

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**One Flower Does
Not Make a Spring**

**What the
Resistance Is
Saying About U Win
Myint's Release**

● **Survival Over Revolution: Why the TNLA
Reached Out to Min Aung Hlaing**

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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

PLAYING GAMES

The maneuvering by Min Aung Hlaing and his regime reveals a familiar authoritarian playbook: using selective concessions to soften international criticism while maintaining firm control at home. The periodic announcement of prisoner amnesties, including the slight sentence reduction for Aung San Suu Kyi and the freeing of former president Win Myint last week, are less genuine gestures of reconciliation and more calculated signals aimed at multiple audiences. It projects an image of moderation to external observers while reminding domestic opponents that the military still decides the terms of political life.

These moves are not occurring in a vacuum. Since the 2021 coup in Myanmar, the junta has faced sustained resistance, both armed and civil, alongside diplomatic isolation and economic strain. In this context, even small symbolic acts - like trimming prison sentences or hinting at improved detention conditions - can be deployed to test international reaction. The regime appears to be probing whether such gestures might open the door to reduced sanctions, increased diplomatic engagement, or fractures in the unified stance of its critics.

The handling of Aung San Suu Kyi is especially telling. Once the face of Myanmar's democratic aspirations, she now serves as both a bargaining chip and a controlled symbol. Any shift from prison to a form of house arrest would likely be tightly managed, limiting her communication and political relevance. The junta gains flexibility - it can claim humanitarian consideration while ensuring she remains politically neutralized. At the same time, her partial release could be used to encourage divisions among opposition groups or to entice foreign governments into re-engagement under the pretense of "progress".

However, this strategy carries inherent risks. The gap between symbolic concessions and substantive political change is stark, and many observers - both inside and outside Myanmar - are unlikely to be persuaded. Amnesty announcements do little to address the broader context of repression, ongoing conflict, and the lack of a credible path back to democratic governance. If anything, they may reinforce perceptions that the regime is acting in bad faith, using individuals' freedom as leverage rather than as a step toward national reconciliation.

Moreover, the junta's approach underestimates the resilience of Myanmar's opposition. The protest movement and ethnic armed organizations have shown adaptability and persistence, and they are unlikely to interpret these gestures as meaningful reform. Instead, they may view them as confirmation that the regime is under pressure and attempting to buy time.

In the end, the "game" being played is one of optics and control. By offering just enough to generate headlines but not enough to shift realities, Min Aung Hlaing's regime seeks to navigate a narrow path between isolation and survival. Whether this balancing act succeeds will depend less on the gestures themselves and more on how firmly the international community and domestic actors refuse to mistake tactical concessions for genuine change.

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Cover photo of former president Win Myint and former State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw in 2020 during a visit by Chinese leader Xi Jinping by AFP



Former president Win Myint now at home under Myanmar junta guard. Photo: Win Myint in 2029. AFP

ONE FLOWER DOES NOT MAKE A SPRING: WHAT THE RESISTANCE IS SAYING ABOUT U WIN MYINT'S RELEASE

JAMES SHWE

On April 17, 2026 — the first day of the Myanmar New Year — U Win Myint, the last democratically elected president of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, walked out of Taungoo Prison after five years, two months, and sixteen days. He had been seized in the pre-dawn hours of February 1, 2021 by the same men who, this April, claim to have released him.

State media announced he had been "returned to his family" alongside 4,335 Burmese nationals and 179 foreign detainees — 4,514 in total — under a Thingyan amnesty. State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, now 80, had her 27-year sentence reduced by one-sixth and was reportedly transferred from detention to house arrest, according to a senior military source who spoke anonymously to the Associated Press. NLD spokesman Myo Nyunt visited U Win Myint at his family's home in Naypyidaw and said he was "in good health".

The diaspora rejoiced. So did I. A Myanmar family has its father back. That moment belongs to them.

But within twenty-four hours, a second story began to be written — not in Naypyidaw, but in the offices of the National Unity Government, the Karenni Interim Executive Council, the Kachin Independence Organization, and along the wires to New York where Myanmar's UN ambassador still holds his country's seat. The resistance is speaking with extraordinary discipline. And it is speaking a single sentence back to the world: one flower does not make a spring.

A Revolutionary Victory, Not a Regime Concession
The National Unity Government's position statement, issued on April 18 from nugmyanmar.org, opens with an unambiguous reframing (NUG):

"The reunion of the President with his family, who was freely and fairly elected by the people, as a result of sustained domestic and international pressure, is firmly regarded as an integral part of the people's revolutionary victory."



IN MORE NORMAL TIMES - President Win Myint with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi with visiting Chinese leader Xi Jinping in 2020 in Naypyidaw. Photo: AFP

Read that carefully. The NUG does not thank Min Aung Hlaing. It does not acknowledge the legitimacy of his office. It credits the release to "sustained domestic and international pressure" and classifies it as a people's victory — a concession extracted from the dictatorship by five years of armed and civil resistance, not a gift bestowed by a new presidency.

That framing is the load-bearing wall of the entire resistance response, and it strips the amnesty of the thing Naypyidaw needs most from it: the appearance of magnanimity.

The statement goes further. The NUG "together with ethnic revolutionary organizations, revolutionary forces, and the people, continues to uphold and recognize the results of the 2020 general election." And: "President U Win Myint and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi continue to be recognized as the duly elected President and State Counsellor, respectively." U Win Myint himself has said nothing publicly since his release. Whatever he chooses to say or not say in the difficult weeks ahead, the NUG and the wider resistance structure are holding the political line on his behalf.

The Six Principles That Now Bind the Opposition

The NUG's April 18 statement is not a stand-alone cry. It anchors itself in two earlier commitments: the common positions of January 31, 2024 issued jointly with the Kachin, Karenni, Karen, and Chin allied ethnic groups; and the foundational announcement of the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) on March 30, 2026. Together these documents set out six political principles that must now be read aloud every time the word "peace" is used in connection with Myanmar:

One, to overturn the usurpation of state power by the military, and to terminate the involvement of the armed forces in politics. Two, to ensure that all armed forces operate solely under the command of a civilian

government elected through democratic processes. Three, to abrogate the 2008 Constitution in its entirety and quash all attempts to reinstate its provisions. Four, to draft and promulgate a new constitution embodying federalism and democratic values, with the consensus of all relevant parties. Five, to establish a new Federal Democratic Union in accordance with that constitution. Six, to institute transitional justice to deliver accountability for victims of injustices during the conflict period — including gender-based violence.

A single released president satisfies none of these. A single released president does not end military involvement in politics, does not place armed forces under civilian command, does not repeal the 2008 Constitution under which Min Aung Hlaing has declared himself elected, does not federalize the Union, and does not answer for the nearly 8,000 civilians killed or the 3.58 million displaced since the coup.

Any "Five-Point Consensus progress" argument mounted around U Win Myint's release must be measured against this six-point framework — and every international interlocutor, every ASEAN chair, every UN envoy, must now be asked the same question: which of the six did the release advance?

A Parallel Amnesty, and What It Reveals

On the very same day U Win Myint walked out of Taungoo, the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC) issued its own Thingyan amnesty. Chaired by Khu Oo Reh — and operating as Myanmar's first resistance-run civilian administration since June 2023 — the IEC pardoned 25 prisoners outright and reduced sentences for 209 others.

The contrast is not accidental. The Karenni IEC governs territory the junta does not control. Its amnesty carries no re-arrest clause. And it asks for no recognition in return. It is an act of civilian government, not of legitimacy laundering.

Min Aung Hlaing's amnesty, by contrast, comes with strings visible in its own text. Every Burmese national released under the order is freed under Section 401, Subsection (1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure — the provision that returns a pardoned individual to prison, for the remainder of the original sentence plus any new penalty, on re-offense. Every word U Win Myint speaks from this day forward will be composed in the shadow of that clause. It is not freedom. It is a longer leash.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners counts approximately 22,170 individuals still detained on political grounds, and the Institute for Strategy and Policy Myanmar has documented that fewer than 14 percent of post-coup amnesty releases have been political prisoners. One president walked out. Roughly 22,169 remain inside.

The Secretary-General Noticed the Same Thing

The United Nations Secretary-General's statement on April 17 was carefully worded and worth quoting in full, because it rejects the exact narrative Naypyidaw is selling:

"The Secretary-General takes note of the announcement of amnesty, including the release of prisoners, reductions of sentences and commuting death penalties to life imprisonment, and the news about the release of President Win Myint. He underscores the need for meaningful efforts to ensure the swift release of all those arbitrarily detained, including State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and to create conditions conducive to a credible political process.

A viable political solution must be founded on an immediate cessation of violence and a genuine commitment to inclusive dialogue. This requires an environment that allows the people of Myanmar to freely and peacefully exercise their political rights."

Note the verb — takes note. Not welcomes. Not commends. Note the continuing insistence on "all those arbitrarily detained." Note the three conditions for a viable political solution: cessation of violence, inclusive dialogue, and freely exercised political rights — all three of which Min Aung Hlaing's amnesty conspicuously fails to deliver. This is the line Amnesty International drew on April 3 when it responded to Min Aung Hlaing's "election" by declaring that "no individual should have immunity from prosecution for crimes under international law, no matter their position". This is the line ICC spokesperson Oriane Maillet drew on April 14 when she told DVB that the general's civilian pivot "doesn't change the fact that an arrest warrant was requested against him" and that the Rome Statute "applies equally to all persons without any distinction based on official capacity".

The ICC application against Min Aung Hlaing for crimes against humanity — deportation and persecution of Rohingya in Rakhine State in 2017 — was filed by Prosecutor Karim A. A. Khan on November 27, 2024 and has sat before Pre-Trial Chamber I for sixteen months. For comparison: the warrant against Vladimir Putin took twenty-three days; the warrant against Muammar Gaddafi took six weeks. Every day this warrant remains pending is a day the pardon of U Win Myint is used, internationally, to sanitize the record of the man accused of ordering a genocide.

A title cannot sanitize a record. A pardon cannot erase a warrant.

Beijing's Script, Naypyidaw's Performance

It is impossible to read the release honestly without reading Beijing into it. China was the first country to formally acknowledge Min Aung Hlaing's presidency; Ambassador Ma Jia called on him in Naypyidaw on April 6, days before the inauguration; Xi Jinping sent congratulations. Beijing's special envoy Deng Xijun has

spent the last eighteen months dismantling the conditions that made Operation 1027 possible: pressuring the United Wa State Army to cut weapons flows to the resistance; holding MNDAA commander Peng Daxun under house arrest in Yunnan since late October 2024; engineering Lashio's return to the junta in April 2025; and fracturing the Three Brotherhood Alliance along lines drawn in Beijing.

U Win Myint's release is the next act. The regime and Beijing will attempt to stage televised ceremonies positioning him as a "civilian interlocutor" for Chinese-brokered talks. State media will ask, in tones of reasonable bewilderment, even U Win Myint is ready to talk — why aren't the PDFs? The narrative will be amplified through ASEAN, through the UN Security Council where Beijing holds a veto, and through the pro-regime commentary already surfacing in Forbes, The Hill, and Eurasia Review. Whether U Win Myint himself participates is his decision, made under the heaviest possible pressure and the explicit threat of Section 401(1). That choice is his. But the legitimacy the regime seeks to manufacture around it is not.

The KIO has already answered. "It cannot talk to the KIO alone," Lt. Gen. Gun Maw said at the Kachin Independence Day ceremony on February 5. "The KIO will not accept the approach of talking bilaterally, and we have already told all the international community and neighboring countries". NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La has been equally blunt, calling SCEF "a milestone of the Spring Revolution" that will "completely remove the junta army from Myanmar's politics, end the military dictatorship, and crack down on any attempts to bring life to the 2008 Constitution". The Karen National Union, which on April 10 ratified a draft charter for a self-governed, multi-ethnic region, had previously denounced Min Aung Hlaing's election as "unlawful and illegitimate".

And from frontline resistance civil society: "Global Myanmar Spring Revolution welcomes the release of

President U Win Myint. But let's be clear: one flower does not make a spring," wrote Mark Farmaner of Burma Campaign UK.

The Hostage Still Inside

The most important detail of April 17 is what did not happen. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's sentence was cut by roughly four and a half years. Her location was changed. Her freedom was not restored. She remains the most valuable hostage the regime holds — and the card Beijing is likeliest to play at the moment of maximum leverage, when disarmament, acceptance of the 2008 Constitution, or recognition of the 2026 "election" is the price demanded of the resistance.

The NUG's April 18 statement anticipates this trap exactly. Its demand is not tiered, not conditional, not subject to negotiation on the regime's timeline. The "ultimate objective of the Spring Revolution," the NUG writes, is not only the unconditional release of all those arbitrarily detained — State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi explicitly named — but "complete liberation from the entrenched cycle of oppression whereby successive military dictatorships have prioritized their own interests while systematically repressing and exploiting the country and its people."

This is the sentence international capitals must now echo back. Not "encouraging steps." Not "welcome gestures." Complete liberation from the cycle.

Why This Matters at the UN

The fight over how U Win Myint's release is read will be settled, more than anywhere else, at Turtle Bay. On December 12, 2025, the UN General Assembly adopted the Credentials Committee report by consensus, allowing Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun — who represents the elected 2020 government, not Naypyidaw — to continue as Myanmar's Permanent Representative through the current session. The UN's official Protocol

List continues to record U Win Myint as President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as Minister of Foreign Affairs. On April 2, 2026, Kyaw Moe Tun submitted a formal letter to the Secretary-General continuing to speak for Myanmar against the regime's "election".

The regime will use U Win Myint's release to argue, at this autumn's UN General Assembly Credentials Committee, that a pardon reshuffles the question. It does not. The six principles of the SCEF did not change on April 17. The 22,170 political prisoners did not change. The nearly 8,000 civilians killed, the 3.58 million displaced, and the 630,000 Rohingya classified by Genocide Watch as Stage 9: Extermination did not change. What changed is that one elected official went home to Naypyidaw — while the man who arrested him at dawn on February 1, 2021 now sits behind a desk labeled president.

The Three Non-Negotiables

Between now and September, the international community will be tested. Testing will come through ASEAN chairs, through quiet cables from Beijing, through op-eds placed in Western journals whose editors do not know Khu Oo Reh from Zin Mar Aung. The answer must be unified, short, and impossible to launder:

First. Unconditional release of all political prisoners. Not sentence reductions. Not house arrest. Not tiered bargaining. All 22,000-plus — including State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi — released without strings. The NUG said this on April 18. The Secretary-General implied it the same day. The resistance has held this line for five years.

Second. Inclusive dialogue, or no dialogue at all. The KIO has rejected bilateral talks. So has the SCEF, which by design represents the full resistance architec-

ture: NUG, KIO, KNU, KNPP, CNF, and the three-pillar structure of states and ethnic revolutionary organizations, the people's movement, and women. Any negotiation that excludes the SCEF, its constituent organizations, or women at the table is not a peace process. It is choreography.

Third. Refusal of recognition laundering. The EU, Japan, Canada, the UK, and ASEAN itself refused to recognize the 2025–26 elections as free, fair, inclusive, or credible. One pardon cannot erase that record. Any government that accepts Min Aung Hlaing's presidency on the strength of U Win Myint's release is not resolving a crisis. It is rewarding a coup.

A Father Came Home. A Country Has Not.

U Win Myint is a free man tonight, to the extent that Section 401(1) permits anyone pardoned by this regime to be free. That is worth marking. It is worth celebrating. It is worth every Burmese family lighting a candle in his name on Thingyan.

But the Steering Council did not form on March 30 to be outmaneuvered on April 17. The six principles were not adopted to be traded for one man's freedom. The NUG did not issue its April 18 statement to ask for gratitude. It issued that statement to put a fence around the moment — to insist that a people's victory cannot be rebranded as a general's grace, that a release of one cannot be substituted for a liberation of all, and that the arithmetic of Myanmar's revolution is not divisible.

One flower does not make a spring. The Spring Revolution will.

James Shwe is a Myanmar American professional engineer and advocate for democracy in Myanmar, affiliated with the Los Angeles Myanmar Movement.

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



Resistance fighters in Kalay.
Photo: Supplied

MIN AUNG HLAING CLAIMS PRECEDENCY BUT REVOLUTIONARIES CONTINUE THE FIGHT

After junta leader Min Aung Hlaing consolidated his position, armed clashes with ethnic revolutionary organizations and PDFs continue to intensify across Myanmar, underscoring the regime's persistent reliance on military force despite mounting resistance nationwide.

In the country's north, fighting has escalated sharply across Kachin State and parts of northern Shan State. According to a statement by the Kachin Independence Army, at least 20 clashes were recorded during the second and third weeks of April in key areas including Hpakant, Danai, Waingmaw, and Bhamo, as well as KIA-controlled territories.

The long-running battle for Bhamo has intensified, with junta forces increasingly deploying heavy artillery and airstrikes in an attempt to regain ground. In Hpakant—known for its lucrative jade mining industry—fighting remains inconclusive as both sides continue to contest control of the strategically important Mashi Kahtawng “praying hill,” which has reportedly changed hands multiple times.

Elsewhere in Danai Township, KIA and allied forces claimed to have seized two outposts belonging to the pro-junta Warazup Pyithusit militia. In Waingmaw, junta troops and allied units are attempting to push along the Waingmaw–Kanpaitee road to retake rare earth mining areas. However, resistance forces have so far held their defensive positions, preventing any significant breakthrough.

In southeastern Myanmar, the Karen National Union and its allies have stepped up coordinated offensives across their areas of operation. Throughout April, they reportedly

captured at least five junta positions, seizing weapons and ammunition in the process.

On April 12, resistance forces captured the strategic Laykay post in Mon State after six days of sustained fighting. The operation resulted in the capture of the junta's deputy commander and another soldier. The following day, KNU-led forces seized the Kyalbyaung outpost in Brigade 7 territory, an important position linked to the junta's Point 962 base. Weapons recovered included MA-series rifles, a machine gun, and a rocket-propelled grenade.

Resistance operations have also targeted the junta's Wawlay post south of Myawaddy. The broader southern Myawaddy area, including Minletpan and Phaloo villages, has seen sustained heavy fighting in recent weeks, reflecting the strategic importance of the Thai-Myanmar border corridor.

In western Myanmar, clashes have intensified in Ayeyarwady Region, particularly in Laymyatnhar Township, where the Arakan Army and allied resistance groups have captured villages and junta positions. The military has responded with counteroffensives, reinforcing troops and increasing airstrikes during the

Thingyan period in an effort to reclaim lost ground.

Meanwhile, in Chin State, junta columns have advanced toward the Var Bridge near Falam after a grueling six-month campaign through mountainous terrain. The regime also retook Webula, a town previously held by Chin resistance forces. The bridge lies just 11 miles from Falam, often referred to as the state's second capital, marking a potentially strategic gain for the military.

However, the advance has come at a high cost. Junta forces reportedly suffered significant casualties while relying heavily on artillery and airpower. Resistance remains strong, with two major groups—the Chinland Council and the Chin Brotherhood—continuing to oppose the military's push despite internal divisions.

Taken together, the spread and intensity of clashes across multiple fronts highlight the entrenched and fragmented nature of Myanmar's conflict. While the junta continues to leverage superior firepower, resistance groups have demonstrated resilience and tactical coordination, preventing decisive gains and prolonging a nationwide war of attrition.



Fuel restrictions are biting. Photo: EPA

Fuel shortages drive up prices

Fuel shortages in Myanmar are driving up costs across essential sectors, placing growing pressure on households and farmers as the hot season intensifies.

At fuel pumps, the official price of diesel has surged to nearly 8,000 kyats per liter. The impact is particularly severe during the dry season, when electricity supply becomes unreliable and many households and businesses rely on diesel-powered generators. The agricultural sector is also heavily affected, as diesel remains essential for irrigation and harvesting operations.

The junta has sought to tighten control over fuel distribution. Authorities in Mon State recently took action against staff at a fuel terminal operated by Puma Energy in Mottama Township, accusing them of diverting fuel to the black market instead of supplying official pumps and stations. The move highlights ongoing concerns over supply leakages amid tightening fuel availability.

The ripple effects of the fuel crisis are evident in rising food prices. According to findings by the World

Food Programme, general food prices have increased by around 19 percent. Staple items such as rice, cooking oil, and vegetables have all seen significant price hikes, exacerbated by global supply disruptions linked to tensions around the Strait of Hormuz. In domestic markets, the price of ordinary rice has climbed to around 90,000 kyats per 1.5-basket sack, while higher-quality rice now fetches up to 200,000 kyats.

Transportation costs have also risen sharply. Bus fares on key routes, including the Yangon–Mandalay corridor, have more than doubled. In early March, tickets ranged between 30,000 and 40,000 kyats, but prices have now climbed to between 80,000 and about 100,000 kyats. The increase has made travel unaffordable for many salaried workers, particularly during the Thingyan holiday period, when people traditionally return to their hometowns.

In central Myanmar, authorities in Magway Region have begun selling diesel directly to farmers in Minbu and Natmauk townships at a rate of one gallon per acre, priced at 10,000 kyats—around 2,000 kyats higher than urban fuel stations. Farmers report that the supplied



Temperatures are increasing. Photo: AFP

fuel is domestically produced and of lower quality compared to imported diesel. Despite distributing only about 20,000 gallons, state-run newspapers have portrayed the effort as a major success.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing and energy officials have claimed that fuel consumption has been reduced in response to the Middle East crisis. However, many residents say these measures overlook the hardships faced by ordinary people. “They do not see how people and farmers are struggling. They only focus on saving foreign currency. It is ridiculous,” a Yangon resident told local media.

Frustration is increasingly visible. A widely shared video on social media shows a farmer lamenting that his harvested paddy is worth less than a barrel of diesel. With input costs rising, farmers estimate that producing 100 baskets of paddy now costs about 1.5 million kyats, while market returns reach only around 1.2 million kyats—leaving many operating at a loss.

As fuel shortages persist, their cascading effects on food production, transport, and daily life continue to deepen Myanmar’s economic strain.

Living conditions worsen as hot season intensifies

Amid intensifying heat across Myanmar, prolonged power outages are compounding daily hardships, particularly in central dry zone regions where temperatures are nearing extreme levels.

In Mandalay, authorities have imposed scheduled electricity cuts of up to eight hours per day since March 18. The city, located in Myanmar’s dry zone, has been experiencing temperatures approaching—and in some cases exceeding—40 degrees Celsius. To manage limited supply, electricity authorities have divided urban areas into three groups, each facing two daily outages lasting four hours each. The load-shedding program is expected to continue until June, according to official statements.

However, residents say the outages are often unpredictable. “Although the electricity authorities issued a timetable, it is not accurate,” a Mandalay resident told People’s Spring. “In the morning, power was cut from 4 to 8 a.m., restored briefly, and then cut again at noon.”

Similar shortages are affecting other dry zone towns, including Yenangyaung and Chauk. While junta authorities have announced plans to open temporary shelters to help residents cope with extreme heat,

independent media have reported little evidence of their effectiveness, particularly for elderly populations who are most vulnerable to heat-related illnesses.

The consequences are becoming increasingly severe. In Magway Region, two people—a 60-year-old man and a 50-year-old woman—reportedly died from heatstroke on April 19 and 20. Data from the junta’s Department of Meteorology and Hydrology show some of the country’s highest temperatures recorded in recent days: Chauk at 43.2°C, Minbu at 42.8°C, Magway at 42.4°C, and both Myingyan and Sagaing at 42.0°C. Mandalay and Nyaung-U also recorded temperatures of around 41.5°C.

In northern Myanmar, power disruptions are also affecting Myitkyina, where electricity has been cut since April 18 due to major repairs at a hydropower plant. Authorities say outages will continue until at least May 1.

The combined impact of fuel shortages and unreliable electricity is disrupting both daily life and economic activity. In Myitkyina, residents are struggling to charge mobile phones and maintain basic communications. Transportation has also been affected. While motorbikes remain the primary mode of travel, rising fuel costs have pushed many people to switch to China-made electric bikes. However, continued power cuts now limit their usability, creating new challenges for commuting.

Small and medium-sized enterprises are among the hardest hit. Many businesses have been forced to suspend operations due to the lack of stable electricity. With fuel both scarce and expensive, running generators is no longer a viable alternative for many operators.

Across the country, the overlapping crises of extreme heat, fuel shortages, and power outages are placing growing strain on communities. As temperatures continue to rise and infrastructure struggles to cope, residents face increasing difficulty maintaining both their livelihoods and basic daily routines.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S EX-PRESIDENT WIN MYINT AMONG THOUSANDS PARDONED IN NEW YEAR AMNESTY

On 17 April, 2026, marking the first day of the Myanmar New Year, the Office of the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar issued Order No. (42/2026), granting a full pardon to former President Win Myint.

Pro-military media outlets, including MRTV and MWD, confirmed that the release was ordered by Min Aung Hlaing, effectively commuting all remaining sentences for the former leader.

Win Myint, who served as the 10th President of Myanmar after being elected in 2018, was detained in Naypyidaw alongside State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi during the 1 February, 2021, military coup. Prior to his presidency, he had a long legislative career, serving as a member of parliament from 2012 to 2018 and as Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Following the coup, Win Myint was subjected to a series of legal proceedings, resulting in convictions for corruption, violations of the Penal Code, and breaches of the Natural Disaster Management Law. While various sentences had totaled up to 14 years, today's order saw his release from Taungoo Prison, though officials noted the amnesty is subject to specified conditions.

The former President's release was part of a broader traditional New Year clemency programme that saw 4,335 prisoners nationwide granted amnesty.

Political analysts suggest the move is a calculated strategic maneuver by the military-led government rather than a purely humanitarian gesture. By releasing a high-profile figure like Win Myint while thousands of other activists remain behind bars, the junta appears to be attempting to soften its international "pariah" status and project an image of "national reconciliation."

This strategy is frequently viewed as an effort to appease regional neighbours and major partners, such as China and Russia, by signaling a shift toward a nominally civilian administration.

However, the conditional nature of the release ensures that while Win Myint is physically free and, he remains under the threat of immediate re-arrest should he resume an active leadership role in the pro-democracy movement.

This effectively sidelines one of the country's most prominent political voices while the military government seeks to stabilize its authority and gain broader international recognition.



FLASHBACK. Photo: AFP

AUNG SAN SUU KYI RECEIVES PARTIAL PARDON IN MYANMAR NEW YEAR AMNESTY

On April 17, 2026, marking the first day of the Myanmar New Year, the military-led government issued a series of sweeping pardons and sentence reductions. While the amnesty led to the release and home return of former President Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi remains in detention at an undisclosed location despite a reduction in her prison term.

According to legal representatives, the 80-year-old Nobel laureate received a four-and-a-half-year reduction in her 27-year sentence, representing roughly a one-sixth cut to her total time.

This adjustment aligns with the junta's broader clemency order, which reduced death sentences to life imprisonment, life sentences to 40 years, and applied a one-sixth reduction to all other prison terms. Despite the reduction, it remains unclear whether the State Counsellor will be permitted to serve her remaining prison term under house arrest. Since the 2021 coup, she has faced a litany of charges including corruption and election fraud that her allies maintain are politically motivated.

In contrast, former President Win Myint was officially released from Taungoo Prison and has returned to his family. His release was confirmed on social media by writer Htin Lin Oo, who shared a photograph of the former president following his return home.

Reports from National League for Democracy (NLD) central working committee member Dr. Myo Nyunt suggest that Win Myint's release involved a significant point of contention regarding Section 401(1) of the Criminal Procedure Code. While the junta intended the release to be conditional meaning any

future offense would trigger the reinstatement of his original 10-year term, Win Myint reportedly refused to sign the document, asserting his innocence of all prior charges. He was ultimately permitted to return home without signing the paperwork.

The former president, reportedly in good health, had been serving a commuted sentence following his 2021 arrest. During his trial, he testified that senior military officials had unsuccessfully pressured him to resign for "health reasons" just moments before the coup began.

Afterwards, the military authorities charged him with multiple offenses, including Section 505(b) of the Penal Code, Section 25 of the Natural Disaster Management Law, and five corruption charges related to the alleged rental and purchase of a helicopter for disaster purposes, as well as Section 130(a) of the Penal Code. In total, he faced eight cases and was initially sentenced to 14 years in prison. Later, following sentence reductions, his prison term was reduced to 10 years.

The New Year amnesty covered a total of 4,335 prisoners and 179 foreigners across facilities such as Insein, Obo, and Pakokku prisons. Among those freed was award-winning documentary filmmaker Shin Daewe, who had been serving a sentence at Insein Prison.

Analysts view these high-profile releases as an attempt by newly inaugurated President Min Aung Hlaing to project an image of national reconciliation following his transition to a civilian leadership role earlier this month.



Photo: AFP

UN RIGHTS CHIEF URGES IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF MYANMAR'S AUNG SAN SUU KYI

UN rights chief Volker Turk called for the immediate and unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi after the jailed Myanmar democracy icon had her sentence reduced on Friday.

The military has ruled Myanmar by force for almost all of its post-independence history, before a decade-long democratic experiment gave civilian politicians tentative control.

The generals took back power in a 2021 coup deposing the government of Aung San Suu Kyi, now 80, detaining the democratic figurehead and plunging the country into civil war.

"All those detained unjustly since the coup -- including state counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi -- need to be released immediately and unconditionally," he said on X.

"There must be an end to the unrelenting violence against all of Myanmar's people."

Aung San Suu Kyi had her sentence reduced on Friday as part of a mass amnesty, a source close to her legal case told AFP.

Myanmar's former president Win Myint, also

detained since the coup, was also pardoned of his convictions during the post-putsch period of military rule, a statement said.

Turk said he was relieved by the "long overdue release" of Win Myint and other prisoners from arbitrary detention, as well as the commutation of death sentences.

Win Myint served as president starting in 2018, with Myanmar in the midst of its experiment with civilian government that was abruptly halted by the coup.

While he occupied the top spot, it functioned as a ceremonial role following the lead of de facto government head Aung San Suu Kyi, who was barred from holding the presidency under a military-drafted constitution.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate remains detained, serving a 27-year sentence rights groups decry as a politically motivated move to hobble her National League for Democracy party.

AFP



Shin Daewe after her release. Photo: AFP

RSF APPLAUDS RELEASED OF MYANMAR JOURNALIST SHIN DAEWE

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) issued a statement of relief on 17 April regarding the release of Myanmar journalist and filmmaker Shin Daewe. An RSF Press Freedom Award laureate, she had been detained by the military junta for her unwavering dedication to independent journalism

The text of the RSF statement is as follows.

On 17 April, after 915 days of living a nightmare, Shin Daewe returned home following her release under an amnesty. A former contributor to the US broadcaster Radio Free Asia (RFA), she was arrested and detained by Myanmar soldiers in October 2023 in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, while working on a documentary. RFA contacted RSF to confirm her release and express its joy and relief at her return home.

In January 2024, a military court sentenced the detained journalist to life imprisonment under section 50(j) of the Counter-Terrorism Law, which was later reduced to 15 years. While in jail, she was interrogated repeatedly and tortured, according to her husband. He told RFA he had seen evidence of violence during

two prison visits, including "stitches on her head and wounds on her arms."

"The release of Shin Daewe is an immense relief, first and foremost for her loved ones, but also for the entire Myanmar journalism community. It must be made clear that she should never have been arrested, nor subjected to mistreatment. We now call on the Myanmar regime to immediately release the 40 journalists still detained in the country, according to the RSF barometer," said Cédric Alviani, the Director of RSF Asia-Pacific.

RSF has long campaigned for the release of Shin Daewe, who is known for her work on environmental issues and the impact of the civil war in Myanmar. She has won multiple awards, including the 2025 RSF Press Freedom Prize for Independence, awarded while she was still in detention. Myanmar ranks 169th out of 180 countries and territories in the 2025 RSF World Press Freedom Index. The country is the world's second-largest jailer of journalists, just behind China.



NUG ACTING PRESIDENT DEMANDS RELEASE OF DETAINED LEADERS ON ORGANISATION'S 5TH ANNIVERSARY

Acting President Duwa Lashi La of the National Unity Government (NUG) issued a high-profile demand for the immediate and unconditional release of State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, President U Win Myint, and all political prisoners on 16 April.

The call was made one day before U Win Myint was released from prison.

Delivering a keynote address on the 5th anniversary of the NUG's formation, the Acting President characterized the release of those unjustly detained as a "primary responsibility" and the driving force of the ongoing revolution.

"Alongside our leaders, we unequivocally demand the immediate and unconditional release of everyone unjustly detained during the Spring Revolution," Acting President Duwa Lashi La stated. "Securing their early release is a primary responsibility of our revolution, and their sacrifices serve as the strength that drives us forward."

He further emphasized that the NUG remains acutely aware of the plight of the State Counsellor, the President, and all political prisoners, stating their situation "will not be forgotten for a single minute or second."

Reflecting on the current state of the struggle, the Acting President noted that while the NUG is steadily marching toward the end of the military dictatorship,

the journey has seen both significant triumphs and heavy losses. He candidly admitted that formidable challenges remain to be overcome.

Highlighting unity as the cornerstone of the revolution's success, the interim leader urged stakeholders to move past internal blame and prioritize practical cooperation.

He also warned the public to remain vigilant against those inciting division to undermine the revolution's momentum, advising supporters to focus only on constructive criticism that strengthens the movement.

In his speech, the Acting President expressed deep gratitude to the Myanmar diaspora for their tireless efforts, noting the profound impact of global revolutionary movements. He also officially recognized and recorded the vital support provided by Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) throughout the conflict.

Following the 2021 coup, the military junta detained the country's top leadership. Currently, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is serving a 27-year prison sentence, while President U Win Myint remains imprisoned under a 10-year sentence.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), between 1 February 2021, and 10 April 2026, the military junta and its affiliates have arrested more than 30,800 people for political reasons. Of those, over 22,000 individuals remain in detention.



Campaigning for
Human Rights
and Democracy

BURMA CAMPAIGN UK LABELS POLITICAL PRISONER AMNESTIES AS PROPAGANDA STRATEGY

On 21 April, which is Myanmar's New Year, Burma Campaign UK will participate in Blue Shirt Day to support over 14,000 political prisoners in Myanmar. The group criticized recent amnesties as military propaganda and calls for the immediate release of all detainees, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

The text of Burma Campaign UK's statement regarding Blue Shirt Day is as follows.

More than 14,000 people are in jail for opposing military rule, criticising the regime, or exercising their basic rights, with many facing severe beatings, torture and medical neglect.

On Tuesday 21 April 2026 we are supporting a global day of action in solidarity with political prisoners in Burma: Blue Shirt Day. We are backing this initiative led by the Political Prisoner Network Myanmar (PPNM), an organisation dedicated to defending political prisoners in Burma. Their aim is to provide tailored support to victims of torture, defend the rights of all political prisoners, and secure the release of those still detained.

Blue Shirt Day is rooted in the legacy of U Win Tin, a journalist, democracy activist, and one of Burma's most respected former political prisoners. He spent nearly two decades in jail and continued to wear his blue prison shirt long after his release, saying he would only stop wearing it "when all political prisoners in Burma are free." This powerful symbol has been adopted by activists around the world to call attention to the human toll of arbitrary detention and military repression.

As Burma Campaign UK predicted, the Burmese military have begun releasing political prisoners as

part of a propaganda strategy following sham elections held in 2025 and 2026. However, thousands remain in jail, new arrests are being made, all repressive laws remain in place, and the Burmese military have made no commitment to free all political prisoners.

"The Burmese military's theatrical releases of political prisoners should fool nobody," said Minn Tent Bo, Advocacy and Communications Officer at Burma Campaign UK. "Amnesties are designed to manipulate public opinion and buy international credibility, while the Burmese military continues to jail dissidents at will."

The Burmese military's definition of "terrorism" includes peaceful dissent, criticism of the army, contact with resistance groups, and even family relationships, meaning many people remain in prison despite amnesty announcements. Some activists released under amnesties have been re-arrested on new or similar charges almost immediately, sometimes in a few days or months. Political prisoners endure horrific conditions, including torture, sexual violence and denial of medical care.

Among those still unjustly detained are Aung San Suu Kyi, whose party, the National League for Democracy, won elections in 2020 and Wai Moe Naing, sentenced to 74 years in jail for organising protests against the 2021 military coup.

The ongoing imprisonment of thousands of political prisoners highlights the stark reality: these amnesties are not a sign of reform, but part of a concerted public relations effort by the Burmese military, who are fighting to preserve their power and wealth in the face of unprecedented resistance.



UNITED NATIONS REFUSES TO RECOGNIZE MYANMAR'S MIN AUNG HLAING AS PRESIDENT IN UPDATED DIPLOMATIC LIST

The United Nations has officially declined to recognize Senior General Min Aung Hlaing as the president of Myanmar, despite his recent swearing-in ceremony.

In an updated list of heads of state and foreign ministers released by the UN Department of General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) on 13 April, the global body reaffirmed its recognition of the pre-coup leadership.

According to the official UN designation, Win Myint remains the President of Myanmar, while State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi continues to be listed as the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

This list serves as the definitive guide for the UN regarding diplomatic ceremonies, official invitations, and formal international communications, effectively signaling that the military leader's transition to the presidency lacks international legitimacy within the UN framework.

On 3 April, Myanmar military leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing was elected president for 2026 in a parliamentary vote and was sworn in on 10 April at the Union Parliament.

According to the 2026 Pyidaungsu Hluttaw statement, the swearing-in ceremony was attended by 16 ambassadors and seven chargés d'affaires from 23 countries, along with senior officials including the Vice Chairman of the Political Consultative Conference of China, the Speaker of Belarus's House of Representatives, the Vice Speaker of Russia's State Duma, Cambodia's special representative to ASEAN, and Thailand's former deputy prime minister and foreign minister.

Following the Myanmar military's seizure of power in February 2021, President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were sentenced to a combined 27 years in prison on charges including violations of the Export-Import Law, the Environmental Management Law, and the Anti-Corruption Law.

SPRING REVOLUTION: WINNING BATTLES, BUT RISKING THE WAR

K2

Something remarkable is happening in Myanmar. Through extraordinary sacrifice, pro-democracy and ethnic resistance forces have driven the military junta to the edge — today controlling roughly 38% of the country's territory and commanding 66% of key border trade. By any measure, these are historic gains. But here is the inconvenient truth that no one in the resistance wants to hear: winning on the battlefield is not the same as winning the war. Military momentum, however impressive, cannot by itself secure a lasting victory — or the international legitimacy that must come with it.

The Spring Revolution now remains at a crossroads. If the resistance cannot establish a Federal Democratic Burma — transitioning from armed struggle to genuine nation-building anchored in federal and state constitutions — it risks the worst of all outcomes: an indefinite stalemate, or a coerced political settlement imposed by neighbouring powers that leaves the junta partially intact. To permanently dismantle successive military regimes, the movement must make a fundamental shift — from the familiar politics of temporary alliances to the harder, less glamorous work of building a state.

The Cemetery of Grand Alliances

For over seventy years, Myanmar's resistance has been caught in the same vicious cycle: form a grand alliance, celebrate its promise, watch it unravel. From the Democratic Nationalities United Front in 1956 to the National Democratic Front, the Democratic Alliance of Burma, and the United Nationalities Federal Council, the history of this movement is a cemetery of coalitions that faded into irrelevance. The reason is not a lack of courage or commitment. It is structural. Every one of these alliances rested on political agreements rather than on state institutions bound by law, and political agreements, from the Panglong Agreement (1947) to the Marneplaw Agreement (1992) and the Thoo Mweh Klo Agreement (1998), without legal force, are only as durable as the goodwill behind them.

When an alliance has no working constitution, it has no legal mechanism to enforce rules, manage competing interests, or hold anyone accountable for breaking ranks. In the 1990s, groups within the NDF and

DAB — including the Pa-O National Organization and the Kachin Independence Organization — broke with their alliances' overarching policies to sign unilateral ceasefires with the junta. Without a constitutional or punitive framework, the alliances could do nothing but watch themselves fracture.

The risk of repeating this pattern is real and present. The Federal Democracy Charter (2021), though a genuine milestone, is still a political agreement without legal force. This constraint has already slowed the National Unity Consultative Council, reducing it to a deliberative body rather than an executive one. The Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) now brings together the National Unity Government, the CRPH, and key Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations. This is progress. But history is unambiguous: without at least an interim working constitution, even the most promising high-level alliance will eventually collapse under the burden of its own contradictions.

From Resistance to Governance: What Must Be Done

The transition from resistance to governance does not happen by declaration — it requires concrete, structural action. A working constitution and a unified roadmap are not abstract ideals; they are the practical tools that solve the movement's most immediate problems. They laid down clear rules for revenue-sharing — requiring, for instance, that member states contribute a fixed percentage of their revenue to the federal government — turning what is now a source of friction into a transparent, structured process. They prevent the financial disputes that have derailed past coalitions and ensure that resource management serves long-term development rather than short-term factional interests.

So, what does pragmatic implementation actually look like? Enacting an interim constitution means moving decisively from drafting rooms to the ground. Three steps are essential.

- First, governance must be built from the ground up. Autonomous ethnic states and ad hoc federal units — Karenni, Karen, Kachin, Chin, Sagaing, Magwe, and

Mandalay, etc. — must be formally recognized and empowered to fill the vacuum left by the retreating military.

- Second, a definitive leadership summit must be convened — bringing together top figures from the Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations, the NUG, the NLD, the CRPH, the NUCC, and emerging federal units — with one clear objective: to operationalize the state and federal constitutions jointly.
- Third — and perhaps most critically — the movement cannot wait for unanimous agreement. Unanimity is a luxury revolutions rarely afford. The way forward must be taken with the most active political and military forces currently fighting the dictatorship, even if some choose to stand aside.

There is also the question of international legitimacy — and it is not a secondary concern. The junta is actively laundering its image through sham elections and a proxy political transition designed to present a veneer of normality to the world. The resistance can only counter this by becoming what the junta can never be: a credible, unified, and constitutionally grounded governing partner. A constitutional framework gives the movement a single, coherent voice in diplomatic interactions. It allows the leadership to demonstrate to China, India, ASEAN, and the broader international community that it — not the generals — is the only pragmatic partner capable of guaranteeing border stability and commercial continuity. The constitutional and functional unity of the resistance automatically answers the junta's repeated threat of balkanization.

Justice, too, cannot be deferred. For decades, the military has operated with total impunity, shielded by the 2008 Constitution. Today, the junta wields law not as protection but as a weapon — violently enforcing conscription to turn civilians into human shields. An interim constitution breaks this cycle by institutionalizing the rule of law and establishing mechanisms for accountability. Transitional justice must be embedded directly into the governance framework, ensuring that those responsible for war crimes and gender-based violence face consequences. This is not simply a moral duty. It is the only credible path to building trust across Myanmar's diverse populations — and with the international community watching.

Military fragmentation remains one of the revolution's most dangerous vulnerabilities. Operations 1027 and 1111 proved the revolutionary power of joint command — but as Sun Tzu's warning goes, tactics without strategy are merely the noise before defeat. Powerful factions, including the Arakan Army and the

Three Brotherhood Alliance, remain outside formal political structures like the SCEF, maintaining only tacit military collaboration. A codified constitution addresses this directly by establishing a "One Policy, One Strategy" mandate — standardizing interoperability, joint command, and, ultimately, civilian supremacy over all armed forces. Some groups will continue to operate with autonomy; a federal-democratic constitutional track accommodates that reality while ensuring the broader movement speaks and acts with coherence.

Finally, the threat of a coerced political settlement must be taken seriously. Neighbouring powers, driven by fear of instability, may attempt to broker a sham peace that leaves the junta partially intact and the revolution's goals unmet. The only effective defense is to move faster than the diplomats — shifting from military defense to an economic and political offensive. In the 38% of territory under the resistance's control, functional local administrations, judiciaries, and public services must be established and made visible. Governance that exists on the ground cannot be easily negotiated away at a table.


The Moment Demands More Than Courage

The era of hit-and-run tactics, broad political charters, and "handshake alliances" must come to an end. The resistance has earned its position: it holds the territory, commands the economic resources, and has drafted the constitutional frameworks. What remains is the will to act on them.

To dismantle the junta and ensure the Spring Revolution does not fade into history as another noble failure, the movement must step fully into the responsibilities of statehood. Enact a working constitution. Bind the alliances in law, not just in spirit. Pursue accountability without compromise. Move forward decisively with the federal units that are ready to govern — and trust that the others will follow when the framework is real. Remember how the United States was established.

The vision of a Federal Democratic Burma is within reach. But visions do not become nations. Constitutions do. This is how the resistance becomes a government. This is how the Spring blossoms.

K2 is a seasoned strategist and advisor specializing in nonviolent activism, conflict resolution, and federal democracy in Myanmar. With extensive experience in strategy development, policy consultation, and human rights advocacy, he currently serves as Senior Executive at the Institute for Peace and Social Justice – IPSJ.



TNLA fighter. Photo: AFP

SURVIVAL OVER REVOLUTION: WHY THE TNLA REACHED OUT TO MIN AUNG HLAING

COMMENTARY BY K2

When the Palaung State Liberation Front and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) issued a congratulatory message to President Min Aung Hlaing on April 15, 2026, the announcement landed like a thunderclap across Myanmar's resistance networks. Here was one of the driving forces behind Operation 1027 — the landmark offensive that shook the Tatmadaw to its foundations — formally recognizing the very government it had fought to dismantle.

This was not an ideological shift for the TNLA, but rather a strategic decision forced by circumstances. Although the TNLA maintains its political goals, it is now acting to ensure immediate organizational survival. Its outreach signals a reluctant adaptation: recognizing the current realities while remaining fundamentally opposed to the regime it faces.

The 'Government' that the TNLA recognizes

The "government" recognized by the TNLA emerged from elections widely condemned as a sham. After staged votes in late 2025 and early 2026, the

military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) claimed a landslide victory. On April 10, Min Aung Hlaing was sworn in as President, relinquishing his military title but ensuring loyalists filled all key posts. The uniform changed; control did not.

The new administration also established the Union Consultative Council (UCC), a body ostensibly designed to bring ethnic voices into the peace process, but one that operates firmly within parameters set by the regime. By recognizing this government, the TNLA has made a hard-nosed admission: the military has, for now, outlasted the revolutionary surge and consolidated its grip on the country's constitutional and urban core.

Beijing's Squeeze: The Haigen Framework

If one factor above all others drove the TNLA to this moment, it is Chinese coercion. Beijing initially tolerated — and in some respects welcomed — the Three Brotherhood Alliance's (3BHA) offensive, which served China's interest in dismantling the online scam networks that had embarrassed it regionally. But as the

fighting deepened and pro-Western resistance groups gained ground, Beijing's calculus shifted. China turned on the TNLA.

Under intense Chinese pressure, the TNLA signed the Haigen ceasefire agreement in Kunming on October 28, 2025. The terms were severe: the TNLA was compelled to withdraw from and hand back strategic towns it had captured, including Mogok (a ruby-mining hub in Mandalay Region) and Momeik in Northern Shan State, returning them to junta control by late 2025.

Beijing reinforced pressure by closing border gates in TNLA-held areas and cutting flows of rice, fuel, and medicine. By April 2026, the TNLA controlled a blockaded enclave, with China signaling that only a formal commitment to the new presidential framework would reopen trade routes.

The Collapse of the Brotherhood Alliance

The TNLA's diplomatic pivot also reflects the disintegration of the Three Brotherhood Alliance. Tensions with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) — its former partner — escalated into open conflict in early 2026, triggered by a dispute over administrative control in Kutkai, a key town on the Lashio-Muse trade route.

In March 2026, the MNDAA launched coordinated drone and ground strikes on TNLA positions, inflicting a decisive defeat. Within days, the TNLA lost Kutkai entirely, with approximately 100 personnel missing or detained. Beijing's role was telling: China reportedly warned other ethnic groups, including the UWSA-led FPNC, not to intervene — effectively backing the MNDAA and allowing it to consolidate the strategically vital Lashio-Muse corridor.

The United Wa State Army (UWSA), which had historically served as the TNLA's most powerful patron

and arms supplier, maintained strict neutrality during the Kutkai battle. This represented a watershed moment: the TNLA could no longer count on the protection of its "Big Brother." The congratulatory message to Min Aung Hlaing is, in part, an admission of this abandonment — an attempt to counterbalance the MNDAA's growing regional dominance.

The "Ring of Fire": Encirclement and Logistical Collapse

Beyond the MNDAA conflict, the TNLA faces hostility on multiple fronts. Relations with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) — which originally trained and armed the TNLA — have deteriorated sharply over disputes involving taxation, recruitment, and territorial control in Namtu, Namkham, and Kutkai. The KIA's strong alignment with the National Unity Government (NUG) and the "Spring Revolution" stands in direct contrast to the TNLA's ceasefire posture.

Friction with Shan armed groups (the SSPP and RCSS) has also intensified, driven by the TNLA's forceful removal of Shan cultural symbols and its monopolization of mining assets in areas like Mogok — moves perceived as an existential threat by a Shan population that significantly outnumbers the Ta'ang.

The logistical situation is dire. Caught between the Tatmadaw and Chinese blockades, the TNLA faces severe shortages of food, medicine, fuel, and ammunition. The UWSA, pressured by Beijing, has halted the supply of weapons and ammunition, leaving the TNLA unable to replenish its stocks and stripping it of major revenue after the loss of Mogok.

The Meaning of the Message

The TNLA's congratulatory message is intended for three audiences: the Tatmadaw, Beijing, and the Ta'ang people.

- For the Tatmadaw, it provides the new government with a degree of legitimacy, differentiating

the TNLA from "Spring Revolution" groups that continue to reject the regime outright. The TNLA hopes this gesture will help it secure a seat at the UCC table and forestall further military counteroffensives.

- For Beijing, it is a formal act of submission to the Haigen framework - a signal that the TNLA is ready to halt the fighting that has disrupted China's border trade and threatened its strategic infrastructure, including oil and gas pipelines running through TNLA territory.

- For the Ta'ang people, it is a bid to reopen the border gates and restore the flow of medicine, food, and fuel. The leadership has calculated that short-term physical survival must take precedence over the longer-term project of achieving a "Ta'ang State."

Outlook: A Fragile and Temporary Accommodation

The TNLA's pivot is risky. By distancing itself from PDF resistance and the anti-coup coalition, it trades political legitimacy for tactical breathing room. The

military's history with broken ceasefires leaves little reassurance of lasting accommodation.

Min Aung Hlaing's inaugural address contained no concrete roadmap for constitutional reform or genuine ethnic autonomy. The regime is widely expected to use any period of calm to consolidate urban control, rebuild its military capacity, and eventually reassert authority over territories lost during Operation 1027.

For now, the TNLA remains trapped by Chinese pressure, the MNDAA's ambitions, and the presidency's limits. The April 15 message may mark the TNLA's shift from revolution to survival.

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TNLA fighters. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S THEATRE OF POWER

The Release of an Elected President by an Imposter Regime

By Alan Clements

There are moments in history when language itself begins to fracture under the weight of deception - when words like "election," "amnesty," and "civilian rule" are so violently misused that they no longer describe reality but obscure it. Myanmar stands inside such a moment now: a stage-managed hallucination of legitimacy performed by a man who has mistaken domination for destiny.

Min Aung Hlaing - the former general, terrorist dictator, and now self-appointed imposter civilian president - has declared himself the head of state through the mechanics of fear, a metamorphosis not of legitimacy but of costume, a change of uniform without a change of mind. The election he presides over is one in which ballots are cast not in hope but under the shadow of imprisonment, torture, and erasure. It is not democracy distorted; it is democracy inverted. A theatre of power so crude, so naked in its coercion, that it reveals something deeper than political fraud. It exposes the psychological architecture of authoritarianism itself: the need not only to control bodies, but to colonize perception - to conscript reality itself into obedience.

For five years, Myanmar's people have resisted - through civil disobedience, underground networks, exile media, armed struggle, and a refusal to grant moral legitimacy to a regime born of a coup. The cost has been

staggering. Thousands imprisoned. Thousands more killed. Entire communities displaced. Doctors, monks, artists, students - voices of conscience - systematically hunted - not for what they have done, but for what they represent: an unbroken will to be free.

And yet, amid this devastation, the regime now speaks the language of "amnesty."

Win Myint - the democratically elected President of Myanmar - is released after years of incarceration, not into freedom but into a quiet ultimatum: return to your family, remain silent, live within the invisible perimeter of control - a freedom so conditional it dissolves on contact with truth. Aung San Suu Kyi - the Nobel Peace Laureate whose moral authority still eclipses the junta's fabricated power - has her sentence reduced, not overturned, not absolved, but mathematically adjusted, as though justice were a ledger to be negotiated rather than a truth to be honored - as though time itself could be weaponized into a life sentence.

This is not mercy. It is narrative warfare - a choreography of language designed to anesthetize outrage while preserving domination.

It is the regime attempting to dictate the terms of reality itself: to convince the world that brutality can be softened by gesture, that imprisonment can be reframed as governance, that fear can masquerade as order. It is, in the most precise sense, political gaslighting - a manipulation so pervasive that even observers begin to question the clarity of their own moral sight - a hall of mirrors in which truth is not denied, but endlessly deferred.

But beneath this spectacle lies something more fragile, more revealing.

Fear.

Authoritarianism, for all its weapons and wealth, is never rooted in strength. It is rooted in existential dread - the terror of accountability, the knowledge that power seized through violence must be defended through escalating violence, and the haunting awareness that history is not infinitely malleable - that memory, like conscience, cannot be permanently exiled.

Min Aung Hlaing understands, at some level, that the arc of his story may not end in palaces but in tribunals. The precedents are clear. The names are known. The fall from untouchable ruler to indicted criminal is not theoretical - it is historical fact - a pattern written in the quiet collapse of men who believed themselves immune to consequence.

And so, this moment - this so-called transition to civilian rule, this partial release of prisoners - is not merely strategic. It is psychological. A search for an exit

that preserves not just power, but self-image - a last attempt to negotiate with history before history delivers its verdict.

The question, then, is not whether this theatre is convincing. It is not.

The question is whether, within the actor himself, there remains even the faintest capacity for transformation.

Buddhist tradition offers a story that has endured for over two millennia - not as mythology, but as moral instruction. The story of Angulimala, a man who murdered without restraint, who wore a necklace of fingers as a testament to his violence. When he encountered the Buddha, he approached not in reverence but with the intention to kill.

And the Buddha said simply: stop.

Not stop physically - stop internally. Stop the momentum of greed, hatred, and delusion at its source. In that moment, something in Angulimala broke open. Not through force, but through recognition. He saw himself - not the justification, not the narrative - but the truth - unadorned, unprotected, and inescapable. And he put down his weapon.

He became, according to the tradition, fully liberated - not because his past was erased, but because he ceased to perpetuate it.

The story is not naïve. It does not suggest that all tyrants will awaken. It suggests something more radical: that even the most violent mind contains the latent capacity for self-recognition. That conscience, though buried, is not extinguished - only deferred, waiting for the moment it can no longer be denied.

This is where Myanmar stands - not merely in a political crisis, but in a moral threshold.

If Min Aung Hlaing seeks a way out - if these gestures toward "amnesty" and "civilian rule" are anything more than performance - then the path is not complicated, though it is unimaginably difficult.

Release all political prisoners. Immediately and unconditionally - not as concession, but as recognition of their inherent dignity.

Restore the elected leadership, including Aung San Suu Kyi and Win Myint - not as symbols, but as the legitimate voice of the people's will.

Invite international observers - not as props, but as witnesses - to a genuine process of national dialogue - where truth is not stage-managed, but spoken without fear.

Relinquish power, not incrementally, not symbolically, but decisively - in a gesture that would

reverberate far beyond Myanmar, into the moral imagination of the world.

These are not concessions. They are acts of survival - moral, historical, existential.

Because the alternative is already written.

A continuation of violence. A deepening of isolation. A legacy defined not by leadership but by destruction - a silence filled not with peace, but with absence. A name that enters history not as a statesman but as a warning - a cautionary echo of what happens when power devours conscience.

And yet - there remains, however faint, another possibility.

That this moment, however compromised, could become a pivot. That the architecture of control could be dismantled from within - not by force alone, but by the withdrawal of psychological consent. That a man defined by domination could, in a single irreversible act, redefine himself through relinquishment.

History has never seen such a transformation at this scale. But history is not a closed system. It is shaped, again and again, by the improbable convergence of crisis and courage - by the rare human decision to interrupt inevitability.

To choose that path would not erase what has been done. It would not undo the suffering, nor silence the call for justice. But it would alter the trajectory - from inevitability to interruption, from collapse to reconciliation - from fear to a fragile, hard-won trust.

And perhaps, in a world exhausted by cycles of violence, it would offer something almost unthinkable: a demonstration that even at the height of power, a human being can choose to stop.

Not as theatre.

Not as strategy.

But as truth - the only force that has ever outlived tyranny.

About the Author

Alan Clements is an author, former Buddhist monk, and human rights advocate who has written extensively on authoritarianism, nonviolence, and Myanmar's struggle for democracy. He is the author of seventeen books, including *Conversation with a Dictator*, *Unsilenced: Aung San Suu Kyi—Conversations from a Myanmar Prison*, and *Politics of the Heart: Nonviolence in the Age of Atrocity*. He has worked closely with Burmese democracy leaders for more than three decades, and his writing has appeared in international media across Asia, Europe, and the United States.



INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP WARNS BATTLE FOR SITTWE COULD RESHAPE WAR IN WESTERN MYANMAR

The battle for Sittwe, the capital of Myanmar's Rakhine State, is emerging as one of the most strategically significant fronts in the civil war since the 2021 coup, with the outcome likely to reshape control of western Myanmar, according to a new analysis by the International Crisis Group (ICG).

In an interactive report, *The Fight for Sittwe*, ICG said the Arakan Army (AA) has tightened pressure on the city after seizing most of Rakhine State over the past two years. This has left Sittwe as one of the military's last major strongholds in the region.

The report said recent months have seen the AA intensify attacks on the outskirts of the city, while junta forces have heavily fortified urban positions and appear determined to prevent Sittwe from falling.

Sittwe holds outsized strategic importance. It is the administrative capital of Rakhine State, hosts military headquarters and naval facilities, and sits near the terminus of the China-backed oil and gas pipelines linking the Bay of Bengal to Yunnan province.

The city's loss would mark one of the junta's most serious territorial setbacks since the 2021 coup and further erode its presence in ethnic borderlands.

The report said the military has concentrated troops, artillery, and naval assets around Sittwe while relying heavily on air power and maritime supply routes to sustain the defence. The AA, meanwhile, has expanded operations in surrounding townships and sought to isolate the city from land reinforcements.

The battle reflects a broader shift in Myanmar's war, in which ethnic armed organisations and allied resistance groups have moved from guerrilla attacks to coordinated offensives against fixed military positions.

The ICG analysis noted that the fighting is taking place in a region already scarred by years of conflict, displacement, and communal tensions.

For the junta, holding Sittwe would preserve a symbolic and operational foothold in Rakhine State. For the AA, capturing it would cement the group's dominance in the state and strengthen its hand in any future political settlement.

As clashes intensify, the report said the battle for Sittwe could become a defining test of whether Myanmar's military can retain control of key regional capitals as resistance forces expand their reach.



Photo: AFP

ROHINGYA CIVILIANS TRAPPED AS FIGHTING CLOSES IN ON MYANMAR'S SITTWE

Rohingya civilians in and around Sittwe face mounting danger as fighting between Myanmar's military and the Arakan Army (AA) closes in on the Rakhine State capital, according to a new report by the International Crisis Group (ICG).

The analysis warned that civilians are increasingly trapped between front lines, with many unable to flee because of conflict, movement restrictions, and longstanding segregation policies affecting the Rohingya population.

Sittwe and nearby camps have housed large numbers of Rohingya displaced since communal violence in 2012. ICG noted that renewed clashes now threaten communities already living under severe constraints with limited access to livelihoods, healthcare, and education.

Many civilians, including women and children, have reportedly come under attack while trying to escape. Others risk exploitation by trafficking networks or dangerous sea journeys out of the area, the report said.

The organisation said the battle for Sittwe is unfolding in a uniquely fragile humanitarian setting, where pre-existing discrimination and wartime violence are colliding.

Over the past two years, much of Rakhine State has fallen under AA control, but Sittwe remains under junta administration and heavily militarised. The city has become a focal point of escalating conflict as the AA steps up assaults on positions around the capital.

The report did not assign sole blame for civilian suffering to one side, but said all armed actors must comply with international humanitarian law and protect non-combatants.

Access to aid remains severely constrained, with insecurity and administrative restrictions hampering relief efforts. Humanitarian agencies have repeatedly warned of worsening food insecurity and displacement across Rakhine.

Crisis Group said the fate of civilians should be central to any response to the battle, warning that a military contest for Sittwe risks deepening one of Myanmar's longest-running humanitarian crises.

As the conflict intensifies, Rohingya communities, already marginalised for years, may again bear a disproportionate share of the cost.



MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES RAID VILLAGES IN EASTERN NATTALIN, DISPLACING TENS OF THOUSANDS AMID HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

A military junta column has launched a violent campaign across eastern Nattalin Township in the Bago Region, according to reports from local residents. Since 5 April, the military has targeted a string of villages including Kan Thar Yar, Pae Ma Kham, and Ma Gyi Pin, resulting in at least two civilian deaths, multiple injuries, and the widespread destruction of property.

Sources state that airstrikes involving paramotors, drones, and bombers are carried out almost daily, while military units based in Paungde are providing heavy artillery support.

During the raids, the military frequently arrests, beats, and forcibly conscripts civilians encountered along the way. While entering Pae Ma Kham village, many residents from Kan Thar Yar were detained. Similarly, during the raid on Ma Gyi Pin village, 25 men and women who had briefly returned home were arrested. Five of them were taken as forced porters for military service.

"They have reached as far as Ma Gyi Pin Dam in eastern Nattalin and are now dominating the area, doing whatever they please. Airstrikes occur every single day

without absence. There have been civilian casualties. Even during the Thingyan holidays, there were days when they attacked with one fighter jet, and other days with two. No one dares to stay there anymore," said a displaced resident from Nattalin.

Furthermore, it is reported that after entering the villages, junta military forces have been torching civilian homes and looting property.

Due to arrests, killings, and airstrikes by the military, at least two civilians have died, and no fewer than five others have been injured. Hundreds of houses have also been destroyed by fire.

Tens of thousands of civilians from at least 15 villages, including Kan Thar Yar, Pae Ma Kham, and others mentioned above, have been forced to flee. They are currently in urgent need of food and other forms of humanitarian assistance.

According to two sources, clashes have broken out between the military column and local revolutionary forces along the route of the raid, though Mizzima is still working to verify these details.



Myanmar Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR UN AMBASSADOR URGES SECURITY COUNCIL TO END PARALYSIS FOLLOWING RECENT VETO

Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations, delivered a statement on 16 April during a General Assembly plenary meeting regarding the use of the veto.

The full statement is as follows.

First, the urgency of ceasing all hostilities: In support of this objective, Myanmar co-sponsored the Security Council resolution 2817, submitted by Bahrain on behalf of the GCC and adopted by the Council on March 11, 2026.

Myanmar welcomes the announcement of the two-week ceasefire and emphasizes the importance of sustaining de-escalation and creating conducive conditions for dialogue and diplomatic solutions.

In this regard, we commend the efforts of all parties, including mediators, and look forward to the resumption of the next round of negotiations with a view to bring lasting peace and stability in the region.

Second, the necessity of upholding freedom of navigation: the disruption of security and stability in a critical maritime corridor has a ripple effect on food and energy supply chains.

Myanmar, therefore, stresses the need to respect the right of transit passage in international waterways

in full compliance with international law, including the UNCLOS.

Such a prolonged crisis can pose a disproportionate risk to the most vulnerable, particularly those in the least developed countries and conflict-affected situations.

In this context, I am dismayed to report that the rising price of commodities, products and fuel is compounding the already-dire humanitarian situation, food and energy insecurity in Myanmar since the illegal military coup.

As the people of Myanmar face fuel scarcity and queue for rations, the military junta continues to exhaust jet fuel to conduct indiscriminate airstrikes against civilians across the country.

Third and last, the responsibility of the Council to fulfill its mandate: We, as Member States of the United Nations, confer on the Security Council, the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Myanmar expresses our regret that the Council was, once again, unable to speak in one voice despite the escalating adversity in the region.

The latest use of the veto and divergent views among Council members are yet another reminder of the growing trend of paralysis on many of the files under the Council's agenda, including the situation in Myanmar.

As a case in point, the Council continues to fail the people of Myanmar by its inability to transparently discuss, effectively address and urgently take decisive action to resolve the situation for more than 5 years.

In conclusion, Madam President, Myanmar reaffirms the importance of maintaining the freedom of navigation and the right of transit passage in international waterways as well as the responsibility of the Council to address issues of global significance.

People in conflict-affected countries around the world look up to the Council and the UN to take timely actions to save their lives.

As such, the Security Council must appropriately respond to evolving conflict dynamics, reflect realities on the ground in their assessment, and speak in unity to effectively discharge its mandate



OVER 13,000 BILIN RESIDENTS UNABLE TO RETURN HOME AMID ONGOING FIGHTING WITH MYANMAR MILITARY

Despite the capture of Lay Kay camp, intense fighting continues at Win Tar Pan camp, while more than 13,000 residents of Bilin remain unable to return to their homes, according to a source.

Lay Kay camp, located in Lay Kay village in Bilin Township, was captured on April 12 by joint forces of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), and local People's Defence Forces (PDF).

Win Tar Pan camp, a military base located about eight miles from Lay Kay camp, was simultaneously blockaded, with fighting to seize the position beginning on April 15.

"The fighting is ongoing, particularly on the Tapaw front. Reinforcements have also been deployed to the Lay Kay side from the military junta. The situation remains chaotic, and I am unable to provide further details at this time," the source said.

During the battle to seize the camp, more than 13,000 residents from 12 nearby villages – including Lay Kay and Win Ta Pan (Tapaw) in Bilin Township – who fled amid airstrikes and artillery shelling by the junta's military forces, remain unable to return to their homes.

"They are in urgent need of assistance. They fled without food or belongings and have yet to receive any support," said a local woman from the KNLA Brigade 1 territory.

Lay Kay, Win Tar Pan, and Pain Nae Taw camps are military outposts situated along a forest road linking Mon State to Hpa-Pun Township. The route has previously been used by the military junta as a key supply corridor, and its disruption through the capture

of these bases could sever critical logistics lines, a source said.

Lay Kay and Win Tar Pan camps are located about eight miles apart, while the distance between Win Tar Pan and Pain Nae Taw camps exceeds 12 miles. All three bases lie within the KNLA Brigade 1 territory.

Since late March, prior to the capture of Lay Kay camp, sustained airstrikes hit areas around both Lay Kay and Win Tar Pan camps, as well as nearby civilian villages. The attacks have left seven civilians injured and caused multiple homes to be burned down.

In addition, the junta is reportedly preparing for renewed fighting at Pinnai Taw camp, conducting aerial reconnaissance and firing artillery shells indiscriminately.

During the offensive on the forward Lay Kay camp, deputy battalion commander Major Aung Zaw Moe and one junta soldier were captured alive, while weapons and ammunition were also seized.

In addition, five junta soldiers were killed and around 10 others were injured, with the wounded and remaining troops fleeing the camp. On the side of the allied resistance forces, five fighters, including an ABSDF company commander, were killed or injured.

The operation to capture Lay Kay camp was carried out jointly by the KNLA, the ABSDF, and the PDF, including battalions under Special Operations Command 37 and Tactical Command 27, as well as the Special Operations Force (SOF), the Yangon Region Pa Ka Pha Combat Battalion, the UOC Column, and drone units including the FFD, Yaungni, Cloud Wings, and KRF battalions.



Photo: Supplied

FOUR BODIES DUMPED AT HPAKANT ROAD JUNCTION ON SECOND DAY OF MYANMAR THINGYAN FESTIVAL

On 14 April, the second day of the Thingyan Water Festival, Myanmar military forces reportedly dumped the bodies of four men at the Shwe Myanmar petrol station junction in Ma Shi Ka Htaung ward, Hpakant, in Kachin State.

According to local witnesses, occupants of a grey four-wheel-drive vehicle arriving from the military's strategic hill base, known as Tat Ma Kone, left the bodies at the intersection around 1:00 pm.

The identities of the deceased have not yet been confirmed. However, residents expressed concern that the victims may have been among the more than 30 individuals currently being held at the Hpakant strategic base.

Local sources suggested the men may have been killed during interrogation, with their bodies

subsequently abandoned in public to dispose of evidence.

Regarding the identity of the deceased, a local resident stated, "We don't know the details yet. More than 30 people are currently detained at the Hpakant strategic base. It seems they were killed during interrogation and then dumped here to dispose of the evidence."

The bodies reportedly remained at the scene until approximately 3:00 pm on this day. During this Thingyan holiday period, intense fighting has persisted in Hpakant, involving exchange of drone attacks and airstrikes carried out by the Naypyidaw military.



Photo: Supplied

CRPH WARNS AGAINST MYANMAR MILITARY ELECTION PLOYS AT 5TH ANNIVERSARY OF INTERIM CHIN NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL

During the 5th-anniversary ceremony of the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC) on 13 April, the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) issued a strong warning against the Myanmar military junta's attempts to hold "sham elections".

CRPH Chairman Aung Kyi Nyunt emphasized that as the military loses ground in physical offensives, it is increasingly resorting to inhumane airstrikes and political manipulation to maintain its permanent leadership.

Furthermore, he warned revolutionary forces to be especially wary of attempts to hold sham elections through various means and the use of populist rhetoric to lure the movement back under the 2008 Constitution and the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) framework, aimed at ensuring the military junta's permanent leadership.

"I see these as evidence of how much the revolutionary forces must remain heart-to-heart and stand back-to-back during such a time," said Chairman Aung Kyi Nyunt.

The official message from the CRPH also emphasized that while there may be differing perspectives, disagreements, or misalignments among

groups, they must strengthen their established mutual trust and understanding to collectively resist the military junta's wicked and cunning attempts to sow division.

The CRPH honoured the ICNCC for standing with the Chin people since the start of the Spring Revolution and for its steadfast struggle to eradicate the military dictatorship despite numerous challenges.

Citing figures from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), his speech noted that at least 7,972 pro-democracy activists and civilians have perished from the 2021 coup until 10 April of this year. It reaffirmed that they will not surrender until the goals of the martyrs, who sacrificed their lives and bodies for the revolution, are achieved.

The CRPH pledged to continue its cooperation through the parliamentary sector toward common goals: the complete eradication of the terrorist military dictatorship, the realization of the political aspirations of the Chin people, and the building of a federal democratic union based on equality.



FAMILIES SEARCH FOR HUNDREDS MISSING AFTER BOAT SINKS IN ANDAMAN SEA

Families were frantically searching for news of their relatives on Wednesday after a boat carrying about 280 Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants capsized in the Andaman Sea earlier this month.

The boat, which left the southern Bangladeshi port of Teknaf on April 4 and was on its way to Malaysia, sank due to heavy winds, rough seas and overcrowding, according to the United Nations.

Bangladeshi authorities said nine people had been rescued. One survivor told AFP the boat sank nearly 10 days ago, casting gloom over the fate of the missing.

"I now have 70–80 photos on my mobile phone from people asking for updates on the victims," 40-year-old Rafiqul Islam, one of the survivors, told AFP on Wednesday.

Islam, who sustained burn injuries as oil spilled from the trawler, said he was lured by traffickers who promised him a job in Malaysia.

The Rohingya on board the boat were likely leaving huge camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, where more than a million refugees forced to flee war-torn Myanmar's Rakhine state live in squalid conditions.

Rakhine state has been the scene of fierce fighting between the military and the Arakan Army, an ethnic minority rebel group.

The Rohingya undertake perilous sea journeys every year in search of better living conditions, travelling aboard rickety boats often operated by trafficking networks.

Bangladesh police said Wednesday they had arrested six people on suspicion of human trafficking over the incident.

"We are investigating each individual's liability in the tragic incident," Saiful Islam, officer in charge of Teknaf police station, told AFP.

Risking lives

At the Kutupalong Rohingya camp, Jasim Uddin, 34, said he had travelled to Rafiqul Islam's home after losing contact with his brother.

"My brother paid 350,000 taka (\$2,850) for the trip to Malaysia to a contractor who is now avoiding us," he told AFP.

"I showed my brother's photo to Islam, and he confirmed that he had seen him on the boat."

Rohingya representatives warned that worsening poverty and food aid cuts were likely to drive more refugees to undertake dangerous sea travel.

Since April 1, the UN World Food Programme has reduced monthly assistance for large sections of the over one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

"Human trafficking has never stopped, and in the near future it will escalate without a doubt as the food aid cuts remain in place," Sayed Ullah, president of the United Council of Rohingya, told AFP.

"Desperate people will risk their lives to support their families."

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said Tuesday the latest incident reflected the "dire consequences of protracted displacement and the absence of durable solutions for the Rohingya".

AFP



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR MILITARY FORCES BURN FIVE VILLAGES IN MYINGYAN TOWNSHIP IN COORDINATED ARSON SPREE

Military units operating under the Naypyidaw Command launched a series of coordinated arson attacks across northern Myingyan Township in Mandalay Region, destroying five villages in a single day on 12 April. According to the Myingyan Township Public Action Committee, the targeted communities include Htain Pan, Ywar Thit, Kyi Pin Kan, Yong Htoe Swal, and Sate Kone.

Arson attacks by Naypyidaw Command forces have devastated HtainPan village, leaving only two or three houses standing out of more than 500, while in Ywar Thit village, just around 10 of over 400 homes remain, according to local sources.

The extent of damage in the other burned villages of Kyi Pin Kan, Yong Htoe Swal, and Sate Kone remains unclear, an official from the Myingyan Township Public Action Committee said on 13 April.

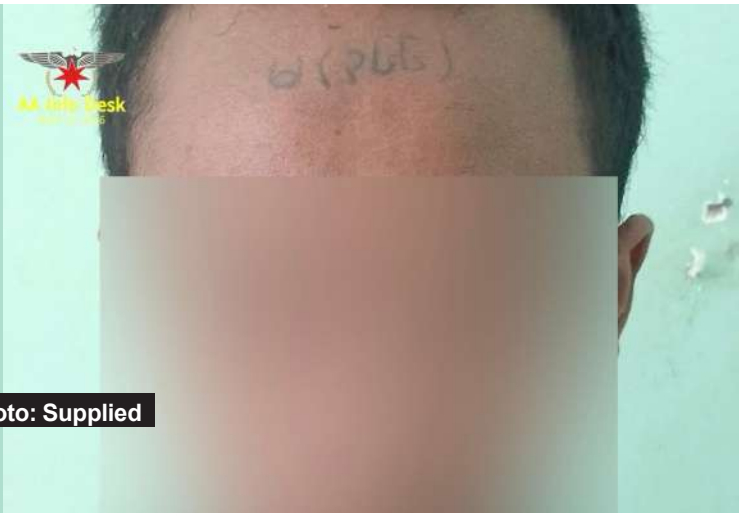
“The military column torched the villages before withdrawing, leaving nearly all of them deserted,” he said.

A Naypyidaw Command force of around 300 troops has split into three columns in Myingyan Township, carrying out village burnings and drone attacks, according to an official from the Myingyan Generation Z Group.

“They are advancing into villages north of Myingyan and dropping bombs from drones on areas sheltering displaced people,” he said.

According to the Myingyan Township Public Action Committee, two military columns entered the villages from the direction of Thit Yon village while a third advanced from Sate Kone; after setting the villages ablaze, all units withdrew toward Thit Yon.

A Naypyidaw Command column entered Phat Pin Ai village in Myingyan Township on 2 April and shot dead eight local residents and three members of a defence force, in what the National Unity Government (NUG) Human Rights Ministry described as a mass killing of civilians and a war crime, according to a statement issued on 8 April.



Tattooed on the forehead. Photo: Supplied

RECAPTURED CONSCRIPTS IN NAYPYIDAW BRANDED WITH FACIAL TATTOOS TO PREVENT DESERTION

Conscripts who attempt to flee military service in Naypyidaw are being subjected to forced facial tattooing upon recapture, according to testimonies from recent defectors.

In a video released by the Arakan Army (AA) on 11 April 2026, two youths in their early 20s who surrendered to the AA detailed the military's new tactics used to deter desertion and ensure permanent identification.

A defector from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 366, under Military Operations Command (MOC) 10, testified in the video that tattoos such as unit names and the word "deserter" are inked onto the foreheads and cheeks of those caught.

"They do this so we can't go back home or live there anymore. By tattooing the battalion names, they can easily recapture us. It makes it impossible to live in the city unnoticed. After that, they send us to the front lines to ensure we don't dare flee again," said one of the defectors.

He added that other deserters also had the word "deserter" tattooed on their cheeks. Those who joined the AA were reportedly conscripts from the security outposts of Defence Equipment Factory No. 16, specifically Point (500) Hill and its surrounding areas.

Furthermore, a conscript from LIB 362 under MOC 10 stated that military personnel in Naypyidaw arrested him on framed charges to force him into service.

"They searched my bag and planted WY (methamphetamine) tablets right in front of me. Claiming they found drugs, they took me to a house and kept me in chains. They asked if I wanted to join the army or go to prison. When I chose prison, they beat me up together. Eventually, I had to say I would join the army," he recounted.

Following the activation of the People's Military Service Law by former Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing on 10 February 2024, the first batch of training commenced on 8 April 2024.

It was officially announced that approximately 5,000 trainees would be recruited per batch. To date, up to Batch 21 have completed their training.





Photo: AFP

FORCED DISPLACEMENTS TO SOAR BY 4.2 MILLION BY 2027, AID GROUP WARNS

Wars, conflicts, violence and persecutions will drive 4.2 million people from their homes by the end of 2027, not including those affected by the war in the Middle East, a Danish humanitarian aid agency warned 16 April.

The number doesn't take into account those fleeing their homes due to the current situation in the Middle East as the Danish Refugee Council's (DRC) projections were based on data available at the end of 2025, it said in its annual displacement forecast.

The figure of 4.2 million comes on top of the 117.3 million people already displaced worldwide, DRC said.

The war in the Middle East "is driving new displacements and making the humanitarian situation worse," the agency's secretary general Charlotte Slente said in a statement.

"There is a road map that can pull the region back from the brink: the current ceasefire must become permanent, and it must be extended to Lebanon, where one in five people have been displaced by the conflict," she said.

"Families in Lebanon and Iran must be allowed home to rebuild their lives in peace."

The report noted that recent displacements are increasingly spread out across more countries, rather

than a few major crises as in the past.

In 2025, Myanmar and Sudan alone accounted for more than half of the projected total, while in the updated forecast, they account for a quarter of the total.

International aid cuts have also had a direct impact on displacements.

In the five countries with the highest estimated displacements in 2025 -- Ukraine, Myanmar, South Sudan, Nigeria and Mali -- funding for peace efforts declined by 23 percent on average in 2024.

Inversely, in the five countries where displacements decreased the most -- Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo -- funding for peace efforts rose on average by 15 percent.

"The international community is facing a catastrophic failure to protect the world's most vulnerable," Slente said, noting a 14 percent surge in violence against civilians in 2025.

"For families fleeing war with nothing but the clothes on their backs, there is little hope: the international safety net that once existed has gaping holes" as humanitarian assistance shrinks, she said.

AFP



Chinese bullet train. Photo: AFP

BEHIND CHINA'S PROGRESS: THE DARK TRUTH ON TRAINS

SUN LEE

Observers have described the experience of purchasing high-speed rail tickets in China as deeply frustrating. Many noted that the mobile app often displayed only a few first-class seats remaining, or at times the dreaded “sold out” message. When travellers arrived at the platform, they sometimes found themselves facing empty trains. Reports suggested that trains bound for major cities such as Chonggha, which would normally be crowded with passengers and luggage, were instead running nearly empty. Videos circulated online showed carriages with no one in sight, recordings that were said to be unedited and authentic. Witnesses remarked that the silence inside these massive steel vehicles was so profound that it felt as though they were alone in a ghostly setting.

Commentators compared the scene to a dystopian science fiction film. What once had been a symbol of mass migration and bustling stations had now turned into deserted towns and ghostly railway hubs. Analysts pointed out that this was not fiction but the reality of China in 2026, the world’s second-largest economy. The explanation, they argued, was both simple and harsh: ticket prices for high-speed rail fluctuated depending

on demand, and sudden surges were common. A single ticket could cost as much as 2,400 yuan, while even 800 yuan was considered unaffordable for many. With nearly 900 million citizens living on less than 2,000 yuan per month, spending 800 yuan meant sacrificing half of their monthly budget for food, rent, and other necessities. For this vast population, luxury travel was simply out of reach. The high-speed rail system, once celebrated as a national achievement, had effectively excluded them.

As a result, millions turned to the older “green trains,” relics from the 1990s that still operated because of their affordability. These trains, often described as outdated iron coffins, took far longer to reach destinations but cost significantly less. For example, the Beijing–Shanghai high-speed route took 4.5 hours at a price of 553 yuan, while the green train required 19 hours but charged only 156 yuan. That difference of nearly 400 yuan, though modest to some, represented several days of survival for poorer families. For them, saving money outweighed comfort or dignity.

Accounts from passengers painted a grim picture of life aboard these trains. At midnight, carriages

were overcrowded, with people blocking aisles and clustering near toilets. Travelers were packed so tightly that movement was nearly impossible. One passenger shared online that boarding the green train felt like being trapped between two giant rocks, unable to breathe or move. He claimed he survived only because he disembarked after a few stops, fearing that staying until the final station might have crushed him. Others described enduring more than ten hours in freezing conditions, surrounded by alcohol consumption and chaos. Tickets were reportedly oversold, worsening the overcrowding. Parents struggled to care for infants in the cramped environment, with one father publicly appealing to railway leaders to witness the suffering first-hand. He accused officials of prioritizing political achievements through high-speed rail expansion while reducing the number of affordable trains, leaving ordinary citizens with no viable options.

Experts echoed these concerns. Wang Hi, a China affairs specialist, explained that local trains had once been plentiful but were deliberately reduced after the rapid growth of high-speed rail. Routes were cut to maintain the appearance of success, and basic transportation was gradually stripped away from the public. He noted that where multiple trains once connected provinces to Beijing, now only a single slow train might remain. Ticket searches often excluded the cheaper Z-series trains, leaving only the costly G-series high-speed options. Analysts concluded that this was not coincidence but policy, creating a modern class divide in transportation.

The consequences extended beyond travel. Many towns were filled with workers unable to return home for the New Year because of financial hardship. The collapse of the real estate market and declining export orders had forced factories to close early, leaving employees jobless. Returning home required not only tickets but also gifts and red envelopes for relatives, expenses that could reach thousands of yuan. For those who had earned little, the burden was unbearable. Viral videos captured the despair: one man tearfully told his mother he would not come home, insisting he was fine before breaking down after the call. His story resonated widely, symbolizing the hopelessness of countless workers. Some chose to avoid returning altogether, heading directly to new jobs instead. Estimates suggested that

by 2026, around three million people would make such decisions, traveling vast distances to industrial zones or provinces. Stories emerged of couples preparing for journeys exceeding 2,400 kilometers, and workers riding motorcycles for days, subsisting on steamed buns to avoid extra costs. These accounts highlighted the lengths to which people went to survive, braving cold winds and dangerous roads.

Even the middle class faced difficulties. Officials claimed billions of trips were made annually, most by private vehicles, yet drone footage revealed massive traffic jams stretching for dozens of kilometers. Highways resembled parking lots, with cars immobilized for hours, symbolizing stagnation rather than prosperity. Young graduates also struggled. Many took part-time jobs in factories, earning meager wages under harsh piece-rate systems. Unable to afford high-speed tickets, they too crowded into the green trains, enduring indignity while modern trains glided past nearly empty.

The government continued to promote slogans of common prosperity, advanced technology, and sustained growth. Yet behind these promises, the reality remained stark: hundreds of millions of citizens were still fighting to save every yuan. Observers concluded that no matter how advanced technology became, if its benefits failed to reach the people, it represented a paradox of progress. The contrast between empty high-speed trains and overcrowded green trains, between slogans of prosperity and the lived struggles of ordinary citizens, revealed a shadow behind the facade of development. For many, this was seen as the darkest truth of modern China.

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

Rare earth minerals collected in Malaysia. Photo: AFP

DELICATE EXTRACTION: MALAYSIA OFFERS RARE EARTHS ALTERNATIVE TO CHINA

Workers load tonnes of rare earth minerals into bags ready for shipping at a refinery in eastern Malaysia, fuelling the global pushback against China's grip on the critical sector.

Rare earths are a key ingredient in products ranging from smartphones to fighter jets, electric cars and wind turbines -- and increasingly for hardware powering the artificial intelligence boom.

Global jitters about Beijing's dominance as a rare earths producer have kicked Australian mining giant Lynas into action, expanding its portfolio of rare earths refined in Malaysia as it hopes to boost its approximately 10 percent share of the market.

China makes up the other 90 percent of the world's market, stoking fears about Beijing's ability to choke global supplies.

"China has built its success on executing a clear industrial plan -- it takes us to be serious about it," Lynas company's chief executive Amanda Lacaze told AFP.

Pushing against Chinese dominance will "take discipline, focus and clear planning", she said during a rare press visit to the company's sprawling chemical plant in Malaysia's Gebeng industrial hub, near the coastal city of Kuantan.

The Lynas facility in Gebeng is now the world's largest single rare earths processing plant.

Downstream demand

Since 2012, the facility has been refining pure metals from raw materials mined in Western Australia, in an intensive and complicated separation procedure.

It currently handles 11 of the 17 rare earths -- a number that is increasing -- with plans to expand even further to include "heavies" such as yttrium and lutetium, used for lasers, medical imaging and cancer therapy.

From the plant, the bags are transported to Port Klang on the other side of Malaysia, and leave on a ship for Japan, where the metal powders are turned

into high-performance magnets used in advanced industries such as electronics and aerospace.

Most bags contain NdPr, short for neodymium-praseodymium, a rare-earth mixture and key magnet material, which sells for around \$100,000 per bag.

Smaller quantities of other separated heavy rare earth oxides like dysprosium, terbium and samarium are sold in 25-kilogramme tins.

Rare earths are so vital for the global economy that they have become a flashpoint in the blistering trade war between the United States and China.

Beijing leveraged its grip on the precious minerals in spectacular fashion last October, reaching a deal with Washington to pause the trade war after its curbs on exports rattled markets and snarled supply chains.

Supply of rare earths is expected to be a key discussion point at an upcoming summit between US President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Beijing set for mid-May.

But the challenge for Lynas is not its production capacity, chief operating officer Pol Le Roux said.

Instead, incentives are needed to boost downstream capacity -- the ability to turn raw minerals into a finished product -- which is "growing too slowly", he told AFP.

Lacaze said the company was already partnering with magnet makers to close the gap between rare-earth processing and manufacturing.

However, she stressed: "We won't just say that we are going to wake up tomorrow and be a magnet maker."

'Minimise risks'

Producing rare earths requires heavy chemicals and can produce toxic waste, with cases including illegal operations polluting Mekong tributaries in Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia with arsenic and cadmium.

Lynas got the green light last month from the Malaysian government to process rare earths there for another 10 years.

The licence was issued as environmental watchdogs such as Greenpeace raised concerns over the management of radioactive by-products.

Under the latest agreement, the government said the company must now halt all activities that produce radioactive waste within five years of its renewed operating licence.

Lynas however, says its by-product from rare earth refining produces a non-toxic, non-radioactive magnesium-rich gypsum and an iron phosphate with a very low level of naturally occurring radioactive material.

Existing by-product is already stored in a permanent disposal facility "constructed and managed to ensure the material does not impact on the surrounding environment," the company said.

Lynas also has ambitions to diversify further into producing rare earths as catalysts over the next decade.

Rare earths are particularly important as a low-cost catalyst in the hydrogen supply chain, for instance, in the recovery process when the gas is transported long-haul as ammonia.

"In 10 years from now, I expect this to be a substantial part of the business," Le Roux said.

AFP



FROM A MIRRORLESS CELL

Toru Kubota is a Japanese documentary filmmaker who argues that storytelling can cultivate empathy in ways argument alone cannot. Reflecting on his work, he says, “You never know, but you have to imagine, and you have to trying to feel the others.” That principle shapes his journey from a political science student in Japan to a political prisoner in Myanmar and, after his release, to an advocate supporting exiled Burmese filmmakers along the Thai–Myanmar border.

Kubota was born in Yokohama and studied political science at Keio University. He jokes how becoming a filmmaker was “pure coincidence.” As a student in 2014, he joined a university project interviewing Rohingya refugees living in Gunma Prefecture. Japan’s refugee recognition rate was extremely low, and the project sought to understand how Rohingya families were trying to build lives in Japanese society. During that work, he began using a camera for the first time, and the team produced a short documentary about Rohingya life in Japan and screened it for members of the community. During the project work, some told him that unless he went to Myanmar himself, he would not be able to understand what was happening there.

That response prompted his first trip, in August 2015, just before Myanmar’s general election. He stayed mostly in Yangon and also visited some tourist spots; he observed a society that, at least on the surface, appeared to be opening and hopeful about democratic reform. The trip enabled him to dip his toe in the water, and prepare to return in a more focused way.

The following year, Kubota traveled to Sittwe in Rakhine State, where camps had been set up to house Rohingya that had been displaced after the violence in 2012. Although these were officially designated as “internally displaced persons” (IDP) camps, he describes them more as internment camps, where Rohingya Muslims were segregated from surrounding Buddhist communities and confined with limited access to medical care and food. While inside one camp, he witnessed an accidental fire, and filmed as children ran back and forth with water, attempting to extinguish flames that continued to spread. When he later brought the footage back to Japan and began editing, he realized he had captured a powerful moment, and created a 20-minute film from it. This experience marked a turning point. He began to see filmmaking not merely as a form of “objective” documentation, but as a way to convey the subjects’ lived reality.

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<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/4/2/episode-515-from-a-mirrorless-cell>



MYANMAR JUNTA LAUNCHES SME-FOCUSED ECONOMIC DRIVE

Myanmar's new quasi-civilian military regime has launched an economic restructuring drive centred on small businesses, with ministries ordered to improve efficiency and expand support for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), according to state media reports.

The move, highlighted over the past week in the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar (GNLM), forms part of an early economic agenda following the installation of President Min Aung Hlaing and a restructured cabinet.

Officials said ministries had been instructed to strengthen coordination, streamline administration, and place greater emphasis on supporting MSMEs. These enterprises play a central role in Myanmar's economy due to their impact on employment, the retail trade, and light manufacturing.

State media framed the initiative as part of broader efforts to accelerate economic recovery, promote self-reliance, and create new business opportunities.

Ministries were also urged to improve implementation capacity and ensure that economic policies delivered practical benefits.

The policy focus comes as Myanmar continues to face severe economic headwinds following the 2021 military coup, due to conflict-related disruption, high inflation, currency volatility, and declining foreign investment.

The prolonged crisis has hit small businesses particularly hard, as they grapple with weak consumer demand, rising input costs, power shortages, and logistical constraints.

Myanmar's military leadership has repeatedly promoted economic self-sufficiency and domestic production as key policy goals, particularly as sanctions and investor caution have constrained external capital flows.

Whether the SME-centred approach can generate meaningful recovery is likely to depend less on bureaucratic directives than on improvements in the wider political and security environment.



Family and friends of prisoners wait outside the gates of Insein Prison for their release. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S NEW YEAR AMNESTY SPARKS OUTRAGE OVER LOW NUMBER OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

Myanmar's New Year amnesty on 17 April is dominating social media but not with celebration. On the day, Min Aung Hlaing ordered the release of more than 4,300 prisoners to mark the traditional new year The Messenger, yet the number of political detainees among them remains strikingly low. PPNM says only around 160 political prisoners have been confirmed released so far.

Users on Facebook, users are calling the move absurd and politically calculated. "An illegitimate president who stole power is now granting a pardon to the rightful president — Min Aung Hlaing has completely lost it," one user wrote. Another commented, "Power-mad Min Aung Hlaing released the hostage national leaders as a political chess move, but whether it grants him legitimacy remains uncertain. We, the Spring Revolution comrades, will not be misled — we know the

difference between what matters and what doesn't. We push forward, we fight on."

Others dismissed any gratitude toward the military: "U Win Myint was only imprisoned inside Myanmar — if he were abroad, he'd still be president. All political prisoners were innocent from the start. The military releasing them deserves no thanks."

Meanwhile, award-winning filmmaker Shin Daewe was seen walking free from Insein Prison on Friday morning, while Min Aung Hlaing also commuted all death sentences to life imprisonment in a blanket order.

Yet Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's most prominent political prisoner, remains detained. The Institute for Strategy and Policy Myanmar has noted that fewer than 14 percent of those released in successive amnesty rounds since the coup have been political prisoners.

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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.