

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

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Analysis & Insight



**Blind Metrics:
How Flawed Data
Masks the True Scale
of Myanmar's Crisis**



**ASEAN ministers push stalled
peace plan in Myanmar talks**

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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.

KEEPING UP MORALE

There is little doubt that fighting the Myanmar junta armed forces is a tough call for the resistance. In this week's issue of Mizzima Weekly, we include stories on the state of the Myanmar crisis, and the resistance bodies fighting the junta.

There is little doubt that Myanmar's resistance movement faces one of its most difficult periods since the military seized power in February 2021.

While resistance forces have demonstrated remarkable resilience, adaptability and courage, the conflict has entered a new phase in which battlefield victories are becoming harder to achieve and the costs of continued fighting continue to rise.

In the early years after the coup, the momentum appeared to be shifting decisively against the military. The emergence of People's Defence Forces (PDFs), renewed cooperation with long-established Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs), and a series of successful offensives deprived the junta of large areas of territory. The military was forced onto the defensive across multiple fronts, exposing weaknesses that few believed possible only a few years earlier.

Today, however, the battlefield looks far more complicated. The junta has strengthened its ranks through conscription, reorganized parts of its command structure, and increasingly relied on overwhelming air power, drones, paramotors and artillery to compensate for weaknesses on the ground. Resistance forces continue to hold significant territory in several regions, but maintaining these gains has become increasingly difficult in the face of relentless aerial bombardment and shortages of weapons, ammunition and funding.

The resistance also faces internal challenges. Myanmar's anti-junta movement is a broad coalition of ethnic armed organizations, local defence forces and political bodies with differing

priorities and strategies. While cooperation has improved considerably since 2021, sustaining unity over a prolonged conflict remains a constant test. Localized disagreements, uneven access to resources and differing political objectives inevitably complicate military planning and long-term governance.

International dynamics have also shifted. Regional powers increasingly prioritise stability over confrontation, while diplomatic engagement with Myanmar's military-backed authorities has resumed in some forums despite continuing criticism of the country's political situation. Resistance leaders remain frustrated by what they see as insufficient international pressure on the junta and inadequate support for pro-democracy forces.

Yet declaring the resistance to be in decline would be premature. The military still faces determined opposition across large parts of the country, and many analysts believe it remains incapable of exercising uncontested control over much of Myanmar. The conflict has become a prolonged war of attrition rather than a contest likely to produce a rapid military victory for either side.

For Myanmar's resistance, the coming months will demand patience as much as courage. Military success alone may not be enough to shape the country's future. Preserving unity, strengthening governance in areas under resistance control and maintaining the confidence of Myanmar's people could ultimately prove just as important as battlefield victories.

After five years of war, the struggle is no longer simply about defeating the junta - it is about demonstrating that a democratic and federal alternative remains both credible and achievable.

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Cover photo of Myanmar resistance fighters by AFP



An IDP with her baby in Karenni State.
Photo: Antonio Graceffo

BLIND METRICS: HOW FLAWED DATA MASKS THE TRUE SCALE OF MYANMAR'S CRISIS

ANTONIO GRACEFFO, PHD

As of June 2026, an estimated 3.77 million people in Myanmar are internally displaced, up from roughly 3.5 million in early 2025. Yet, the UN's 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan estimates that 16.2 million people require life-saving humanitarian assistance, down from 19.9 million in 2025. OCHA attributes the reduction entirely to a narrower scope of analysis, stating it "by no means indicates any improvement of the humanitarian situation."

This counterintuitive finding is indicative of how flawed data collection or changes in methodology can present a false picture of the level of crisis facing people on the ground. Accuracy and consistency are crucial in assessing the humanitarian impact of the war because this data informs international policy interventions as well as potential donors and can result in funding cuts. At the same time, the junta can capitalize on the mirage of improving numbers to legitimize its rule.

Roughly half of school-age children are missing basic education. Yet, according to the United Nations Development Programme, Myanmar's Human Development Index (HDI) score held steady through the coup years, recovering to its 2019 level by 2023 despite a worsening situation on the ground.

The HDI is a geometric mean of three components: life expectancy at birth, education (mean years of schooling for adults 25 and older, and expected years of schooling for children), and gross national income per capita in purchasing power parity terms. Myanmar's score, published by UNDP, was 0.609 in 2019, the year before the coup. In 2021, the year of the coup, it was 0.605. By 2023, it had returned to 0.609, the same value as 2019.

However, during the same period that the HDI was reported as unchanged and then recovering, displace-

ment increased, as did the number of people fleeing the country. According to UNDP's own projection, the percentage of the population estimated to be living in poverty nearly doubled, from 24.8 percent in 2017 to 46.3 percent. The number of children killed or maimed in the conflict also increased sharply, while meaningful indicators such as agricultural production, industrial activity, and the percentage of children attending school declined.

One of the indicators that improved, creating the illusion of better conditions, was life expectancy at birth. Myanmar's life expectancy at birth, as reported in World Bank data, fell from 66.612 years in 2020 to 65.553 years in 2021, the year of the coup. It then rose in each subsequent year: 66.506 in 2022, 66.889 in 2023, and 67.095 in 2024. The irony is that between 2020 and 2024, access to hospitals declined dramatically, while the likelihood of being killed in air or drone strikes increased.

This figure is produced using the UN Population Division's cohort-component demographic method, which projects forward from prior mortality trends and is updated when new vital registration or survey data become available. Myanmar does not have a national vital registration system that reliably captures deaths in contested or conflict-affected townships. Death registration completeness was already below 60 percent nationally before the coup, according to peer-reviewed assessments, with the largest gaps in rural areas with poor transportation and limited access to health facilities, the same areas most affected by the current conflict.

Mean years of schooling, one of the two education inputs to the HDI, measures the completed education of the adult population aged 25 and older and has remained unchanged for years: 6.38 from 2019 through

2023. At the same time, the basic enrollment figures that actually changed show the opposite trend. Basic education enrollment in Myanmar fell from 9.7 million students in the 2019-20 academic year to 6.1 million in 2025-26. The number of students sitting the matriculation exam fell from more than 900,000 in 2020 to about 200,000 in 2025.

With fewer students attending school or sitting the matriculation exam, it logically follows that the mean level of education will eventually decline. However, because many of the children who have missed up to five years of schooling have not yet reached age 25, the figure has not yet been affected.

Similar to other human development indicators, Myanmar's education quality data are likely illusory. The World Bank's Human Capital Project assigns Myanmar a Harmonized Learning Outcomes score of 424.6, on a scale where 300 represents minimal attainment and 625 advanced attainment. That same score appears for 2017, 2018, and 2020, indicating a single pre-coup data point carried forward across update cycles rather than repeated measurement, with no coup-era update since.

The Academic Freedom Index, produced by the V-Dem Institute and Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, scored Myanmar at approximately 0.4 in 2020. After the February 2021 coup, the score fell to 0.02-0.03, among the three lowest scores measured globally, alongside North Korea and Eritrea, and rated "completely restricted." Scholars at Risk reported Myanmar's university student population shrank by 90 percent from pre-coup levels by 2024. Unlike the indicators above, this index is built from annual expert assessments rather than modeled demographic or national accounts data, and it clearly reflects the impact of the coup.

The gap between illusion and reality reflects how the data is gathered. UNDP's own November 2021 assessment of Myanmar admits, "given the currently limited data, we are not able to provide an accurate picture of the impact of COVID-19 and the takeover" on human welfare. Its Myanmar Development Observatory describes the country's data environment as marked by "protracted crisis, conflict, and data scarcity."

A peer-reviewed study of eastern Myanmar found that "national figures do not include data from substantial portions of the country, including areas that are conflict-affected or controlled by non-state actors along Myanmar's borders with Thailand and China." Similarly, a separate review of Myanmar's health sector found that national survey representation "was constrained by a 31-year gap between population censuses and by persistent active conflict in multiple states and regions."

Some data collection efforts use methodologies designed to reach areas outside government administrative control. The World Bank's Myanmar Subnational Phone Surveys use a sample of more than 8,500 households across all 15 states and regions, covering an estimated 95 percent of the population through phone interviews. However, the methodology raises questions about the reliability of the results because much of the country has little or no cell phone service.

The junta has imposed prolonged communications blackouts, cutting both mobile and internet access across nearly all resistance-controlled and contested areas. As of late 2025, roughly 131 townships remained cut off, with some in Sagaing, Chin, and Karenni states disconnected continuously for more than four years. More than 400 cell towers were destroyed during the conflict's first year alone, and surviving towers

in contested areas often cannot operate because rural and conflict-affected regions face near-constant power outages as the junta prioritizes electricity for military zones.

Wa State, one of the few areas of Myanmar with reliable phone service, is not a resistance-controlled area in this sense. It has operated under a separate, decades-old ceasefire arrangement since 1989 and functions as a de facto autonomous administration outside the post-coup conflict.

UNHCR's Results Monitoring Survey in Myanmar uses "a mixed methodology of remote and in-person interview... to allow for inclusion of respondents in areas not accessible to data collectors, e.g. Rakhine state." These survey instruments, rather than the administrative data underlying the HDI's life expectancy and income components, produced the Kayah, Chin, and Sagaing findings cited above.

The reality in Myanmar is far worse than current data suggests. Much of the available data is flawed because it relies on modeled projections that are not updated with actual mortality data, frozen pre-coup figures carried forward as if they were current, and national averages built from government data that exclude conflict zones. The more important question, however, is whether the international community would intervene even if it had an accurate picture of conditions inside the country.

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

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Karenni fighters. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

KARENNI STATE RESISTANCE UNDER PRESSURE

Karenni State continues to experience intense conflict between Myanmar's military and resistance forces, with civilians bearing the brunt of the violence. According to the Karenni Human Rights Group, June saw a sharp increase in human rights violations following renewed military operations across the state.

The military has been attempting to regain control of the 77-mile Moby-Laikaw-Demoso-Hpruso-Bawlahe road, a key transportation route linking several townships. As junta columns advanced along this corridor, civilians and farmers faced increasing restrictions and insecurity. Farmers have been unable to safely access their fields during the rice cultivation season, with reports of military drone strikes targeting people working on farmland. Some farmers have already been injured in these attacks. Hpruso Township has been particularly affected, with reports of attacks on civilians, assaults on farmers, and the burning of homes.

Throughout June, the Karenni Human Rights Group documented 14 airstrikes, seven artillery attacks, six drone attacks, one landmine incident, the burning of 35 houses, and the killing of three civilians by junta forces.

The conflict has also severely disrupted transportation and supply chains. Monsoon conditions, combined with military control of major roads, have forced traders and transporters to abandon conventional routes in favour of rough off-road tracks accessible only by tractors or human porters. According to a local resident interviewed by Kantarawaddy Times, commercial goods have not entered the area through normal transport routes since mid-June because of poor road conditions. A journey that previously took half a day now

requires two to three days, significantly increasing transportation costs and driving up the prices of food, fuel, and other essential goods.

These transportation challenges are also affecting healthcare, education, and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In eastern Demoso Township, malaria cases are rising while shortages of medicines are becoming increasingly severe. Although donor organizations continue to supply essential medicines, deliveries are frequently delayed because of poor road access. As a result, local health workers and volunteers have been forced to borrow medicines from neighbouring communities to continue treating patients until new supplies arrive. One volunteer told local media that medicine deliveries, which previously took about one week, now often require nearly a month. She mentions, "If we run out of medicine, we borrow it from other villages. When our supplies finally arrive, we return what we borrowed." This informal system of sharing limited medical supplies has become essential to sustaining healthcare services in conflict-affected communities.

Malaria is widespread in both internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and surrounding villages in eastern Demoso Township. Health workers say the shortage of medicines, combined with limited access to mosquito

nets and other preventive materials, is worsening the public health situation. With transportation constraints continuing and the conflict showing no sign of easing, humanitarian needs across Karenni State are expected to remain severe.

Myanmar civilians feel the cost of living pinch

Myanmar continues to face a deepening cost-of-living crisis, driven by prolonged conflict, supply chain disruptions, import restrictions, and weak economic performance. The rising cost of basic commodities has significantly reduced purchasing power, particularly for low-income households and people living in conflict-affected areas.

Prices of essential food items have increased sharply compared with the period before the 2021 military takeover. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, an egg cost around 150 kyats. Today, it costs at least 550 kyats in relatively accessible urban areas. In remote and conflict-affected regions, prices fluctuate frequently depending on local security conditions and transport access, making the cost of essential goods highly unpredictable.



Internally displaced people are finding prices of essentials going up. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

The humanitarian situation has deteriorated alongside the economic crisis. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), more than 16 million people—including approximately 3.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)—require humanitarian assistance. Ongoing conflict, repeated displacement, and difficulties in delivering aid have compounded humanitarian needs across the country. Of those in need, UNOCHA has identified 4.9 million people as requiring the most urgent life-saving assistance.

Cooking oil has become one of the clearest examples of the widening gap between government controls and market realities. Palm oil, a staple cooking ingredient relied upon by many low-income households, is currently sold in the market for around 18,000 to 20,000 kyats per viss, nearly three times the military administration's reference price of about 7,000 kyats per viss.

Responding to criticism over shortages, the junta's spokesperson defended restrictions on palm oil imports by arguing that Myanmar's overall consumption is excessive. She stated that the average person consumes around 11 visses of cooking oil annually, while the World Health Organization recommends approximately 10 kilograms, or about 6.5 visses, per person each year. She also argued that importing large quantities of palm oil places additional pressure on the country's limited foreign currency reserves.

However, import restrictions have coincided with declining supply. Myanmar previously imported between 800,000 and one million tonnes of palm oil annually. This year, import permits have reportedly been limited to just over 600,000 tonnes—roughly 30 percent lower than previous levels—contributing to shortages and higher prices.

The junta leader, Min Aung Hlaing, has publicly acknowledged that rising prices remain one of the country's biggest economic challenges and has said that stronger economic growth is essential for national development. He attributed inflation primarily to supply and demand imbalances.

Business operators, however, point to broader structural problems. Traders interviewed by local media argue that excessive centralization of trade, restrictions on imports and exports, and numerous checkpoints along transportation routes have disrupted the normal flow of goods and increased distribution costs. Even domestically produced goods have become more expensive because manufacturers face rising production costs and shortages of imported raw materials.

Businesses also highlight persistent shortages of electricity and fuel as major obstacles to domestic production. Although the military administration has promoted greater reliance on local manufacturing, unreliable energy supplies continue to limit production capacity, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Traders argue that easing import and export restrictions and improving the movement of goods would help stabilise prices and improve market supply.

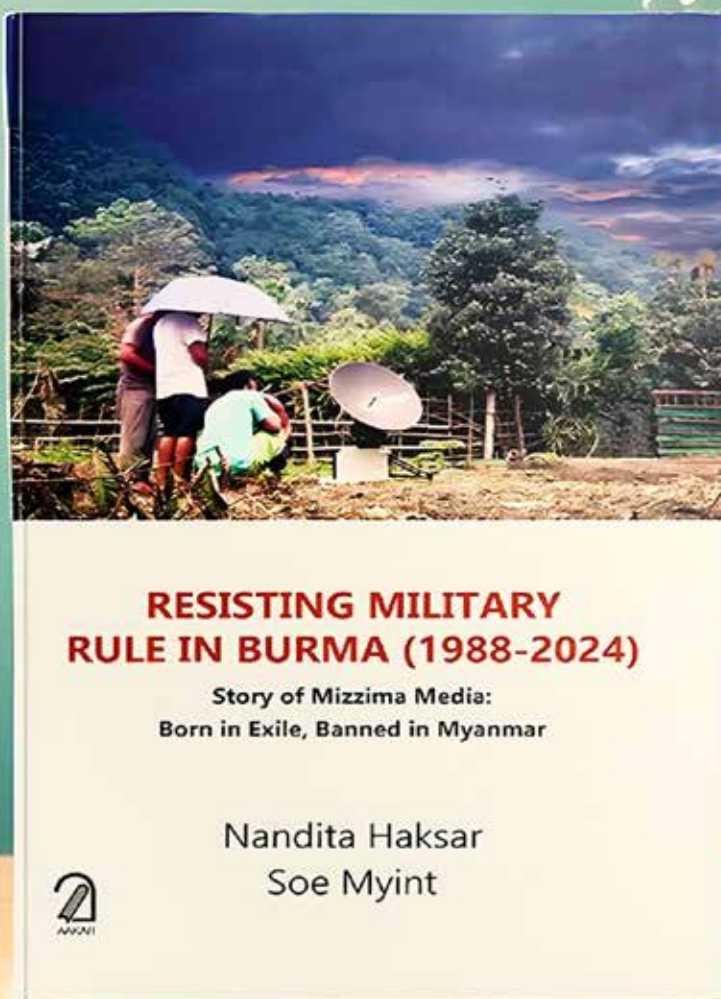
Underlying many of these policies is the military administration's effort to conserve increasingly scarce foreign currency reserves by reducing imports and encouraging domestic production. At the same time, much of Myanmar's border trade with China, Thailand, and India now passes through areas controlled by resistance forces, which collect taxes on cross-border commerce. Analysts and traders believe the military's tighter control over border imports is driven not only by foreign exchange concerns but also by its broader strategy to reduce revenue flowing to resistance groups.

As conflict continues and economic restrictions remain in place, Myanmar's cost-of-living crisis is likely to persist, placing additional pressure on households already struggling with displacement, declining incomes, and limited access to essential goods and services.

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

STORY OF MIZZIMA MEDIA: BORN IN EXILE, BANNED IN MYANMAR

by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint



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Photo: AFP

ASEAN MINISTERS PUSH STALLED PEACE PLAN IN MYANMAR TALKS

Southeast Asian foreign ministers pressed their Myanmar counterpart for "concrete" progress on a stagnant ASEAN peace plan for the country during a meeting in Bangkok on Sunday, top Thai and Philippine diplomats said.

The meeting between foreign ministers of several members of the 11-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Myanmar's Foreign Minister Tin Maung Swe was the first such gathering since a 2021 military coup in the country.

Myanmar has been diplomatically sidelined within the regional bloc since the country's military ousted the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi more than five years ago, triggering a civil war.

But junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was installed as civilian president in April following highly restricted elections, and neighbouring Thailand has been leading attempts at normalising relations.

Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow told a press briefing on Sunday that his government supported "calibrated engagement" with Myanmar in an effort to implement ASEAN's "five-point consensus" plan aimed at ending the war between the military and a coalition of pro-democracy rebels and ethnic minority armed groups.

But he said it required Myanmar to address the concerns of ASEAN and the international community.

"We have some concrete expectations" with regard to humanitarian assistance, reduction of violence, especially against civilians, and promoting inclusive political dialogue, Sihasak told reporters.

He also urged "further release of political prisoners and further positive development" with regard to 81-year-old Suu Kyi, who remains detained after she was moved from prison to house arrest.

"We want to see progress, step by step," Sihasak said.

'Concrete actions'

But ASEAN has made little headway with its initiative to end Myanmar's civil war through dialogue with all sides.

Myanmar lawmakers -- elected in a vote that did not include rebel-controlled areas or Suu Kyi's party -- blasted the bloc's plan in parliament last week, calling for it to be "reviewed and reconsidered", the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar said.

The plan "undermines Myanmar's equality within ASEAN and is inconsistent with ASEAN's fundamental principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a member state", they said, according to the outlet.

Still, Philippines' Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro said she and the bloc stood behind the plan.

Lazaro, who is also the Myanmar special envoy of the ASEAN chair, told reporters that ministers at

the meeting in Bangkok hoped Myanmar would take the "opportunity to make concrete and demonstrable progress or benchmarks on the core points of the five-point consensus" -- although no timeline was set.

"ASEAN called for concrete actions towards the cessation of hostilities," she said, adding that she intended to visit Myanmar this year in an effort to expand access to humanitarian assistance in the country.

The five-point plan, which Myanmar and the rest of ASEAN agreed to in 2021, calls for an immediate halt to hostilities and for dialogue between all parties, mediated by the ASEAN envoy.

But consensus among ASEAN members is fraying, analysts say, between those open to seizing on small concessions to bring Myanmar back into the fold -- a group led by Bangkok -- and those maintaining a firmer stance.

Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam confirmed their foreign ministers' attendance on Sunday, while Malaysia's foreign minister told AFP he could not attend but sent other representatives.

More than 100,000 people have been killed in Myanmar's civil war, according to monitor group ACLED.

AFP



Myanmar's Foreign Minister Tin Maung Swe at the ASEAN meeting in Bangkok. Photo: AFP

THE PARODY OF ASEAN'S FIVE-POINT CONSENSUS AND MYANMAR'S NEW ACTOR

NICHOLAS KONG

On July 12, 2026, the foreign ministers of the 11-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) met with their Myanmar counterpart from the junta's nominal civilian administration at an "informal meeting" in Bangkok. It was the first in-person meeting between ASEAN foreign ministers and Myanmar's top diplomat since ASEAN barred Myanmar from its high-level summits following the military's overthrow of the democratically elected government of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

Five-Point Consensus: "It Was and It Remains Valid"

ASEAN continues to adhere to its Five-Point Consensus (5PC) peace plan, which it regards as the primary framework for resolving Myanmar's crisis. The bloc hopes to see demonstrable progress on three key issues: the permanent cessation of violence, the release of all political detainees including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and unrestricted humanitarian access through ASEAN's humanitarian mechanisms to all communities

in need, regardless of political affiliation.

Yet, more than five years after the 2021 coup, the military regime has largely ignored the consensus, while its military-controlled institutions have shown little interest in implementing it.

The very first point - the cessation of violence - has been a non-starter. The military continues its aerial bombardment of civilian populations across the country. Historically, the military has used ceasefires not as genuine steps toward peace but as tactical instruments to divide and weaken opposition forces while reducing international pressure when it serves its strategic interests.

The second point - the release of political prisoners - which the junta has long treated as a bargaining chip rather than a humanitarian obligation. It was perhaps the most absurd claim of the week when the regime asserted that "Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is in good health and that she's a relative, she's a sister and therefore we will take care of her."

This is the same regime led by individuals who orchestrated the coup and dismantled Myanmar's democratic institutions. The whereabouts of the 81-year-old Nobel laureate remain unknown, and the authorities have repeatedly denied requests by her son to visit or communicate with his mother.

The third point - humanitarian assistance - which military has also repeatedly weaponized. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Typhoon Yagi in 2024, the Sagaing earthquake in 2025, and throughout the ongoing civil war that has displaced more than five million people, aid has often been restricted, delayed, or manipulated for political purposes.

International Voices and Silent Whispers: The NUG's Response

Human rights groups unequivocally rejected ASEAN's decision to invite the junta's foreign minister to the Bangkok talks. One rights advocate described the move as ASEAN "falling into the trap" and compromising itself, warning that the organization risks becoming increasingly irrelevant.

The regime has sought to normalize relations with ASEAN since the formation of its nominal civilian administration. If ASEAN or individual member states continue engaging stakeholders separately and without equal political weight, they risk reinforcing the junta's divide-and-rule strategy, signaling that its political exclusions are optional, and prioritizing institutional optics over the protection of human rights and civilian lives.

The National Unity Government (NUG) issued a statement regarding the informal meeting between ASEAN and the military junta. It argued that the central challenge facing ASEAN is not the absence of diplomatic engagement, but rather the military junta's persistent refusal to implement the commitments it accepted under the Five-Point Consensus. While ASEAN and its member states have engaged a range of stakeholders, such engagement has often occurred separately, without equal political weight or a coherent framework. As the NUG noted, ASEAN's credibility will ultimately be judged not by the number of meetings it convenes but by whether its collective commitments are translated into measurable results.

The New Actor in the Parody

The junta is politically shrewd. It knows precisely when to act and when to remain silent - but always in pursuit of its own interests, not those of the people of Myanmar. A snake remains a snake, no matter how many times it sheds its skin.

ASEAN should recognize that the emergence of a more unified resistance structure presents an opportunity to move beyond junta-centric engagement and better reflect Myanmar's evolving political reality. The Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF), an institutionalized collective leadership mechanism among major resistance actors, offers such a framework.

The SCEF should clarify whether the NUG has been designated as the executive branch responsible for implementing the Steering Council's decisions, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. External stakeholders need confidence that they are dealing with a coordinated authority speaking on behalf of the broader resistance rather than multiple parallel voices.

While the NUG's statement expressed disappointment over ASEAN's engagement with the regime, it stopped short of advancing or explaining SCEF's broader diplomatic agenda. It did not articulate the strategic direction that many external partners are seeking.

Although diplomacy often requires discretion and careful negotiation, discretion should not come at the expense of strategic positioning. SCEF must not allow ASEAN to engage solely on its own terms while relegating resistance to the status of a secondary actor. At present, the Steering Council remains largely reactive rather than asserting itself as an equal political stakeholder.

The leadership must understand that credibility is built not only through dialogue but also through strategic clarity and institutional confidence. Respect in diplomacy is earned through clarity, confidence, and a steadfast commitment to principled positions.

Originally published in Eurasia Review.

Photo: AFP

ASEAN SPECIAL ENVOY AND EAO LEADERS MEET IN PATTAYA; NUG FM ZIN MAR AUNG CLARIFIES MEETING INVOLVED INDIVIDUAL INVITATIONS ONLY

MAUNG KHET NWAY FOR MIZZIMA

The Philippine Foreign Minister, acting as ASEAN Special Envoy, and the Thai Foreign Minister met with several Myanmar Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) for the first time on 13 July in Pattaya, Thailand.

Zin Mar Aung, Secretariat Member of the Steering Committee for the Establishment of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) and Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government (NUG), confirmed to Mizzima that the meeting did not host the SCEF as a collective body, but instead involved separate invitations extended to individual EAO leaders.

"I want to clarify that this meeting did not invite the SCEF, but was instead conducted through separate, individual invitations. Regarding the invitation, it remains unclear whether it was extended by the host Thai government or by the Philippine Foreign Minister in her capacity as the ASEAN Special Envoy. Furthermore, the discussion topics and agendas are unclear," said Minister Zin Mar Aung.

The closed-door meeting was attended by leaders of EAOs including the Karen National Union (KNU), Chin National Front (CNF), and Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), with discussions joined by

Philippine Foreign Minister Theresa Lazaro and Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak.

Zin Mar Aung added that regardless of how the meeting was convened, SCEF members had coordinated beforehand to maintain a unified common stance.

Philippine Foreign Minister Lazaro told the Bilyonaryo News Channel that this meeting was highly significant, marking the first direct engagement between an ASEAN Special Envoy and high-level EAO leaders.

She added, "This was a constructive meeting as the Thai Foreign Minister and I were able to engage in open and candid discussions with these EAOs."

Prior to this, on 11 July, the ASEAN Special Envoy and the Thai Foreign Minister also held an informal meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, with ASEAN Foreign Ministers, including the military junta's foreign minister.

These consecutive meetings with both the junta and EAOs occur as ASEAN faces mounting international pressure over its inability to halt the violence perpetrated by the military junta in Myanmar effectively.

Photo: AFP

APHR CONDEMNS MYANMAR JUNTA'S REFUSAL TO LET ASEAN ENVOY MEET AUNG SAN SUU KYI

ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR), a regional network of lawmakers, has condemned Myanmar's military junta for barring the ASEAN Special Envoy from meeting detained former leader Aung San Suu Kyi, calling the refusal the latest in a pattern of denials that has kept ASEAN representatives from accessing her since November 2021, according to a press release on 7 July.

The Five-Point Consensus, agreed by ASEAN leaders and junta chief Min Aung Hlaing in April 2021 following the coup, commits the junta to end violence, allow humanitarian access, and permit an ASEAN special envoy to hold dialogue with all parties to Myanmar's conflict. APHR said that commitment has never been honoured when it comes to Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the party that won Myanmar's last free election in 2020.

Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro, serving as ASEAN's 2026 Special Envoy on Myanmar, formally requested access to Aung San Suu Kyi on 6 May, following reports she had been moved from prison to house arrest. A junta spokesperson, Khaing Khaing Soe, confirmed on 30 June that the request had been denied, saying Aung San Suu Kyi remained ineligible to meet international representatives while serving her sentence.

"A 'positive step' that forecloses all independent verification is no step at all," APHR Chairperson Mercy Chriesty Barends said in the statement, arguing that the junta's April announcement of Aung San Suu Kyi's transfer to house arrest had sought diplomatic

credit without offering any way to verify her condition independently.

The condemnation follows a 19 June report to the UN General Assembly by Julie Bishop, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Myanmar, who called for Aung San Suu Kyi's urgent release and said her condition had gone unverified by independent observers for years.

APHR urged Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., in his capacity as ASEAN Chair, and other member states to press for Aung San Suu Kyi's immediate and unconditional release along with that of all political prisoners, and to secure access for her family, legal counsel, and an independent medical team to confirm her whereabouts and wellbeing. The group also called for any further ASEAN engagement with the junta to be strictly conditioned on verifiable progress under the Five-Point Consensus, and for increased pressure on the junta's external backers, including China, to secure her release.

Aung San Suu Kyi, 81, has been held since the military seized power on 1 February 2021. Her transfer from Naypyidaw Prison to an undisclosed "house arrest" location came in late April, days before the 48th ASEAN Summit in Cebu. Junta officials have described her health as "very good," a claim her son, Kim Aris, has disputed, saying he has received reports she suffers from heart disease and osteoporosis. Neither her exact whereabouts nor her health have been independently verified.

A portrait of French President Emmanuel Macron in a dark suit and tie, standing in front of the French flag and the European Union flag.

French President Emmanuel Macron.
Photo: AFP

MACRON CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI AMID CONCERNS FOR WELL-BEING

French President Emmanuel Macron has told Kim Aris, the son of Aung San Suu Kyi, that France will continue to press for her "immediate and unconditional release," along with all political prisoners held since Myanmar's 2021 coup.

According to a letter from Macron, the French president was responding to a letter Aris delivered to France's Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs on 4 May, raising concerns about his mother's health and whereabouts after junta leader Min Aung Hlaing ordered her transfer from prison to "house arrest".

Aung San Suu Kyi, the 81-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Myanmar's detained former State Counsellor, has been held since the military seized power on 1 February 2021. Her office's transfer announcement in April came alongside the conditional release of former president Win Myint, but Aris says he has received no independently verified confirmation of his mother's health or location since — a demand he has framed as a "Proof of Life" campaign.

In the letter, Macron wrote that France's appeal "remains unchanged" and that it "will continue to call for her immediate and unconditional release," calling

this "a precondition for any inclusive political dialogue." He said France supports a request by the Philippines, this year's ASEAN chair, for the bloc's Special Envoy to be granted a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi.

Macron also wrote that he raised the matter directly with Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul during Anutin's visit to Paris on 25 May, and noted that France had backed a one-year renewal of the European Union's Myanmar sanctions regime on 27 April.



Kim Aris is supporting the Proof of Life campaign for his mother. Photo: Supplied



Photo: Supplied

NLD STRONGLY CONDEMNS MYANMAR JUNTA'S DESTRUCTION OF GENERAL AUNG SAN STATUES

The Central Working Committee of the National League for Democracy (NLD) issued a statement 8 July strongly condemning the military junta's ongoing destruction of General Aung San statues nationwide, saying junta forces have destroyed approximately ten of the monuments in June and July alone.

The statement said the junta and its subordinates — including the military, police, and municipal staff — are systematically destroying statues that were built through public donations in compliance with legal regulations and procedures, carrying out the demolitions under cover of darkness.

This destruction is not merely vandalism of public property but a deliberate assault on Myanmar's national identity, historical symbols, and the collective faith and hopes of the people, the NLD said.

General Aung San is revered by the public as an exemplary leader — both the architect of Myanmar's independence who unified the Union, and the founder of the armed forces, the statement added.

The NLD warned that those ordering and carrying out the destruction are undermining the spirit of the Union, and said it would pursue measures to hold them accountable.

CHINA'S RARE EARTH RUSH IS POISONING THE MEKONG — AND SOUTHEAST ASIA IS PAYING THE PRICE

SUN LEE

For seventy million people, the Mekong River isn't scenery. It's dinner. It's income. It's the reason a village exists where it does. Now, for the first time, arsenic has been confirmed in the river's mainstream sediment not just its tributaries and the trail of toxic mud leads straight back to a mining boom that China created, exported, and continues to profit from.

From Beijing's Backyard to Myanmar's Frontier: The story starts with a clean-up but not the kind that helps anyone downstream. When China tightened environmental enforcement on its own rare earth industry, the dirtiest part of the business didn't disappear. It moved. Mining operations that once scarred hillsides in southern China shifted across the border into Kachin and Shan States in Myanmar, where a 2021 military coup had already shattered central authority and handed resource-rich frontier territory to ethnic armed groups.

The numbers tell the story of just how fast this relocation happened. In Kachin State alone, mining sites jumped from roughly 130 in 2020 to over 370 by the end of 2024. Myanmar's rare earth exports to China, overwhelmingly the destructive heavy rare earths used in EV motors and wind turbines, more than doubled in the two years after the coup, and 85% of the \$4.2 billion in exports recorded between 2017 and 2024 came after the military took over. By 2023, Myanmar was supplying more than 60% of China's heavy rare earth imports by value output that, tellingly, exceeded China's own domestic mining quota that year. China didn't just tolerate this shift. It became structurally dependent on it, while keeping its hands clean of the mess it produces.

Satellite imagery from the U.S.-based Stimson Centre has identified 833 unregulated mines across the Mekong River Basin, with 86 confirmed as rare earth

operations using blue tarpaulin leaching ponds, more than half of which opened between 2024 and 2026. Arsenic has now reached the Mekong mainstream itself, with Thai testing in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai in early 2026 showing levels exceeding safety standards at all 23 monitored sites for the first time. On the Salween River, arsenic readings hit 0.096 mg/L on the main stem and 0.554 mg/L on a tributary, more than 55 times the WHO threshold. The economic damage on Thailand's Kok River alone was estimated at 1.3 billion baht (about \$40 million) by September 2025, with projections surpassing \$90 million if left unaddressed. Meanwhile, the Salween basin recorded 127 suspected mining sites between 2016 and 2026, with the sharpest expansion after 2023. Each of these figures represents heavy metals like arsenic, lead, cadmium, and manganese that persist in sediment, move into fish, and accumulate in people's bodies, contaminating rice, garlic, and edamame that enter the global supply chain at its source.

A Convenient Arrangement for Beijing: Here is what critics of China's role point to as the uncomfortable core of this crisis: Beijing gets to have it both ways. Its domestic environmental record improves on paper while its factories keep receiving a steady, cut-rate supply of the exact same toxic material just mined 50 miles across the border instead of at home. Chinese companies and buyers deal directly with armed groups like the United Wa State Army and the Kachin Independence Army, financing militias that fund civil war with mining revenue while skirting any accountability for the environmental devastation those mines leave behind. When Kachin fighters seized key rare earth towns in 2024, China's response wasn't environmental concern it was a border closure to pressure trade terms, followed by a new pricing deal once exports resumed. The message was clear: keep the minerals flowing; the mud is someone else's problem.

Beijing also holds enormous leverage as the source of roughly 90% of global rare earth processing capacity, a chokehold it has openly used as a geopolitical weapon restricting exports to pressure Washington, Tokyo, and Brussels in trade disputes. That same dominance means China could, if it chose to, impose environmental standards on the material entering its own refineries. It has not. Regional bodies like the Mekong River Commission have no authority to compel change upstream, and China's foreign ministry did not respond to press inquiries about the mineral imports fuelling the crisis, according to Mongabay reporting.

The Other Side of the Story: Fairness requires noting the fuller picture. The mines themselves sit inside Myanmar, run by Myanmar-based armed factions and, in some cases, the military junta not the Chinese state directly. Myanmar's own post-coup collapse, not a Chinese master plan, created the lawless vacuum these operations exploit. Some analysts argue China's posture reflects economic opportunism and regulatory neglect rather than a deliberate strategy to harm its neighbours, and note that global demand from EV makers to electronics manufacturers worldwide is what makes this mining profitable in the first place.

Whatever the intent, the outcome is the same: a river that feeds Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam is turning toxic, and the profits are flowing north while the poison flows south.

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



FORUM CALLS ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO CEASE DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH MYANMAR JUNTA

The Strategic Initiative Forum (SIF), a coalition of Myanmar organizations, has issued an urgent appeal to the international community to cease offering legitimacy and diplomatic engagement with Min Aung Hlaing's military junta in Myanmar.

The following is the statement issued on 11 July:

1. The Strategic Initiative Forum (SIF) expresses its sincere appreciation to the United States (U.S.), the European Union (EU), and other democratic nations for their steadfast commitment to standing with the people of Myanmar by refusing to recognize the illegal military junta led by Min Aung Hlaing since the February 1, 2021, coup. We likewise acknowledge and

thank ASEAN for its principled stance in excluding the junta leader from its summits and for refusing to grant legitimacy to the junta's fraudulent electoral processes.

2. SIF strongly condemns the actions of certain neighboring countries and international stakeholders that continue to provide political legitimacy, economic engagement, and diplomatic recognition to Min Aung Hlaing, who masquerades as the head of a "transitional" government following a sham election. Such actions do not resolve the political crisis in Myanmar; rather, they undermine efforts toward democracy and exacerbate the suffering of our people.

3. Furthermore, extending state-level invitations to Min Aung Hlaing, treating him as a legitimate national leader in bilateral meetings, and engaging through ministerial-level visits or high-level diplomatic missions to Naypyidaw, serves only to confer unearned political legitimacy upon a brutal and illegal military entity.

4. The junta has not only seized power unlawfully but continues to misappropriate national resources and public funds. It remains responsible for egregious human rights violations and war crimes, including the arbitrary arrest, torture, and detention of civilians, alongside the daily aerial bombardment of towns and villages across the country.

5. We are deeply concerned that some members of the international community and regional bodies have characterized Min Aung Hlaing's so-called "peace overtures" as positive steps. These gestures are fundamentally deceptive; throughout these periods of purported peace, the junta has never ceased its deliberate attacks on civilians, continuing its campaign of terror through indiscriminate airstrikes, heavy artillery shelling, and systemic oppression.

6. Despite the junta's attempt to forcibly conscript youth through an unjust military service law, Min Aung Hlaing's forces are facing catastrophic military setbacks due to the persistent pressure from the "Operation 1027" offensives and subsequent coordinated resistance operations. While the junta has reclaimed some territory with external assistance, this represents a negligible fraction of the ground lost to democratic

forces. Claims by some international observers that the junta has regained a military advantage are fundamentally disconnected from the realities on the ground.

7. The singular root cause of Myanmar's current political, military, and humanitarian crisis is the military junta led by Min Aung Hlaing. SIF firmly believes that achieving sustainable peace, establishing a federal democratic union, and fostering genuine national reconciliation require the international community to intensify its political, diplomatic, and economic isolation of the junta.

8. Therefore, we urgently call upon the United States, the European Union, ASEAN, and the international community at large to immediately cease all actions that confer political, diplomatic, or economic legitimacy upon the junta and its fraudulent "government." We implore you to honor the sovereignty of the people of Myanmar and stand firmly with us and all democratic forces in our struggle for justice and freedom.

The Strategic Initiative Forum (SIF) is a collaborative mechanism for revolutionary political forces that share a common vision, position, and methodology in the pursuit of eradicating military dictatorship and establishing a federal democracy.



ACCESS TO INDEPENDENT NEWS IN MYANMAR HAS COLLAPSED SINCE 2021 COUP, REPORT FINDS

Public access to independent news in Myanmar has fallen sharply since the 2021 coup, with total monthly readership across 50 analyzed media outlets dropping 48% — from roughly 4.7 billion views in January 2021 to 2.4 billion in 2026 — according to a report by Human Rights Myanmar and IPCM titled "Suppressing Audiences During Myanmar's Digital Coup".

The report found that although independent media outlets have increased content production since the coup, their actual reach to the public has plummeted. Average views per individual post declined by 56% over the same period.

State-owned and pro-military outlets saw even steeper declines, the report found, with audience reach shrinking by as much as 76% overall. Channel 9 Myanmar lost 99% of its audience, Eleven Media lost 84%, and MRTV-4 declined by 62%.

According to the report, the military regime has used a range of methods to restrict the flow of information and weaken the connection between the public and independent media, including internet shutdowns, travel restrictions, and pressure on news sources — measures that have disproportionately affected people in conflict zones.

Independent media have continued documenting military operations, the safety of internally displaced persons (IDPs), and human rights abuses, the report said, but public access to that reporting remains increasingly constrained.

Diminished access to information directly affects people's ability to make decisions about their daily survival and safety, the report concluded. It also warned that reduced access to information during electoral periods poses a serious threat to voting rights and the democratic process.

200 MILLION 'DATAPOINTS' SHOW MYANMAR GENERAL PUBLIC STILL REJECTS MILITARY RULE

A recent report on the military's suppression of independent media during Myanmar's elections included a rare, data-driven picture of public attitudes toward military rule since the 2021 coup, based on sentiment analysis of 194.7 million Facebook reactions, according to the NGO Human Rights Myanmar 7 July.

In a context where surveys are unsafe, and dissent risks violence, arrest, and surveillance, these digital traces offer one of the most reliable indicators of public opinion, the NGO says. The findings show that, even in 2026, the Myanmar public continues to overwhelmingly reject military rule and deny the junta any claim to public legitimacy.

Changes in public sentiment toward news

Their report has examined the direction, scale, and nuances of changes to media information flows on Facebook after the coup. The rise of emoji "reactions," seen globally but especially in Myanmar, because more

overt forms of dissent have been criminalised, offers a more detailed understanding of audience opinion. This section analyses how these shifts in public sentiment reflect views of the media, its coverage, and the coup.

Supporting trusted media with 'Love' reactions

A shift in "Love" Reactions towards the independent media shows increased affection, appreciation, emotional resonance, and trust. Before the coup, independent media captured 58% of all Love reactions. By 2026, this rose to 78% of all Love reactions. Local-level reporting contributed significantly to this shift, with Love Reactions increasing by +1,901%. Conversely, military-affiliated media saw their proportion of Love reactions halve, dropping from 42% to 22%. This shows increased desire to exercise the right to form an opinion without interference, and greater recognition of the legitimacy of non-State actors.

The shift in Love reactions also highlights a change in public sentiment toward political engagement. Before

the coup, the highest proportion of Love reactions (57%) was given to entertainment channels with pro-military leanings. By 2026, most were directed at outlets with an anti-military editorial stance (66%). Growth in Love reactions for partisan media rose by +139% compared to +74% for impartial outlets. This demonstrates a shift toward a more serious sentiment when exercising the right to access information, reflecting the gravity of the coup on people's lives.

Increased anger and shock at atrocities

Increases in "Angry" and "Wow" reactions provide a map of the public's negative sentiment when accessing media. The proportion of reactions that were Angry tripled after the coup from 3% to 8%. Over the five years, they grew by +525% overall, but this growth was uneven. Angry reactions increased by +906% on independent media but dropped by -53% on military-affiliated outlets. This indicates an increase in the public's desire to exercise the right to dissent in response to military repression, and to demand accountability for violations of the rights to life, liberty, and security of person.

The proportion of Wow reactions may have dropped from 7% to 5%, but they still remain significant and reveal a public in shock. Wow reactions represent astonishment, amazement, and disbelief. They grew by +73% for the independent media but shrank for the military-affiliated media by -74%. The decline of Wow reactions on military-affiliated media shows a total breakdown of State credibility, representing a public rejection of propaganda that attempts to distort the right to credible information.

Collective grief through 'Sad Face'

The growth of "Sad Face" reactions shows increased collective mourning. Since the coup, Sad Face reactions have grown by +365% overall, with 98%

of this sentiment on independent media. Local-level media, which often cover human rights violations in depth, saw a +1,506% increase in Sad Face reactions. Media outlets with a pro-opposition editorial stance also saw an increase of +670%. A small proportion of Sad Face reactions are on posts by military-affiliated media (2%). This growth in collective mourning preserves public memory and reinforces the human dignity of those people whose fundamental rights have been violated by the military.

Using the 'Haha' reaction to 'troll' independent media

The "Haha" Reaction has become a tool for "trolling" independent journalism rather than an expression of humour. It has grown in use by +117% since the coup and is found almost entirely on independent media posts. In 2026, there were over 2 million Haha reactions per month on independent media posts compared to just 7,000 on State-owned outlets. Adding these reactions to serious reporting is either dark humour or an attempt to troll, meaning harass or mock the media. It is intended to interfere with the media's right to impart information without fear of harassment.

This trolling is most intense at the local level, where Haha reactions grew by +853%. Outlets with an anti-military editorial stance saw a +289% increase in these reactions, while it fell by -49% for pro-military media. This disparity indicates a coordinated effort to psychologically undermine the right to freedom of expression for the most vulnerable journalists operating in high-conflict zones, the report says.

Moe San Suu Kyi



NLD YOUTH OFFICIAL MOE SAN SUU KYI GIVEN ADDITIONAL FIVE-YEAR SENTENCE UNDER COUNTER-TERRORISM LAW

Moe San Suu Kyi, an official with the National League for Democracy's (NLD) Central Youth Affairs committee, has been sentenced to an additional five years in prison under Section 52(a) of the Counter-Terrorism Law, despite having already completed a five-year prison term, according to sources close to her family.

The sentence was handed down to her on 6 July, the sources said. The new charge was filed by the Kamayut Township police chief, who alleged that Moe San Suu Kyi had contacted and supported the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), NUG minister Daw Zin Mar Aung, and Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) participants, and had links to organizations the junta has designated as terrorist groups.

Moe San Suu Kyi is the daughter of former Rakhine State Chief Minister U Nyi Pu. She was first arrested on 9 May 2021 in Yangon and later sentenced to six years under Section 505(a) for incitement and Sections 17(1) and 27(1) of the Unlawful Associations Act. That sentence was reduced and was due to end on 7 August 2025, but she remained held at Insein Prison after the Kamayut Township police chief brought the new charge before her scheduled release.

U Nyi Pu has been detained since the 2021 military coup and is serving a nine-year sentence under Sections 505(b) and 55. He has been transferred from Tharyawady Prison to Insein Prison, according to family sources.

Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES RESPONSIBLE FOR 80% OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND LGBT, CSO REPORTS

The Sisters to Sisters (S2S) organization has released a report documenting 295 cases of gender- and sexual orientation-based violence in Myanmar over a 1.5-year period from January 2025 to June 2026.

Military junta forces committed nearly 79 per cent of these cases, impacting 234 civilian women and 56 children. The S2S noted that these figures represent only documented incidents, and the actual numbers on the ground could be significantly higher.

According to the data, 192 culpable homicides occurred due to airstrikes, heavy artillery shelling, shootings, domestic disputes, and criminal acts, alongside 58 cases of rape and sexual violence.

The report also recorded 38 cases of outraging the modesty of women at workplaces and checkpoints, 26 cases of physical insult, two cases of digital harassment, and two cases of domestic violence.

Categorized by perpetrator groups, military junta forces committed the highest number of violations with 233 documented cases, perpetrating the most severe war crimes and human rights violations. The data

shows that 33 children were killed and 209 civilian men were affected by the junta's violence.

Revolutionary groups and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EROs) were documented to have committed 36 incidents. These cases allegedly included nine documented rapes by certain PDF forces, the killing of a CDM nurse, and the flogging of a CDM medic. Additionally, there were eight cases involving local administrative bodies (including five rapes), eight harassment cases by the Arakan Army (AA), and three cases by other regional PDFs. The report highlighted challenges surrounding these incidents, such as a weak rule of law, neglected investigations, and lenient punishments.

There were 25 cases of civilian-on-civilian violence, with children being the primary victims. These incidents included the rape and murder of children, a husband burning his wife to death, and human trafficking. The report noted that most of these civilian cases typically concluded with local courts handing down death sentences or prison terms.

S2S compiled and documented this data from news reports published by 45 credible media outlets.

MYANMAR JUNTA WARSHIPS FIRE NEARLY 90 ARTILLERY ROUNDS IN GWA, INJURING 6 LOCALS INCLUDING CHILD

Six civilians, including a five-year-old child, were injured along the coast of Gwa Township, southern Rakhine State, during Myanmar junta naval bombardments targeting residential areas, the Arakan Army (AA) announced on 8 July.

Four junta warships fired approximately 87 heavy naval gun shells. From 7:04 am to 12:45 pm on 8 July, the vessels patrolled and bombarded relentlessly and arbitrarily along the Gwa coast and the adjacent Bawmi coast in Ayeyarwady Region.

The AA identified the injured victims from Ward (3), Kyeintali Town, Gwa Township as Daw Ma Htar, 45, Daw Than May, 74, Ma Yadanar Htun, 5, U Nyo Htun, 48, Ma Thin Thiri Htun, 17, and Daw Mi Wine, 50.

Confronting consecutive losses of military bases and outposts near the Rakhine-Ayeyarwady border, the junta has escalated air strikes and naval bombardments targeting non-military civilian areas in Gwa Township, the statement noted.

Additionally, on 7 July, two junta jet fighters conducted two airstrikes on Gwa Township at approximately 10:00 pm and 11:30 pm.

The AA released documentary photos showing civilian casualties and damaged residential structures resulting from the naval gun attacks.

Photo: AFP

RIGHTS GROUP DOCUMENTS 31 WOMEN KILLED, HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN BEGGING IN SOUTHEASTERN BURMA

Myanmar junta forces killed at least 31 women and 15 children across southeastern Burma between April and June, according to a new report by the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), which monitors human rights conditions in Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi Region.

The report, released this week, documents airstrikes, drone attacks, gyrocopter bombings, artillery shelling, and landmine explosions across the three-month period. In several cases, HURFOM field staff found that attacks came when no active fighting was under way.

Among the deaths documented: a 30-year-old pregnant woman killed in a bombing in Karen State's A Ka Ni village on 3 June, days before her due date; two teenage sisters aged 14 and 17 killed when gyrocopters dropped bombs on their family compound in Tha Yet Chaung Township on 21 May; and a mother and her 13-year-old daughter shot dead by junta troops who opened fire on a vehicle carrying seven displaced civilians in Bilin Township on 9 May. Twenty-three women were also arbitrarily arrested during the period.

The use of gyrocopters and paramotors — small, low-altitude aircraft that carry and drop unguided

bombs — marks a shift in how the junta conducts attacks in the region. Fortify Rights documented more than 300 civilian attacks using such aircraft across Burma between December 2024 and January 2026, and human rights groups have called on governments to close sanctions gaps that allow components for these aircraft to reach the junta.

Beyond combat deaths, the report flags a growing crisis in Mawlamyine, where hundreds of children aged 3 to 14 — many from families displaced by the war — are now begging on city streets. HURFOM links the increase to four years of economic collapse and displacement, and warns that children exploited for begging are losing access to education. Local authorities have not enforced the 2019 Child Rights Law, which prohibits forcing minors to beg.

Since the 2021 coup, HURFOM has documented 308 women and 118 children killed across its monitoring areas. The organisation is calling for a global arms embargo on Burma, referral of the junta to the International Criminal Court, and expanded aid through local civil society groups.



Site of one of the bombings.

MYANMAR WITNESS REPORT DOCUMENTS ALLEGED MYANMAR AIRSTRIKES ON DETENTION SITES HOLDING CAPTURED MILITARY PERSONNEL

Over the last couple of years, a number of Myanmar military airstrikes have surprised analysts as they appear to have targeted their own military personnel – POWs or detainees caught in the crossfire.

A report by NGO Myanmar Witness has documented seven alleged Myanmar Air Force (MAF) attacks on sites holding captured military personnel between October 2024 and March 2026, concluding that more than 200 detainees and other individuals were likely killed or injured across the incidents.

The report, "Reported Airstrikes on Sites Holding Captured Military Personnel: Documented Attacks On Facilities Detaining Members of Government Armed Forces In Myanmar" combines satellite imagery, forensic assessment, geolocation, chronolocation, and analysis of user-generated content to examine attacks on detention facilities in Rakhine, Shan and Kayah states.

It is unclear from the report whether the MAF knew POWs or detainees were located in the targeted sites – or were considered acceptable collateral damage.

Myanmar Witness investigated seven locations reportedly operated by resistance forces where captured members of Myanmar's armed forces were

being detained. The organisation stresses that it uses the term "detainee" rather than prisoner of war because Myanmar's conflict is legally classified as a non-international armed conflict (NIAC), although Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions still requires all parties to treat detainees humanely and prohibits violence against those no longer taking part in hostilities.

The report's most detailed investigation focuses on an alleged airstrike carried out on 8 March 2026 in Ann Township, Rakhine State. According to the Arakan Army (AA), Myanmar Air Force aircraft struck a camp holding captured military personnel, killing 116 people, including surrendered soldiers and members of their families.

Myanmar Witness analyzed photographs and videos showing extensive destruction, burned structures and numerous fatalities. Investigators identified metal shackles attached to some of the deceased and injured, along with iron-barred detention cells at the site, providing strong evidence that the compound was being used to detain captured military personnel.

The organisation independently geolocated the camp near the Dalet River in Ann Township using

satellite imagery and determined that it was an isolated detention site located more than one kilometre from nearby villages. Satellite data from NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS), Planet Labs imagery showing a large dust cloud during the reported attack period, and Sentinel-2 imagery documenting landscape changes before and after the incident all supported the reported timing of the attack on 8 March 2026.

While Myanmar Witness concluded that the date of the incident was verified, it stated that available evidence did not allow investigators to independently confirm that the damage was definitively caused by an airstrike.

Forensic examination of images from the Ann site identified multiple charred human remains, extensive burn patterns and severe injuries among survivors. Some injured detainees appeared still to be wearing leg restraints while receiving medical treatment. The report also links the detention facility to the capture of the Myanmar military's Western Command headquarters by the AA in December 2024.

Footage released after the attack included Brigadier General Thaung Tun, one of the senior officers captured during that operation, appearing in shackles and describing the aftermath of the bombardment. Myanmar Witness concludes that available evidence makes it highly likely the compound functioned as a detention facility.

Beyond the Ann incident, Myanmar Witness documented six additional attacks on alleged detention sites. These include Pauktaw Township, where approximately 20 people were reportedly killed and 15 injured on 8 September 2024; Maungdaw Township, where more than 50 detainees and civilians were reportedly killed the following day at a former Border Guard Police base captured by the AA; Mrauk-U Township, where 28 people were reportedly killed and 25 injured in January 2025; Kyauktaw Township, where 21 detainees and family members were reportedly killed and 30 wounded in January 2026; Ho Hko Labour Camp in Nawnghkio Township, Shan State, where 12 people were reportedly killed and around 60 injured in October 2024; and No. 2 Prison in Mese Township, Kayah State, where five people, including women and children, were reportedly killed in March 2026.

Investigators were able to geolocate five of the seven detention sites with high confidence and identify landscape changes consistent with the reported attack dates through satellite imagery. However, Myanmar Witness repeatedly notes that limited user-generated content and the absence of direct evidence of aircraft or munitions meant it could not independently verify that every incident resulted from an airstrike. Instead, the report distinguishes between verified locations and dates and claims regarding the method of attack.

The report also notes that six of the seven detention sites had not previously been publicly identified as locations where captured military personnel were being held. Only one incident, in Maungdaw Township, coincided with ongoing fighting in the surrounding area, suggesting that the remaining reported strikes occurred at relatively isolated facilities rather than active battlefields. Two of the detention sites were established at former Myanmar military bases that had been captured and subsequently occupied by ethnic armed organisations or resistance groups.

Myanmar Witness concludes that its findings raise serious humanitarian concerns regarding the safety of detainees (or POWs) held by resistance organisations during Myanmar's conflict. While acknowledging the limitations of open-source investigations, the organisation says its methodology - including secure preservation of digital evidence, geolocation, chronolocation, forensic image analysis and confidence ratings - provides a transparent framework for independently assessing reported incidents.

It emphasizes that verified locations and timelines do not necessarily constitute proof of responsibility but contribute to the growing body of documented evidence surrounding alleged attacks on detention facilities in Myanmar's ongoing armed conflict.

While it is hard to draw strong conclusions from the evidence laid out in the report, it is difficult to ignore the apparent disregard by the Myanmar military for the well-being of their own personnel and their family members blown to smithereens by fighter jets.

Photo: Aftermath of air attack in Ann Township, Rakhine State



THAILAND UNVEILS GLOBAL ANTI-SCAM PLATFORM, BUT MYANMAR, LAOS AND CAMBODIA NOT AMONG FOUNDING MEMBERS

Thailand launched what officials called the world's first intelligence-sharing platform against transnational call-center scam networks and human trafficking on 3 July, with ten countries joining as founding members while Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar — the countries most frequently linked to the region's scam compounds — were absent from the initial rollout.

The platform, formally named the Scam and Human Trafficking Information Exchange and Linked Database, or SHIELD, was unveiled at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangkok during the closing ceremony of an international dialogue on countering cyber-scam and forced criminality, jointly organized by the Royal Thai Police and the ministry, according to Bangkok Post and Xinhua. Australia, China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, South Korea, the United States and Vietnam joined as the first participating countries, along with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Organization for Migration, the outlets reported.

Asked why Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar were not included, despite being frequently linked to scam-center operations, Pol. Gen. Thatchai Pitaneelaboot,

deputy national police chief and director of the Royal Thai Police's Anti-Human Trafficking Center, said future participation "would depend on mutual trust and consent," according to Bangkok Post.

The three excluded countries include the border areas of Myanmar's Kayin (Karen) State, where compounds such as KK Park and Shwe Kokko have operated for years under the protection of the Karen National Army, formerly known as the Border Guard Force — a militia aligned with Myanmar's military junta and distinct from the Karen National Union, the ethnic Karen political and armed organization that has resisted the military for decades and intensified fighting after the 2021 coup. Investigations have linked the compounds' origins to Chinese organized-crime figures, according to a report by the Human Development Forum Foundation.

Myanmar and Laos had taken part in an earlier consultation on the SHIELD system in January, when Thai police briefed a wider group of countries on the platform's development, according to Vietnamese state media reporting at the time. Neither country was listed among SHIELD's ten founding members at the July launch.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA ASSURES INDIAN GOVT IT WILL NOT PERMIT ITS TERRITORY TO BE USED AGAINST INDIA'S SECURITY INTERESTS

According to the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, the 23rd India–Myanmar National Level Meeting, held in New Delhi on 7–8 July, the Myanmar junta representatives assured India that its territory would not be allowed to be used for activities against India's security interests, ANI reports.

The meeting was led by India's Home Secretary Govind Mohan and the Myanmar Junta Deputy Home Minister Major General Min Thu.

The two sides reviewed the security situation along the India–Myanmar border, reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining peace, stability and security along the border, and agreed to strengthen intelligence sharing and operational coordination.

They also discussed expanding capacity-building and cooperation between their security agencies, stressed the importance of preventing the misuse of either country's territory for activities harmful to the other's security, and discussed the importance of completing the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway as key connectivity initiatives.

The meeting follows a state visit by Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing that took place shortly after Min Aung Hlaing was named “president” under the new quasi-civilian Myanmar administration.

Source: ANI

Photo: Supplied

HUNDREDS OF VEHICLES STRANDED ON MANDALAY-MYITKYINA HIGHWAY AS GOODS ROT, PASSENGERS RUN OUT OF MONEY

Clashes between the Myanmar military junta and revolutionary forces along the Mandalay-Myitkyina highway, the primary artery connecting central Myanmar to Kachin State, have left hundreds of vehicles stranded since 30 June. The blockade has caused severe hardship for passengers and triggered the decay of perishable goods, according to local transport operators and merchants.

Travelers currently rely on three routes between Mandalay and Myitkyina. The Naba-Katha route has been blocked since the afternoon of 30 June. The Meza-Nanthe-Indaw bypass has been closed for approximately 15 days. The remaining route via Banmauk is in extremely poor condition, requiring around four nights to traverse, a private car driver told Mizzima on 7 July.

"On the Naba side, vehicles are not stuck in a single location but are scattered across Naba, Pinwe, and Mawlu. More than 300 to 400 vehicles heading down from Myitkyina are trapped," the driver said.

The Meza-Nanthe-Indaw route is primarily used by large cargo trucks, though the exact number of stranded trucks there remains unverified. Communication networks are also down along these routes.

As the blockade drags on, stranded passengers are running out of funds, with some struggling to afford a single meal, while those with health issues face critical challenges, and perishable commodities such as tomatoes, flowers, and betel leaves are rotting, according to a bus terminal official.

A flower merchant who transports goods from Taunggyi, Mandalay, and Pyin Oo Lwin to Myitkyina and Mohnyin reported massive financial losses. "Merchants are losing flower crates worth 400,000 to 500,000 MMK (approx. US\$129 to 161) each. Many of us have had to discard our inventory on the roadside because there is no one to buy them along the way," the merchant said.

The road closure has triggered a sharp surge in commodity prices in Myitkyina. A local resident said cooking oil prices rose from 6,000 MMK (approx. US\$1.9) to 8,000 MMK (approx. US\$2.6) per 25 ticals (approx. 400g).

"Vegetables like green chilies and tomatoes that used to cost 1,500 to 2,000 MMK (approx. US\$0.5 to 0.6) now cost between 3,000 and 5,000 MMK (approx. US\$1 to 1.6), and items are becoming increasingly difficult to buy," she said.

On 30 June, fighting erupted between revolutionary forces and the junta army near Lankhwa village on the Katha-Naba stretch. A vendor couple from Narkhaung village was caught in the crossfire. They were killed by heavy artillery, according to a 3 July statement by Indaw Revolution (IR).

The military junta launched large-scale offensives in early April to retake Indaw and Mawlu towns, which had been captured by revolutionary allied forces. Ongoing clashes from these offensives have kept the Mandalay-Myitkyina highway blocked since 30 June, Kachin-based outlet The 74 Media reported on 8 July.

Photo: AFP

ABOUT 30 POLITICAL PRISONERS BEATEN IN MYANMAR'S INSEIN PRISON 'WITHOUT REASON'

Approximately 30 political prisoners returning from an officially sanctioned football match at Insein Prison were arbitrarily beaten by a prison staff member in the evening of 5 July, Mizzima sources reported on 7 July. The incident involved Ward 1 prisoners who had attended the match.

The assailant, identified as Prison Officer Aung Kyaw Sint, a one-star insignia officer, allegedly used a rubber baton to deliberately strike the prisoners in vital areas including their faces, heads, and necks.

"They were asked by the one-star officer when they returned to the ward after watching the football match held inside the prison in the evening of the 5th. They explained that they had attended an officially sanctioned match, but he did not accept their explanation and started hitting them," an anonymous Mizzima source stated.

The source added that both those who played in the match and those who watched it were beaten.

"Approximately 30 people were reportedly beaten. Only one person, the one-star officer Aung Kyaw Sint, was beating them," the source said. The officer reportedly continued the assault, hitting a second

political prisoner for looking back at him, and forced others accompanying them to lie on the ground, stepping on their backs with his shoes.

Another Mizzima source, who also requested anonymity, indicated that the political prisoners who were beaten had committed no offenses within the ward.

"They were beaten solely due to Aung Kyaw Sint's resentment towards political prisoners. Some are reportedly unable to get out of bed," the source said.

The Progressive Political Prisoners Network of Myanmar (PPNM) confirmed that the inhumane beatings resulted in severe injuries to the prisoners' faces and heads, with some in critical condition and unable to move from their beds.

PPNM strongly condemned the acts of torture and violence, issuing a statement on 7 July affirming its commitment to consistently uphold the rights of political prisoners.

As of 7 July, a total of 31,339 people have been arrested since the military coup in February 2021, with 14,401 remaining in detention, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).



Photo: Supplied

LOCAL GROUPS REJECT JUNTA'S CLAIM OF FULL CONTROL OVER MONYWA-YAGYI-KALEWA ROAD

Local opposition defense and administrative officials in Sagaing Region have rejected the military junta's claim that it regained full control of the Monywa-Yagyi-Kalewa road on 7 July, telling Mizzima the announcement is propaganda aimed at impressing India.

The military junta launched a self-proclaimed "road clearance operation" on 2 June and reached Kalewa on 7 July, after which its information department announced full control over the road. Local officials responded to inquiries from Mizzima regarding the announcement.

A military official from the Kale District People's Defense Force (PDF) said the announcement is aimed at creating a favourable political image for the junta. "Propaganda channels supporting them claim the road is open and secured, aiming to deceive India. With their current troop strength, dominating this route is impossible; it is purely for show," the official said.

According to the official, junta troops have not established bases or deployed manpower at key strategic points along the road. Instead, they took photographs in front of village signboards, torched the villages, and marched directly to Kalewa in a single column.

He added that junta forces suffered heavy casualties and failed to mount strong resistance during clashes along the route. While some heavy and light weapons were seized from them, specific military details cannot yet be disclosed due to operational security.

An official from the Minkin Township People's Administration also said junta forces are not stationed

along the road. "There is no stationing of troops. Let them come again if they dare. Whether they have gained control of this road section will become clear to the public in time," the official said.

According to Minkin Township People's Administration records, the junta column torched Letpantaw, Kyaukmaw, Konmaw, and Seiktha villages in Minkin Township during their march, destroying approximately 160 homes.

The military junta claimed that its control over the road would enable seamless cargo flow to central Myanmar via the Tamu-Kale India-Myanmar trade route, passing through Kalewa and Monywa.

However, fighting remains intense along the Tamu-Kale road. A local military source reported active clashes on 8 July in Kanan Village, Tamu Township, with defense forces maintaining control over areas including Witok and Bokekan.

The 115-mile Monywa-Yagyi-Kalewa road project, which includes asphalt paving, bridge construction, and rest areas, is funded by the Indian government with over US\$175 million. The upgrade remains incomplete, preventing cargo trucks and large passenger buses from passing, with traffic limited to local cars and motorcycles.

Clashes have intensified along the Tamu-Kale and Kalewa-Yagyi-Monywa routes following junta chief Min Aung Hlaing's discussions on border stability and reopening trade routes during his trip to India from 30 May to 3 June.

Kyaw Moe Tun

MYANMAR ENVOY URGES ICC TO ISSUE ARREST WARRANT FOR MIN AUNG HLAING AT UN DEBATE

Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations, Kyaw Moe Tun, told the UN General Assembly on 6 July that the military junta had carried out 1,147 aerial attacks and 20 massacres in just 70 days between 20 April and 30 June 2026, as he urged the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue an arrest warrant for junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

Speaking during a General Assembly debate on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) — the international norm adopted in 2005 committing states to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity — Kyaw Moe Tun has continued to represent Myanmar at the UN since the February 2021 coup, backing the parallel National Unity Government (NUG) rather than the junta administration.

More than 8,100 people have been killed by the military regime since the coup, and over 3.7 million remain internally displaced, the ambassador said, citing documentation by the UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

Beyond the arrest warrant request, Kyaw Moe Tun pointed to the NUG's July 2021 declaration accepting the ICC's jurisdiction under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute, and said the NUG and allied groups are working through the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) to establish a transitional justice process for conflict victims.

The ambassador also called for a UN Security Council resolution under Chapter VII, along with a halt to the flow of arms, jet fuel and other dual-use items to the junta, arguing that existing measures — including ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and Security Council Resolution 2669 (2022) — have proven inadequate. He pointed to the pending International Court of Justice ruling in *The Gambia v. Myanmar* case as a further opportunity for accountability.

Kyaw Moe Tun warned that countries maintaining what he called "unwarranted engagements" with the junta would be remembered bitterly by the people of Myanmar, closing his remarks by telling the Assembly that "time is of the essence".



Photo: AFP

TWO CIVILIANS KILLED, TWO INJURED AFTER KIA SOLDIER OPENS FIRE IN HPAKANT, KACHIN STATE

Two civilians were killed and two others injured in Hpakant, Kachin State, after an intoxicated Kachin Independence Army (KIA) soldier opened fire and then died by suicide on 6 July, according to local residents.

The incident occurred around midnight in Welon Village, on the Hpakant-Indawgyi Road.

Local residents said two intoxicated KIA soldiers were involved in an altercation with villagers, and that one of the soldiers fired approximately 13 shots before taking his own life. The two deceased were identified as a mother and her son. Cho Cho Oo, the mother, died instantly, while her son, 55-year-old Aik Hnaung, died from his wounds on the morning of 7 July. Both victims sustained two gunshot wounds, residents said.

According to a local resident, the incident began when the two intoxicated KIA soldiers stopped a child on a motorcycle, accused him of using drugs, and

assaulted him. After releasing the child, the soldiers later forced a shop owner to bring the child back, and continued assaulting him inside the shop. Aik Hnaung, described as a local leader, and a 71-year-old village elder, Nyunt Maung, intervened to de-escalate the situation and asked the soldiers to leave. In response, one of the soldiers opened fire, residents said.

During the same incident, the soldier punched Nyunt Maung, prompting further attempts by the two deceased and other nearby residents to intervene. The soldier then fired indiscriminately, striking Nyunt Maung twice in the back and injuring another woman in the arm. Witnesses said they hid as the shooting continued for about 20 minutes before the soldier died by suicide.

Local residents also said KIA authorities are attempting to suppress information about the incident, and that senior KIA officials have been notified to address the matter with the affected families.

Photo: Supplied

ABOUT 10,000 LOCAL RESIDENTS FROM KANI FLEE AGAIN AS THE MYANMAR JUNTA'S FLEET ADVANCES UP THE CHINDWIN RIVER

HLWAN MOE FOR MIZZIMA

About 10,000 local residents have had to flee from their homes after the junta's fleet fired heavy weapons against them as they were advancing upstream along the Chindwin River.

The villagers from about 10 villages have been displaced since 6 July at 8:30 am.

The junta's fleet sailing from Ahlone Township, Mindaunt jetty upstream along the Chindwin River consists of 26 flat-deck iron-hull vessels and two naval boats, the local people said.

"All the local people have to flee from their homes as they are firing heavy weapons shells continuously along the river on both banks. Similarly, junta forces are deployed on land too. And then all the local people have to flee to save their lives," a local villager said.

In the monsoon season, the river is navigable and wide enough as the rainwater floods the river. And then the junta forces use the river waterway to transport arms, ammunition and other supplies by river boats escorted by some naval vessels. As of 6 July, this fleet

has been stationed near Min-O, Ein Taung village in Kani on 6 July.

"We have been displaced for nearly two months. So all the people are unemployed as the commodity prices are soaring. We badly need food supplies at the moment. We are currently taking refuge at the schools in other villages. We will lose these temporary shelters when the schools are reopened," another villager who is displaced again by the advancing junta's fleet said.

A total 46 vessels in this fleet arrived at Monywa, Ahlone, Mindaunt jetty on 4 July in the morning and it had 40 cargo vessels and six escort naval boats, the statement issued by Anyar Myay Pyit Taing Htaung organization says. Of these vessels, 26 vessels are sailing upstream along the Chindwin River. The junta forces are launching military offensive in Kani Township and they have stationed at Chaung Ma village, at the junction of Monywa-Kani-Yargyi highway for about two months. As a result, the villagers from south of Kani have had to flee from their homes as the junta's fleet is advancing upstream along the Chindwin River.



PALE TOWNSHIP ADMINISTRATION COLLECTS STARLINK USER DATA AFTER DEVICES BLOCKED IN SAGAING REGION

Pale Township's People's Administration Team (PAT) in Sagaing Region has begun collecting user data from Starlink satellite internet devices that have been blocked as "Region Restricted," in an effort to help restore their access, according to local officials.

The data collected by the Pale Township PAT will be submitted to the opposition National Unity Government's Ministry of Communications, Information and Technology (MOCIT), which will continue working toward restoring the blocked devices.

"If there are Starlink devices in the township that have been blocked, send their information to us. We will submit that information to the NUG's MOCIT, and the ministry will work on getting the devices back into use," Pale Township PAT in-charge Zaw Htet told Mizzima.

According to him, the current data collection is being carried out on the instructions of region- and district-level officials, and the information gathered will continue to be submitted to the NUG.

Zaw Htet said the NUG has not yet officially announced details on how blocked devices can be restored to use, adding that he believes there is a

possibility of direct negotiation with SpaceX.

SpaceX, which owns the Starlink service, can restrict usage in countries and "Restricted Locations" where it does not yet have official permission to operate. Since early July, Starlink devices used in some areas of Myanmar have been marked "Region Restricted" and rendered unusable, according to users.

Under a statement issued on 6 July by the Pale Township PAT, those whose devices have been blocked must submit 12 categories of information, including the owner's name, national registration card number, device type, and Dish Serial Number.

Zaw Htet said Starlink serves as a key communications infrastructure for residents, revolutionary forces, and local businesses in resistance-controlled territories where the junta has restricted and cut internet services.

"If Starlink can no longer be used, it could immediately affect communications, the flow of information, and online money-transfer businesses," he said.

The Pale Township PAT also said it has not, as of now, registered the Starlink devices in use in the township or collected any monthly tax on them.



BUILDER OF MANDALAY CONDO DESTROYED IN QUAKE JAILED FOR 5 YEARS

The builder of the Sky Villa condominium in Mandalay which collapsed killing more than 200 people during a devastating earthquake last year has been sentenced to five years in prison, local media and a person familiar with the case said.

The 7.7-magnitude quake killed at least 2,700 people in total in March last year, dealing a heavy blow to a country reeling from civil war since the military seized power in a 2021 coup.

Portions of the Sky Villa condo in Mandalay city - the deadliest single site - pancaked, killing 206 people, according to managers of the upmarket mid-rise.

The last of the bodies were recovered from the site in September. The death toll included several foreigners.

The condo was sold as "earthquake-proof" when units first went on sale in 2017.

Naing Tun Lin, owner of the construction firm that built Sky Villa, was sentenced to five years in prison with hard labour on June 23 for causing death by negligence, Eleven Media reported Monday, quoting a court information officer.

A person with knowledge of the case who requested anonymity due to security concerns confirmed the sentence.

Requests for comment from AFP to government spokespeople, the court in Mandalay region and Naing Tun Lin's company, NTL Construction, went unanswered as of Tuesday morning.

Naing Tun Lin was charged in February but initially granted bail, Eleven Media reported on Monday.

His bail was withdrawn and he was arrested the following month, the outlet said.

AFP



Rescue work underway.
Photo: AFP

LANDSLIDE KILLS EIGHT AT REFUGEE SCHOOL IN BANGLADESH

Hheavy rain in Bangladesh triggered a landslide at the world's largest refugee camp on 8 July, killing seven children and a teacher during a school class and doubling the death toll from rain-related disasters last week.

Rescuers clawed through liquid earth to drag out the bodies of the children, who drowned in the mud that swamped their school hut as they studied.

More than 1.2 million Rohingya refugees, many who fled Myanmar during a brutal military crackdown in 2017, live in crowded refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar.

Many refugees live in crowded, basic shelters on hillsides cleared of forests -- making the land unstable when monsoon rains pour down.

Bangladesh Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Mohammed Mizanur Rahman said seven children and their teacher had died.

"Unfortunately, four died at the scene, while four others died in hospital," Rahman told AFP.

Landslides also killed at least eight people as they slept in three different camps on Monday night.

Bangladesh's Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre said torrential rain is likely to continue for four days.

Refugee representative Sayed Ullah, president of the United Council of Rohingya, said that people needed new land in safer locations.

"We don't see proper coordination... over the accommodation of the Rohingya, and that is reflected in these accidents," he said.

The United Nations calls it "one of the world's largest and most protracted refugee situations".

The 2017 Myanmar crackdown, when Rohingya villages were burned and civilians killed, is the subject of a genocide case at the UN's top court in The Hague.

AFP



Rohingya children at a camp.
Photo: AFP

UN URGES MORE LAND FOR ROHINGYA CAMPS AMID DEADLY LANDSLIDES

The UN refugee agency called on Thursday for additional land to ease overcrowding in Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee camps after heavy rains triggered landslides that have killed at least 15 people.

More than 1.2 million Rohingya refugees, many of whom fled Myanmar during a brutal military crackdown in 2017, live in congested camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar.

The refugees live in basic shelters on hillsides cleared of trees -- making the land unstable during monsoon rains.

Since 6 July, at least 15 people have died in the camps and more than 4,000 refugees have been displaced after torrential rains triggered multiple landslides, officials said.

In a report on 9 July, the UNHCR highlighted severe congestion in the camps and renewed calls for space expansion.

"The incidents reinforce the importance of ongoing advocacy for camp space optimisation and additional

space, where feasible," the report said.

"Additional space would support safer relocation from high-risk areas."

Ivo Freijsen, a UNHCR representative in Bangladesh, said many of the dangers facing Rohingya refugees were "neither unforeseen nor unavoidable".

The lack of space, coupled with funding shortages, was limiting opportunities to decongest the most "overcrowded and hazardous locations and to plan safer infrastructure", he said in a statement.

Bangladesh authorities, who say they are already overstretched, have called for the dignified return of the Rohingya to their homeland.

The 2017 Myanmar crackdown, when Rohingya villages were burned and civilians were killed, is the subject of a genocide case at the UN's top court in The Hague.

AFP



Rakhine floods.
Photo: AFP

RAKHINE STATE FLOODS KILL THREE, AFFECT OVER 70 WARDS AS METEOROLOGIST WARNS OF WORST FLOODING IN 20 YEARS

Severe flooding and widespread road closures triggered by heavy monsoon rains have killed at least three people and affected more than 70 wards and villages across Rakhine State as of 9 July, according to local sources and the Humanitarian and Development Coordination Office (HDCO).

The flooding has hit townships across the state, including Mrauk-U, Kyauktaw, Maungdaw, and Sittwe in the north, and Ann, Thandwe, and Taungup in the south, local sources said.

A local source told Mizzima that roads in the Ann area are submerged and impassable. The Ann-Sittwe road is closed in three locations, and the route from Ann to Tat Taung Myaing is impassable at three points, cutting off vehicles traveling from southern townships — Thandwe, Taungup, Mae Ei, and Ramree — to northern townships including Kyauktaw and Mrauk-U.

Strong currents on the Lay Myo River have worsened flooding in low-lying areas in recent days, damaging bridges and roads and destroying farmland.

A Kyauktaw resident told Mizzima that while heavy rainfall and flooding occur most years, this year's

monsoon is particularly severe, with homes in low-lying areas completely submerged and residents evacuating to safer ground.

HDCO reported on 9 July that three people have died in the flooding, alongside road and bridge damage, landslides, and riverbank erosion.

Meteorologist Win Naing warned that Sittwe, Maungdaw, and Kyauktaw could see extremely heavy, continuous rainfall for three days. He had said on 8 July that Rakhine State could face its worst flooding in 20 years, with severe flash floods and river overflows beginning 10 July and potentially continuing for two weeks.

Separately, HDCO reported that a tornado on 5 July damaged approximately 240 homes and other structures in Kyaukphyu, Ramree, Taungup, Thandwe, and Gwa townships.

Rainfall has increased across Myanmar since early July, causing widespread flooding, landslides, riverbank erosion and strong winds nationwide.

Aung Phyoe.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR FILM WINS TOP PRIZE AT CZECH FESTIVAL

"Fruit Gathering" by Myanmar director Aung Phyoe won the Crystal Globe award at the Karlovy Vary film festival in the Czech Republic on 11 July, the organisers said.

Co-produced by Myanmar, the Czech Republic and France, the film tells the story of a love affair between two young women working at a textile factory in Yangon.

"In a captivating rhythm that oscillates between tenderness and harshness, the film explores how women's desires survive in a country where intimacy and love between women remain socially unacceptable," said the festival guide.

US actor Dustin Hoffman, the 88-year-old winner of two Oscars for "Kramer vs. Kramer" and "Rain Man", received a Crystal Globe for "outstanding artistic contribution to world cinema".

Juliette Binoche, an Oscar-winning French actress known for "The English Patient" and "Chocolat", received the same award at the 60th edition of the festival.

So did US cinematographer Robert Richardson, an Academy Award winner for "JFK", "The Aviator" and "Hugo".

The festival held in the spa city of Karlovy Vary on July 3-11 offered 472 screenings of 179 films, selling 132,553 tickets, the organisers said.

AFP





Jorn Andersen.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR NAMES NORWEGIAN ANDERSEN AS HEAD OF NATIONAL TEAM

Myanmar has appointed former North Korea coach Jorn Andersen to lead its men's national football team, the country's football federation said on 9 July.

The Norwegian, whose CV also includes a stint as coach of Hong Kong, signed the two-year contract on Wednesday, the federation said in a statement.

"I am delighted to be in Myanmar," Andersen, 63, said at a press conference on Wednesday.

"I will work to help develop Myanmar players and achieve as much success as possible with the national team."

The football federation said it appointed Andersen "in recognition of his extensive international coaching experience, strong understanding of Asian football and proven ability to build competitive teams".

Under his tenure, North Korea won eight of the 14 matches they played, qualifying for the 2019 Asian Cup.

He was the internationally isolated country's first foreign head coach.

Myanmar has been engulfed in civil war since the military seized power in a 2021 coup that ousted Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government and ended a decade-long democratic opening.

Andersen was also credited with leading Hong Kong's team in 2023 to their first Asian Cup finals in more than five decades.

The former international striker finished as top scorer in the Bundesliga when he was playing for Eintracht Frankfurt.

Andersen will take over from former Myanmar player Myo Hlaing Win, who had served as head coach since 2024.

Myanmar is listed 158th in the FIFA men's world ranking and was previously coached by Germans Antoine Hey and Michael Feichtenbeiner.

AFP



CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY AND THE CASE OF DUTCH COMPANIES STILL WORKING IN MYANMAR

Since the drama of the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, many foreign companies have accepted the message and shut up shop in the Golden Land. After all, not all business is good business.

That said, there are still a number of hangers-on. For companies and investors, the Myanmar case has become a test of whether human rights “due diligence” can prevent commercial activity from strengthening a military regime accused of mass atrocities.

Take a number of Dutch companies. Whether it is a cool beer or a spare part for a fighter jet, “the Netherlands” or similar identifier may be stamped on the container, raising the hackles of human rights groups seeking to strangle sources of funds for the Myanmar junta.

Dutch companies, investors and Netherlands-linked corporate structures have come under renewed scrutiny over allegations that they helped sustain Myanmar’s military junta after the February 2021 coup through tax payments, investment holdings and indirect business relationships connected to the

military’s revenue and weapons networks, and that they continue to do so.

The most prominent Dutch-linked cases involve beer giant Heineken, Dutch pension funds ABP and PFZW, their asset managers APG and PGGM, and Airbus SE, the European aerospace group legally headquartered in the Netherlands.

Rights groups say these cases show how ordinary business operations, tax payments, shareholdings and corporate partnerships can strengthen a military regime accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

BEER SALES HELP SUPPORT JUNTA

Heineken, one of the Netherlands’ best-known multinational companies, has faced strong criticism for continuing its Myanmar beer business after the coup.

Justice For Myanmar reported in April 2023 that Heineken, Carlsberg and ThaiBev subsidiaries paid 49.9 billion kyat in Specific Goods Tax alone between October and December 2021, equivalent to US\$27.6

million based on Central Bank of Myanmar exchange rates. The group said the companies also paid commercial tax and income tax during the same period, amounting to another 12.6 billion kyat, or about US\$7 million.

The NGO argued that such payments provided revenue to the junta at a time when it was using airstrikes, artillery and ground operations against civilians. The group called on Heineken and other beverage companies to end payments to the military-controlled state and follow the guidance of the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) and international human rights standards.

Finance Uncovered, which helped analyse leaked Myanmar Internal Revenue Department filings, reported that while many multinationals left Myanmar after the coup, Heineken from the Netherlands and Denmark's Carlsberg maintained a profitable presence in the country.

Dutch investigative outlet Follow the Money also reported that Heineken remained active in Myanmar after the 2021 coup and alleged that a large share of the price of every beer sold flowed to the military regime through taxes.

The allegations do not mean Heineken directly supplied weapons or military equipment. The criticism is that by continuing business and paying large taxes into a state captured by the junta, Heineken helped provide the regime with revenue it could use to fund repression and war.

PENSION FUNDS

Dutch pension funds have also been criticised for investments in multinational companies linked to Myanmar's military and its conglomerates.

In March 2021, soon after the coup, Justice For Myanmar reported that Dutch pension funds ABP and PFZW collectively held US\$2.3 billion in shares across 20 companies affiliated with the Myanmar military or linked to its business networks. The holdings were managed through asset managers APG and PGGM.

According to the NGO, the companies spanned sectors including real estate, oil and gas, telecoms and beverages, and had direct or indirect ties to Myanmar military businesses or junta-controlled state entities. The group called on Dutch institutional investors to divest from companies with direct or longstanding military ties and to demand that companies halt payments to military-controlled entities.

Responsible Investor also reported that ABP and PFZW were accused of having around US\$2 billion invested in companies with alleged links to Myanmar's military, through dedicated asset managers APG and PGGM.

These investments are significant because Myanmar's military relies not only on direct arms purchases but also on a wider commercial ecosystem involving military-owned conglomerates, state enterprises and foreign partners. Rights groups argue that even indirect investment exposure can help legitimise or financially sustain companies that do business with the junta.

AIRBUS AND THE DUTCH CONNECTION

Airbus SE is a European aerospace company legally headquartered in the Netherlands, although it is closely associated with France, Germany and Spain. It has also faced pressure over its former investment and business links with China's Aviation Industry Corporation of China, known as AVIC.

Myanmar civil society groups and international campaigners say AVIC and its subsidiaries have supplied aircraft, spare parts and maintenance support to Myanmar's military. The aircraft identified by campaigners include K-8 trainer-light attack aircraft and Y-12 multipurpose aircraft, which rights groups say have been used in airstrikes on civilian areas.

In February 2025, a coalition of 361 local and international organisations sent an open letter to the Dutch government, noting that Airbus SE is domiciled in the Netherlands and calling for scrutiny of Airbus' business relationship with AVIC. The groups urged the

Netherlands to ensure Airbus used its leverage to stop AVIC's business with the Myanmar military, or divest if transfers of aircraft, equipment and support continued.

The campaign later welcomed Airbus' divestment from AviChina, an AVIC subsidiary. Justice For Myanmar reported that Airbus completed the sale of its shares in AviChina on 1 April 2025, after a broad civil society campaign. The investment was valued at US\$140 million as of 30 June 2024, according to the group.

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre reported that Airbus said it had no equity investments in AVIC and declined further comment because of a pending OECD complaint in the Netherlands concerning its business relationship with AVIC.

The Airbus case is different from Heineken's tax payments or Dutch pension investments. The allegation is not that Airbus directly supplied aircraft to the junta, but that its investment and business relationship with AVIC created leverage and responsibility because AVIC-linked companies supplied aircraft and related support to Myanmar's military.

OTHER CASES

The Netherlands has also been used as a forum for corporate accountability complaints. In 2024, Inclusive Development International, ALTSEAN-Burma and Blood Money Campaign Myanmar filed an OECD complaint against S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC and S&P DJI Netherlands B.V. The complaint alleged breaches of the OECD Guidelines because of index relationships involving companies linked to the Myanmar military.

This reflects a wider strategy by Myanmar civil society groups: using OECD complaints, investor pressure, sanctions advocacy and public campaigns to push European companies and financial institutions to cut business ties that may benefit the junta.

DIRECT OR INDIRECT SUPPORT

The Dutch-linked cases show several forms of alleged corporate support.

In Heineken's case, the core issue is tax revenue. Rights groups say continued operations generated funds for a junta-controlled state. In the pension fund

cases, the issue is indirect investment exposure to companies tied to the military economy. In the Airbus case, the issue is corporate leverage and business relationships with AVIC, a supplier connected to aircraft used by the Myanmar military.

The companies and investors involved have not all accepted the accusations. Some argue they comply with applicable laws, that tax payments are legally required, or that business relationships are indirect. Rights groups counter that after the coup, Myanmar became a high-risk conflict environment in which ordinary business decisions could contribute to military financing, surveillance, arms procurement or international crimes.

PRESSURE TO ACT

The Netherlands has publicly joined other Western governments in condemning Myanmar's military regime. In a joint statement marking four years since the coup, the EU, the Netherlands' partners and other governments condemned the military's escalating violence and rights violations. Yet, over a year on, it is unclear what progress has been made.

Myanmar campaigners argue that public condemnation is not enough. They say the Dutch government must ensure that Dutch companies, pension funds and Netherlands-domiciled corporations do not directly or indirectly help the junta access money, aircraft, technology or legitimacy.

The controversy has become part of a broader international debate over corporate responsibility in Myanmar. For rights groups, the lesson is clear - after the 2021 coup, businesses can no longer treat Myanmar as a normal market. For companies and investors, the Myanmar case has become a test of whether human rights due diligence can prevent commercial activity from strengthening a military regime accused of mass atrocities.

Sources: Mizzima, Justice for Myanmar, Finance Uncovered, Inclusive Development International, Business and Human Rights Centre, Blood Money Campaign, DVB

An Update to Mizzima Readers

Mizzima continues independent journalism for Myanmar despite repression, censorship, security risks and financial pressure.



1. FUNDING REALITY

Donor funding is now almost none, although we continue to seek support.

2. HOW MIZZIMA IS SUSTAINING ITSELF



YouTube and digital monetization



Training and Mizzima Media Training Institute



AI and Mizzima EAE for research, content regeneration and production



Content repackaging across TV, Facebook, YouTube and digital platforms



Mizzima Weekly, Mizzima English and policy products



HH Channel and diaspora community services



Production services, events, partnerships and sponsorships



Agriculture, tea and coffee, restaurants, shops and marketplace initiatives



Thank you for standing with Mizzima.

Mizzima

Truth. Voice. Future.

- YouTube and digital monetization
- Training and Mizzima Media Training Institute
- AI Technology through Mizzima EAE for research, content regeneration and production
- Repackaging content across TV, Facebook, YouTube and digital platforms
- Mizzima Weekly, Mizzima English and policy products
- Home Away From Home - HH Channel and diaspora community services
- Production services, events, partnerships and sponsorships
- Non-media business initiatives.

AI does not replace our journalists. It helps us work faster and smarter, while human editors remain responsible for accuracy, verification, ethics and editorial judgment.

AN UPDATE TO MIZZIMA READERS AND FRIENDS

Since the 2021 coup, Mizzima has continued independent journalism under very difficult conditions — revoked licenses, office raids, frozen bank accounts, arrests, surveillance, censorship, security risks and financial pressure.

But we continue because Myanmar still needs independent, reliable and verified information.

Today, one difficult reality is that donor funding is now almost none, although we continue to seek support wherever possible.

At the same time, Mizzima is working hard to sustain itself through self-generated revenue and new initiatives, including:

Mizzima is not only trying to survive. We are adapting, modernizing and building for the future — through media, technology, community services and practical business initiatives that can support our public-interest journalism.

Thank you to our readers, viewers, partners, friends and supporters for standing with Mizzima.

Truth. Voice. Future.

#Mizzima #Myanmar #IndependentMedia
#PressFreedom #MizzimaEAE #MediaResilience
#MediaSustainability

Photo: US Embassy

U.S. MISSION BURMA MARKS AMERICA'S 250TH ANNIVERSARY WITH INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION IN MANDALAY

The U.S. Mission in Burma celebrated the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America with an Independence Day event in Mandalay, marking the first official U.S. Independence Day celebration in the city since 2015, according to a press release July 8.

The event celebrated America's milestone anniversary while honoring the resilience and determination of the people of Mandalay following the devastating 2025 earthquake, and reaffirming the United States' enduring presence in Upper Burma and long-standing commitment to its people.

Chargé d'Affaires ad interim (CDA a.i.) Douglas Sonnek welcomed guests from across Upper Burma, including representatives from civil society, business, education, and other partner communities. In his remarks, CDA Sonnek highlighted the reopening of the Jefferson Center Mandalay as a symbol of the United States' enduring partnership with the people of Upper Burma.

"The Jefferson Center is more than just a building," said CDA a.i. Sonnek. "It is a living catalyst for learning, creativity, and connection. It is a place where young people gather to develop their talents and shape their own future."

The Center continues to expand access to English-language instruction, digital education,

entrepreneurship, and cultural exchange, creating new opportunities, strengthening communities, and deepening connections between the American and Burmese people.

"One lesson from America's first 250 years is that renewal is possible," said CDA a.i. Sonnek. "Communities can grow stronger. Economies can expand. Opportunities can multiply. New generations build on the achievements of those who came before them."

The event also showcased American innovation and the strength of U.S.- Burma commercial partnerships, featuring iconic American companies including Caterpillar, Ford, and Harley-Davidson – a reflection of the transparent, mutually beneficial commercial partnerships the United States brings to the region.

CDA Sonnek recognized the contributions of U.S. humanitarian partners working alongside local organizations throughout Upper Burma following the 2025 earthquake. He reaffirmed that the United States will continue working alongside the people of Burma as a trusted, long-term partner, expanding opportunity through education, humanitarian assistance, commercial engagement, and lasting people-to-people ties.



Bhutanese woman carrying her child.
Photo: AFP

BHUTAN BATTLES 'EXISTENTIAL' POPULATION CRISIS WITH BIRTH DRIVE

Bhutan is offering families cash incentives to have more children as the tiny Himalayan kingdom grapples with a nosediving birthrate and a growing exodus of young people seeking opportunities abroad.

Annual births have dropped by more than a quarter over the past decade, compounding the country's loss of youngsters to migration.

Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay has repeatedly rung the alarm over the population slump, calling it an "existential" crisis, according to the state's Bhutan Broadcasting Service.

"The evidence is unambiguous -- Bhutan's fertility has declined to near or below replacement level," Tobgay wrote in the introduction to the government's "Third Child Plus" programme, launched in June.

The scheme provides monthly payments of \$105 for each third or subsequent child until they turn three.

Khandu Wangmo, a 35-year-old civil servant, welcomed the incentive but questioned whether cash payments alone would persuade families to have more children.

"It is a good initiative because it encourages families to have three or more children," she said.

"However, its impact may be limited if the cost of raising children, housing, and childcare remains high."

'Difficult decision'

For the landlocked kingdom of fewer than 800,000 people, wedged between India and China, the issue carries particular weight.

Births of third or more children, the focus of the new scheme, have fallen 27 percent since 2020, according to the report.

Bhutan's fertility rate has fallen to about 1.8 children per woman, below the replacement level, while the share of people aged 65 and over is projected to rise from around six percent to 17 percent by 2050, according to UN estimates.

"These are not abstract statistics," Tobgay said. "They represent real and compounding pressures on Bhutan's workforce, fiscal sustainability, and the social fabric of communities across the country."

The government fears that falling births, combined with sustained outward migration, will leave too few working-age people to support the economy and an ageing population.

More than 71,000 Bhutanese were abroad, as of May 2026, with 39,000 -- about 55 percent of the overseas population -- in Australia, according to the report.

"While migration brings remittance benefits, its concentration among prime working and reproductive ages further constrains labour force participation, domestic fertility, and long-term population momentum," the programme briefing note warned.

Experts say the reasons behind smaller families are complex, ranging from rising living and childcare costs to changing priorities.

Preeti Nirola, 34, who has one child, said she would like another but finances remain a major obstacle.

"I would like to have one more child if my financial situation allows," she said.

"However, the high cost of childcare and household expenses makes it a difficult decision."

The UN Population Fund, which supported the programme, advocates to "expand choices for everyone" through affordable childcare and supportive social policies, rather than simply raising birth numbers.

'Access to education'

Bhutan's demographic worries mirror trends across much of Asia.

Bhutan once promoted family planning through its "Small Family, Happy Family" campaign launched in 1974, helping drive fertility down over several decades.

The 1990s saw an exodus of more than 100,000 ethnic Nepali-speakers -- around one sixth of Bhutan's population at the time -- as the kingdom tightened immigration policies.

Now, policymakers are seeking to reverse that trend.

Tobgay, addressing parliament in June, cited overseas migration as Bhutan's "most pressing challenge", saying that strengthening the economy, creating quality jobs and improving living conditions were essential to slowing the exodus.

Anthropologist Shawn Rowlands, who teaches in Thimphu, said Bhutan's demographic transition had been unusually swift.

"Given the fact that it has gone from a high of about 6.6 in the 1990s, to about 1.8 today, this is quite a remarkable demographic shift," he said.

"It has been exacerbated by the large-scale trend of young Bhutanese emigrating overseas for work."

Yet Rowlands questioned whether a declining population should automatically be viewed as a crisis -- in a country known for prioritising "Gross National Happiness" over economic growth, and for its green credentials, as a rare carbon-negative nation.

"Higher access to education and job opportunities lead to fewer women having children," she said.

"I do not see that as a bad thing at all."

AFP



BURDEN OF RULE

Mon Mon Myat, a journalist, filmmaker, and peace scholar, places Myanmar's political struggle inside a long argument over power, moral discipline, and the limits of force. Her account moves from the nineteenth-century thinker U Hpo Hlaing to Aung San Suu Kyi, but the governing problem remains the same: how a country trained by monarchy, colonialism, military rule, and social hierarchy might change without reproducing domination in another form.

U Hpo Hlaing, in Mon Mon Myat's reading, was "a kind of very early political theorist in Myanmar." Working during the reigns of Mindon and Thibaw, he tried to give Burmese rulers a framework for accountable government before the monarchy collapsed under British conquest. His writing drew heavily on Buddhist concepts, but Mon Mon Myat does not treat him as a narrow religious thinker. She sees him as someone trying to absorb Western parliamentary ideas and make them legible inside Burmese moral language. "He studied that," she says, "and then he tried to make it [work within our] own Burmese parliament democracy system."

That effort matters to Mon Mon Myat because it challenges the assumption that democracy entered Myanmar only as a Western import. U Hpo Hlaing's work points instead to a local tradition of thinking about limits on authority, the conduct of rulers, and the moral basis of political order. His "Burma-native democracy,"

as she frames it, was not a finished institutional design but a set of principles: rulers should be restrained by ethical responsibility, political authority should answer to something beyond personal power, and governance should be grounded in moral conduct.

Mon Mon Myat draws a direct line from that earlier tradition to Aung San Suu Kyi, while also marking the difference between them. U Hpo Hlaing addressed rulers; Aung San Suu Kyi addressed both rulers and the ruled. For Mon Mon Myat, this distinction is central. Political change comes not only from constitutional design or elite reform, but also requires a transformation in public spirit. "She realized that the change must come from within," Mon Mon Myat says, "not only the change of the leadership, also the change of the peoples' spirit."

That belief shaped Mon Mon Myat's own political awakening. As a young woman, she first encountered Aung San Suu Kyi through radio broadcasts and reports while living across the lake from University Avenue. The figure was distant, almost unreachable, but intensely present. After Aung San Suu Kyi's release from her first period of house arrest, Mon Mon Myat joined the crowds who gathered at the gate to hear her speak. Those gatherings were not safe rituals. People could be watched, followed, or arrested. Mon Mon Myat recalls a friend imprisoned for two years for simply moving barbed wire near the gate.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/6/8/episode-552-burden-of-rule>



MYANMAR JUNTA HAS DESTROYED OR REMOVED NINE GENERAL AUNG SAN STATUES SINCE 2024

The Myanmar junta has destroyed or removed nine bronze statues of General Aung San, recognized as Myanmar's architect of independence, over a two-year span from 2024 to 2026, according to a Mizzima tally.

Five of the nine statues were destroyed or removed after the junta formed a nominally civilian administrative body and junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing assumed the title of "president".

In the most recent incidents, statues in Thumangalar Park near Padaytha Market in South Okkalapa Township and in Mya Kan Thar Park in Thaketa Township, both in Yangon Region, were removed on 1 July. A statue in Kyunpyaw Township, Ayeyarwady Region, was destroyed or removed on 2 July, following similar incidents in Ye-U's Aung Mingalar Ward, Sagaing Region, on 27 June, and on Kan Road in Taungoo, Bago Region, on 9 June.

The junta first destroyed a General Aung San statue in Thazi, Mandalay Region, in October 2024. It went on to destroy statues in Naypyidaw on 28 July, in Bago on 7 August, and in Patheingyi's Kan Thon Sint Union Ground, Ayeyarwady Region, on 1 November.

General Aung San led Myanmar's independence movement and is widely recognized as the founder of modern Myanmar. His statues have been erected in towns across the country as national memorials. He was assassinated on 19 July, 1947 at The Secretariat in what was Rangoon.

Successive past military dictatorships preserved General Aung San's statues, but the current junta may be seeking to erase his significance and diminish the political influence of his daughter, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, a CDM (Civil Disobedience Movement) captain told Mizzima.

"There's a tradition of paying respect to General Aung San's statue when cadets enter and graduate from the academy. This practice dates back to Than Shwe's era at the military academy. Now, under Min Aung Hlaing, we're seeing an effort to erase General Aung San's significance and diminish his daughter's role as well," he said.

The junta has not officially explained its reasons for destroying or removing the statues to date.

The first General Aung San statue was erected on 13 February 1955 in Bogyoke Aung San Park on Natmauk Road in Yangon, and that statue remains standing today.

A statue in Kandawgyi Park in Loikaw, Karenni (Kayah) State, along with some others elsewhere in the country, is also known to remain standing.

The Myanmar Lawyers' Council (BLC) has said General Aung San's statues are national memorials and public cultural heritage that should be preserved, and that their deliberate destruction or removal is an act that could be subject to legal action.



AS WORLD REJECTS THE MYANMAR PASSPORT, BELARUS OPENS ITS DOOR

Last week, Myanmar's online conversation focused on an unlikely diplomatic milestone: a visa-free travel deal with Belarus, effective 8 July. The reaction wasn't celebration — it was irony, sharply felt.

The agreement, allowing 30-day visa-free stays for both countries' citizens, follows Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's November 2025 visit to Naypyidaw and grows out of the junta's deepening ties with fellow sanctioned states.

It lands as Myanmar's passport ranks around 90th globally, with visa-free or on-arrival access to roughly 43 destinations — and shrinking, as the US has effectively barred Myanmar students and the UK moves to end study visas for Myanmar nationals.

Across Facebook, users are juxtaposing passport-ranking screenshots against the Belarus announcement, framing it as a punchline rather than

progress. Telegram groups popular with students and job-seekers are venting frustration over near-impossible visa routes to the West even as the junta trumpets new "friendships."

TikTok creators are mining the story for satire, contrasting Min Aung Hlaing's inauguration pledge to "develop" the country with its deepening global isolation.

The deal was formally ratified by Belarus's parliament earlier this year and took effect last week, according to state media. It comes against the backdrop of a passport system that, since the 2021 coup, has functioned less as a travel document and more as an exit-control tool — most young Myanmar citizens seeking to leave still have no valid passport at all.

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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