars, restaurants, general stores, clothing shops, and beauty salons.

According to investigations, there were 19 scam compounds around Soneseemyaing area in Myawaddy area by 2025. As of March 2026, three more have been added, bringing the total to 22.

In order to verify information regarding the scam compounds, a phone inquiry was made to DKBA Commander-in-Chief General Saw Shwe Wa, but no response was received.

On 12 November, 2025, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed sanctions on the DKBA and four of its leaders for supporting cyber scam operations targeting U.S. citizens.

Those sanctioned include DKBA Commander-in-Chief (now DKBA Patron) Saw Steel, Adjutant General Saw Sein Win, Chief of Staff Saw San Aung, Brigadier General Sai Kyaw Hla, and Yu Jianjun (also known as Chamu Sawang), a Thai national and director of the Trans Asia company.

U.S. authorities have warned that many of these scam centres operate along the borders of Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia. The FBI has stated that it plans to take action against such operations.

Furthermore, the FBI has alleged that actors linked to the Chinese Communist Party may be involved behind the scenes in these cyber scam networks.



## WHAT MAKES A WOMAN 'RAPE MATERIAL'?

**HNIN PANN FOR INSIGHT MYANMAR**

**O**n a bright sunny day in Mandalay, Myanmar, dressed lightly in shorts and a loose linen shirt, a young woman walks to her relative's house nearby, just one block away. All the while, she is praying “အခုချိန်မှာ ယောက်ျားတစ်ယောက်ယောက်နဲ့ မတွေ့မိပါစေနဲ့.” or “I hope I don't run into any men right now.” Especially those with leering eyes who follow girls as they go about their day, minding their own business. She fears that a young Tatmadaw (military) soldier, dressed in a dark-green uniform and holding a rifle, might see her as she walks by. “You should dress decently”, he will give unsolicited advice disguised as a comment while scanning her up and down in full perversion. Speaking in glottal native Burmese, he then warns her: “Men on patrol will see you as rape material in those, and no one will save you if your body gets discarded on the streets afterwards”. He will say that dressing like that, wearing shorts that make her toned thighs visible in burning hot weather, is 'asking for it'.

In a patriarchal society, she lives in a constant state of unconscious fear, in both daylight and nighttime, fueled by daily gendered experiences like

the one above, and news of sexual violence committed by men, particularly from the military, police, and government officials. These everyday threats reinforce the patriarchal ideology - a system of beliefs and values that justifies and normalizes male dominance over women, in which women are reduced to mere objects for the male gaze. We learn about what to wear, what not to wear, how to walk, and how to behave in our efforts to avoid harassment, especially from soldiers and police who wield rape threats as weapons against women's safety and dignity.

In Tachileik, Eastern Shan state in Myanmar, there is an ongoing case of police cover-up on the murder of Ma Phyu Phyu Aye, whose corpse was found disposed of roadside and buried on February 15, 2026, without family notification. Her body was found wrapped in a blanket, packed in salt to preserve it and delay discovery. She was only 21 years old. According to a close friend of the victim speaking out on February 25, 2026, concerns persist over the lack of transparency from discovery to burial, with allegations of authorities deviating from standard procedures and attempting to

conceal the crime. In short, this case reeks of incessant police corruption and obstruction of justice, where communication of information is disrupted or, even worse, evidence destroyed.

These incidents are often treated as isolated crimes. But through a radical feminist lens, they reveal something larger: Sexual violence in war is not accidental. It is systematic and political.

Myanmar/Burma is a Southeast Asian country that has been embroiled in the longest-standing civil war in the world, with most regions under a continuous state of violent political turmoil and armed conflict for more than 75 years... almost a century of loss, pain and grief. Ethnically diverse, with around 135 recognised ethnic groups, Myanmar is home to the Bamar, the largest ethnic group. The civil war between the Bamar-centric nationalist Tatmadaw (the unitary military government hogging the centralised power in Burmese politics since the 1960s) and Ethnic Revolutionary Organisations (EROs) arises from the desire of many ethnic groups to self-govern and to be free from the dirty claws of the Tatmadaw.

As if to give us a break from the unceasing bondage of the junta, a glimpse of a possible future where we, citizens of all ethnicities, can live with dignity and thrive. Our first semi-democratic government operated from 2015 to 2021, during which there were some advances in women's rights and gender equality! I remember, as I drove to my sister's house, my heart beating with sheer wonder when I saw plum pink posters with the words "ကျားမ တန်းတူညီမျှမှု" or "Gender Equality", hanging from roadside lamp poles in Yangon - the economic heart of the country.

I thought better days are on the horizon for us girls and women. Condemn husbands who occasionally beat their wives and kids up after a drunken night out with friends, which the abuser, even sometimes the victims, excuse their volatile temperament as an inevitable consequence of intoxication. Gone will be the days I hear a group of uncles and aunties adulating a man for 'helping' raise his own kids and do the laundry, while withholding the same high praise for the wife who

gladly carries the double burden of working full-time both at home and at work in this modern economy.

But our years of democratic transition were short-lived, ending violently in a coup on February 1, 2021. Following the putsch, the people of Myanmar resisted nationwide with peaceful protests and civil disobedience. They were met with brutal crackdowns by the junta, as the whole world watched.

The nationwide resistance evolved into the Spring Revolution of 2021, spearheaded by the emerging People's Defence Force (PDF) - the civilian armed resistance and the armed wing of the National Unity Government (NUG), a parallel shadow government consisting of ousted lawmakers and militant civil rights leaders. Hence, starting from the year 2021 to this very current moment of reading this piece, citizens of Myanmar have been struggling for five years of a full-blown ongoing civil war between the regime and the people.

In the book *The Face of War* (1986), Martha Gellhorn emphasises that war is not a distant political phenomenon but a deeply personal and human tragedy. Many families affected by the war in Myanmar know at least one person who is either jailed, hunted, exiled, or killed because of the effects of a failing state. What's more is that unarmed and innocent civilians, particularly women and girls, are suffering the most and bearing the brunt of oppression.

A 2023 report by the Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace and Security ranked Myanmar at the bottom 12 for women's security globally. Myanmar has been the worst country in East Asia and the Pacific region in terms of proximity to conflict. Such distance often correlates with increased risks of violence and instability, adversely affecting women's security and opportunities.

My relatives, including my grandmother, aunt and her kids, live in a village in Sagaing State, a region most heavily affected by the war. When the rattle of gunfights and carpet bombings arrives near their village, they have to flee from their homes for safety. The UN calls them IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons), who are

terrorised within their own country's borders.

On March 5 2026, the advocacy group Women for Justice (WJ) launched an emergency appeal for basic healthcare services, such as menstrual products and essential medicine for women and girls currently living in IDP camps across the Sagaing Region and Chin state. Reading the news, the faces of my grandmother, my aunt and my cousin's children appear in my head. Although they are safe and healthy right now, they're doing their best to survive by occasionally fleeing. Many people, on the other hand, are now relying on IDP camps for survival as they no longer have a home to return to, since their hometowns have been destroyed either by the civil war or the deliberate bombings and arson by the Tatmadaw.

Meanwhile, the military coup in 2021 was a devastating setback for efforts in gender equality in Myanmar, leaving women and girls particularly vulnerable to even more discrimination, violence, and exploitation. Gender-based violence is now rampant across the country, committed mainly by the men of the Burmese Military (Tatmadaw), and also by the resistance forces.

- These armed brutes subject thousands of women and girls to various levels of sexual harassment and assault, including rape, gang rape (including pregnant women and adolescent girls), forced conscription and torture.

- Unsurprisingly, like most countries under a terrorist authoritarian rule, the justice system and the rule of law in Myanmar are more corrupt than ever, hindering women's access to protection and justice. As a result, there has been a rise in domestic violence and sexual violence among civilians since the coup. "If we hadn't spoken out on social media and asked external media for help, this case would have vanished completely," the friend of Ma Phyu Phyu Aye, victim of manslaughter (by omission), whose body was dumped roadside on February 15. The police and local funeral assistance group, Ko Hla Moe Funeral Assistance Association, upon discovering the body, not only proceeded with immediate cremation and burial, but

they also reportedly failed to inform the victim's family about it. It was only when the family submitted a missing person report at the police station on February 16 that they were notified of their daughter's incarceration.

- There is widespread displacement and increasing economic hardships, creating more vulnerabilities for women and girls in the community.

Over time, what seeps into the minds of civilians living under constant social and political threats is the normalisation of sexual harassment and abuse of women and girls in neighbourhoods all across the country.

Naturally, my curiosity - driven by rage and the desire for freedom from fear - rises on decoding this rape and sexual harassment culture that's providing structural male advantage. Hence, I turn to the radical feminist theory of patriarchy to offer insights into the power dynamics and structural inequalities between the sexes that are foundational to the reproduction and normalisation of gender-based violence. What I discovered is that sexual violence against women is purposely used as a weapon of war by men from the Bamar Military (Tatmadaw) AND the armed resistance groups.

Here's the simplest truth: No such thing as the all-powerful or all-powerless sex exists in the human world. It is the existence and maintenance of a whole social system that almost entirely works in the favour of one gender group - heterosexual males, which is giving its members the grandiose illusion of inherent male superiority and the fateful female inferiority.

Why is the use of sexual violence as a deliberate weapon of war by the men of the Tatmadaw (military) and the armed resistance groups an effective form of terror and control?

First and foremost, most of us live in a patriarchy - a political-social system of power that enables male dominance and female subjugation, through psychological terrorism and violence. One of the major radical feminist voices, Bell Hooks (2004) describes patriarchy as a life-threatening social disease that harms men and women both in our everyday reality, by

rigid, repressive patriarchal gender roles. For instance, boys' masculinity is based on their capability to be aggressive and violent (in appropriate settings, such as in games and fights). In contrast, girls' femininity is based on gentleness and nonviolence (in most settings, often at the cost of self-detriment).

Furthermore, Hooks famously coined the term "patriarchy" as "the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" to describe the political systems of a country that create the foundation of a nation's politics and ultimately its well-being. In Myanmar, patriarchy could be renamed as the "nationalist Bamar-supremacist capitalist patriarchy". The junta often relies on a blend of authoritarian, military-dominated, and ultranationalist Bamar sentiment to unify its core, often using Buddhist institutions to gain legitimacy.

In a sense, every sexual crime these misogynists commit, they announce to all citizens of Myanmar and to the world, that we better blindly obey and comply with the whims of men. Or else, face the wrath of sexual terror in their hands. The Tatmadaw men, including soldiers and police, readily threaten women with rape to force compliance, use them as human shields in war frontlines, or subject them to brutal crimes in conflict areas like Karenni and Sagaing Regions. As a result, gender-based violence reinforces gender inequality and enforces patriarchal control over communities and various ethnic groups.

The main insight from the radical feminist view of patriarchy is that sexual violence is not just a byproduct of war but a deliberate, systematic assertion of misogynist male supremacy and domination over women.

The prolonged conflict in Myanmar, intensified by decades of ethnic discord and the devastating 2021 military coup, has resulted in a brutal environment where gender-based violence is wielded as a weapon of war. Using the lens of feminism, we see how the patriarchal system, deeply embedded in Myanmar's "nationalist Bamar-supremacist capitalist patriarchy", enables and reproduces a systematic utilisation of sexual violence to exert control, terrorise communities,

and reinforce male dominance.

What has been done to rectify this? One might be asking at this point, with a heavy sigh. There have been strong condemnations of violence against women nationally and internationally. However, addressing this crisis demands more than disapproval! It requires dismantling the structural inequalities and power imbalances in sexist societies that sustain violence against women. A collaborative effort toward peace and justice in Myanmar must centre the voices and rights of women from all ethnic backgrounds and identities, ensuring their protection and meaningful participation in rebuilding the nation.

Right now, it's daytime in Aotearoa, where I am safe enough to write this, but not safe enough to forget it. Before the 2021 Coup, I was only aware of the term "survivor's guilt," not of the experience itself. Feminist studies helped me understand for myself the confusion and the complexities as to why my gender is believed to be synonymous with subjugation and internalised inferiority. That is why I believe that we can start by turning to feminism, individually and collectively. Through an intersectional and radical feminist framework, we can begin to challenge the entrenched systems of sexist oppression and work toward a future where all women live free from violence, with security, dignity, and equality. Meanwhile, I acknowledge the overwhelming limits of this grand solution.

And right now, to everyone in Myanmar, daylight could mean something entirely different. In war environments, violence becomes normalised, masculine dominance becomes rewarded, and women's bodies become symbolic battlegrounds. Until that system of patriarchal culture upheld by militarised masculinity changes, a simple act - a woman walking alone in daylight - will remain something many girls in Myanmar cannot take for granted.

Check out the original story on Insight Myanmar here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/burmadhammablog/2026/4/1/rape-material>



Photo: AFP

**SEIZED WEAPONS ON DISPLAY AFTER INDIA DECLARES END TO MAOIST INSURGENCY**

Indian police on 30 March displayed large caches of arms and ammunition seized from Maoist rebels, a day after officials declared the six decade long insurgency was over following a sustained security crackdown.

Over the last two years, India stepped up its campaign against the last remnants of the Naxalite rebellion, named after the village in the Himalayan foothills where the Maoist-inspired insurgency began nearly six decades ago.

The rebellion controlled nearly a third of the country with an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 fighters at its peak in the mid-2000s.

It has since been dramatically weakened, with most remaining armed cadres confined to the Bastar region of central Chhattisgarh state -- a vast, mineral rich expanse of dense forests and hills.

In Bastar's Dantewada district on 30 March, police laid out a haul of weapons ranging from crude, country

made mortars to carbine rifles looted from security forces.

Rather than marking victory with a parade, officials said the display was intended to signal the rebels were "joining the mainstream".

Five former insurgents were presented copies of India's constitution during the event.

Bastar police chief P. Sundarraj told AFP the strength of the insurgency had fallen to "single digits", down from nearly 4,000 fighters less than half a decade ago.

"Mission 2026 is coming to an end," Sundarraj said, referring to the government's long promised deadline of defeating the rebellion by March 31, 2026.

"There will be a new beginning from April 2026 onwards."

Sundarraj said the surrendered rebels were being given new civilian identities through vocational training and rehabilitation programmes.

"Earlier someone was in the armed squad (but now) they will be identified as a tractor driver or an

electrician," he said. "Our focus is to get their violent past to be changed into a new identity."

At one such rehabilitation centre, women were seen knitting blouses while men welded metal salvaged from discarded electric rickshaws to build park benches.

"I will hopefully set up my own tailoring shop back in the village," said 19 year old Kope Madvi, who quit the insurgency after six years as an armed fighter.

Others said they longed for a simple life away from conflict.

"I just want to go back home, farm and feed my family," said Vijay Oyam, 26.

More than 12,000 rebels, soldiers and civilians have died in the conflict since a handful of villagers rose up against their feudal lords in 1967.

The Maoists said they were fighting for the rights of marginalised indigenous people in forest regions, where mining companies also eye valuable resources.

AFP



## REALITY BITES

“I don’t have hope. But I think that this is something that I should accept. It is reality.”

Chalida Tajaroensuk, a longtime advocate of democratic reform and human rights across the Southeast Asian region, joins the Insight Myanmar podcast to describe a life shaped less by ideology than by repeated contact with suffering, and by an insistence that work has to begin where conditions actually are, not where one wishes they were.

That orientation, she says, began before politics, in the ordinary world of a provincial Buddhist temple where her grandmother took her as a child. Chalida remembers a place that held the elderly, the poor, and those without family, and she links that exposure to a bodily sense of shared life. “That is your body, this is my body, it is the same, and we are the same, human beings living in the same world,” she says, noting how Buddhist philosophy, meditation, and community solidarity were linked seamlessly. The lesson was practical, learned through looking after people and watching what happens when someone is cared for in actuality, and not only through theory.

When Chalida later took up meditation, it was not as retreat from the world; rather, the practice she describes is keyed to awareness of movement and speech, a way of monitoring intention as it forms. “I know myself, and I

know I’m talking,” she says of her mindfulness attention. “I know that I’m raising the hand.” But what emerged for her through the practice was not serenity but self-recognition...including, at times, impulses she did not even want to see in herself. “Sometimes I also cried, ‘Oh, my God, I’m bad like this!’” She frames the difficulty as continual, a repeated return to attention, and connects that interior truthfulness to how one treats other people under pressure.

Chalida’s entry into political activism emerged from Thailand’s cycles of upheaval, beginning in the 1970s and extending into the early 1990s. She situates herself in the era of October 14, 1973, the October 6, 1976 massacre, and later Black May in 1992. She describes student activism during those years not as strategic but reactive — a response to direct exposure to state violence. “We just reacted immediately, as a student, to prevent and protect the people,” she says. In that atmosphere of repression and urgency, she joined the movement into the jungle alongside the Communist Party, believing at the time that armed struggle might be the best solution for real political change.

Looking back, Chalida does not romanticize that decision, nor does she frame it as a moment of awakening. Instead, she describes disillusionment as something learned through experience — a recognition that the Communist Party “cannot be the answer of the politic,” and that political movements ultimately depend on the character and motives of those who lead them, more than the ideology being promoted. From that period, she draws a broader conclusion about Thai public life: power consolidates around private interest, reinforced by money and patronage, and is rarely moved by moral argument alone.

### CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/3/26/episode-509-reality-bites>



# REPORT FINDS MYANMAR JUNTA ELECTION IN ETHNIC AREAS MARKED BY EXCLUSION AND MILITARY DOMINANCE

The three rounds of junta-organised elections held in Myanmar's ethnic minority areas were marked by widespread voter exclusion, limited territorial reach, and structural advantages for the military-backed party, according to a report released by Burma News International (BNI) on 6 April.

The report said the 2025–2026 election, held in three phases, was conducted in a “highly constrained political and territorial environment”. Overwhelmingly favouring the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), it has easily secured about 72 percent of seats nationwide.

Ethnic parties, despite fielding candidates across multiple regions, won just over 15 percent of seats, reflecting what the report described as a lack of meaningful political competition.

A key finding was the sharp contraction of the electorate. Eligible voters fell from around 37–38 million in 2020 to just over 24 million. More than 13 million people were effectively excluded due to displacement, insecurity, and administrative restrictions.

The report highlighted particularly severe exclusion in ethnic states, where large areas were unable to participate in voting. In Chin State, elections were held in only two of nine townships, while in Rakhine State,

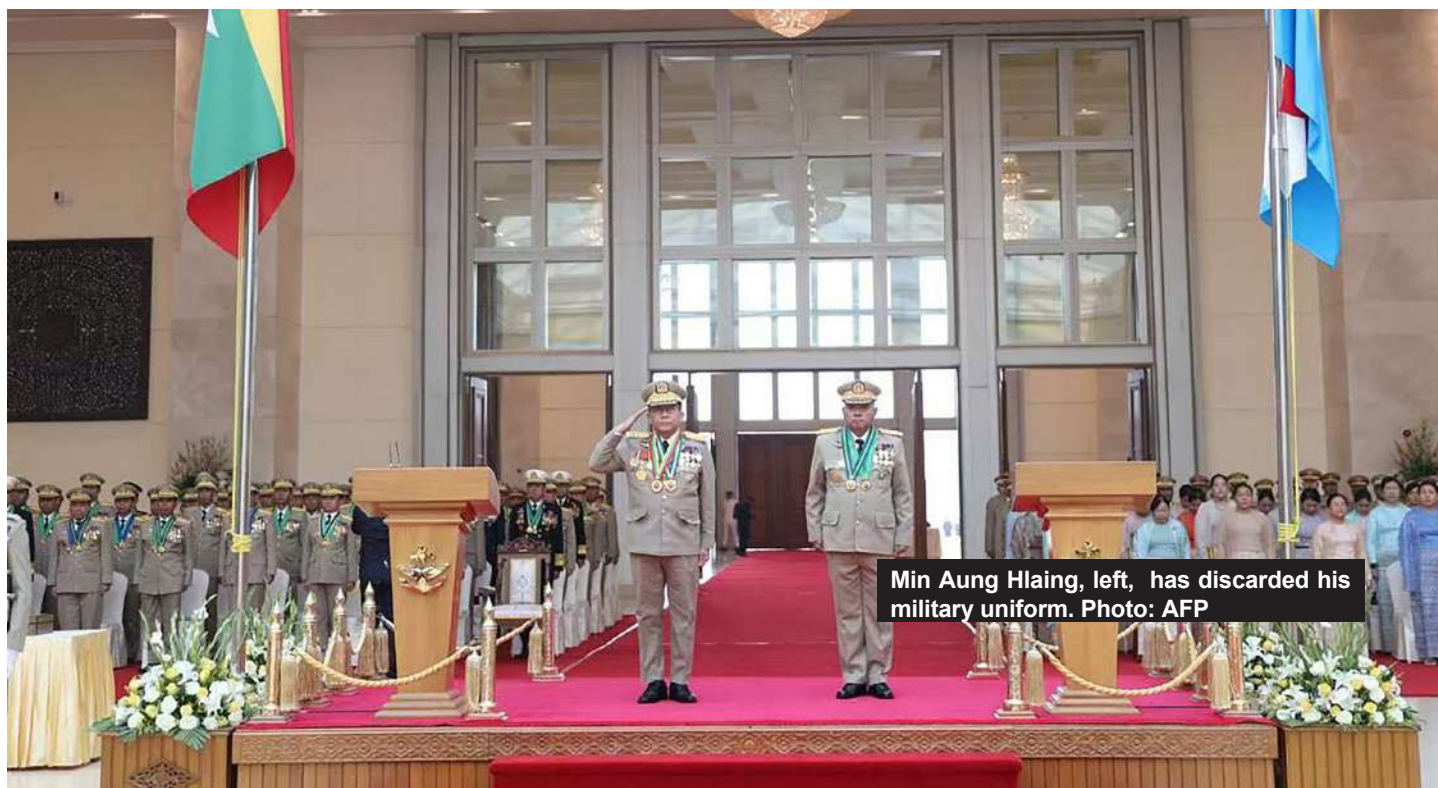
voting took place in just three of 17 townships, often with further exclusions at the village level.

Nationwide, voting was conducted in 263 townships, but could not be held in 67 others due to conflict and resistance control. Even within areas where elections were officially organised, polling was absent in hundreds of wards and thousands of village tracts, underscoring what the report described as a “territorially selective” process.

The BNI report concluded that the election functioned less as a competitive democratic exercise and more as an administrative mechanism to consolidate military authority. It pointed to low voter turnout, widespread legal restrictions on opposition parties, and the dominance of advance voting as factors undermining credibility.

Despite the formal conduct of polling, the resulting political system faces a “significant legitimacy deficit”, the report said, arguing that the process failed to reflect the will of Myanmar's population.

The findings add to mounting criticism of the junta's electoral roadmap, as conflict and resistance continue to shape political conditions across large parts of the country.



## MYANMAR SOCIAL MEDIA USERS REACT TO MIN AUNG HLAING'S NEW ROLE

**M**in Aung Hlaing's election as Myanmar's 11th president is the biggest topic on social media today. People are debating whether this is real change or just a change of clothes.

The parliamentary vote on 3 April came after weeks of preparation by the junta, including elections that excluded major opposition parties. He won 429 out of 584 votes in a parliament filled with military supporters and USDP members. Nan Ni Ni Aye became the country's first female vice president.

On Facebook, users are sharing their anger and frustration. "In the end, he got his dream by killing so many people and destroying so many lives," one user wrote. Another worried about the economy and violence: "Now that he's president, rice and oil prices will keep going up. And he will bomb the whole country with fighter jets whenever he wants." Some pointed

out the strange process: "Becoming president without even being a party member — this is not something normal people can do."

On Telegram, resistance groups are sharing statements saying they do not accept this government. On TikTok, young people are making funny videos comparing his military uniform to civilian clothes.

Critics say this change is just for show, and ASEAN countries are unsure whether to welcome him back to meetings.

Min Aung Hlaing has wanted to be president for more than 10 years. Five years after taking power and starting a civil war, he finally got what he wanted — but much of the country is still not under military control.

# 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.