

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

Rebuffing the Junta
Europe must seriously engage
with the Myanmar resistance



Myanmar junta leader on visit to Laos

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

MYANMAR IDPS DESPERATE FOR AID

The Philippines Special Envoy on Myanmar's call to launch a humanitarian aid drive in the crisis-ridden country later in the year should be welcomed – assuming a meaningful programme can be launched.

Theresa Lazaro made the call last week while at an "informal" ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in Bangkok.

Myanmar's humanitarian crisis is no longer defined solely by conflict. It is increasingly measured by hunger. As fighting continues across large parts of the country, millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) face an uncertain future in makeshift camps, forests, monasteries, schools and villages where access to food has become an everyday struggle. Feeding these vulnerable communities has become one of the greatest humanitarian challenges in Myanmar.

The scale of displacement has stretched humanitarian resources to breaking point. Entire communities have been forced to flee multiple times as military offensives, airstrikes and artillery attacks continue to uproot civilians. Each new wave of displacement places additional pressure on already limited food supplies, while many families have lost access to farmland, livestock and local markets that once sustained them.

Delivering food aid is made even more difficult by the nature of Myanmar's conflict. Many displaced populations are located in contested or resistance-held territories where access is restricted by insecurity, damaged infrastructure and military checkpoints. Aid convoys often face lengthy delays, while humanitarian organisations must navigate a complex web of administrative restrictions and security risks. In some areas, relief workers themselves have become targets, making regular food deliveries unpredictable or impossible.

The destruction of transport routes has compounded the problem. Roads and bridges have been damaged by conflict or become too dangerous to use, particularly during the monsoon season when heavy rains isolate entire communities. Rising transport costs, inflation and the depreciation of Myanmar's currency have further increased the price of basic food items, reducing the purchasing power of both aid agencies and displaced families.

International donors continue to provide vital assistance, but funding has struggled to keep pace with growing humanitarian needs. Global crises elsewhere have diverted attention and resources, while Myanmar's protracted conflict has slipped from the headlines despite the worsening conditions on the ground. Humanitarian agencies repeatedly warn that funding shortfalls are forcing difficult decisions about who receives assistance and who must wait.

Local civil society organisations, ethnic service providers and community volunteer networks have filled many of the gaps left by limited international access. Operating with remarkable courage and local knowledge, these groups often reach communities that larger organisations cannot. Yet they too face shortages of funding, supplies and safe operating space.

Ensuring that Myanmar's displaced population has enough to eat is not simply a logistical exercise; it is a test of international commitment to protecting civilians caught in one of the world's most neglected humanitarian crises. Without greater humanitarian access, sustained international funding and stronger protection for relief operations, millions of displaced people will continue to face the daily threat of hunger alongside the violence that forced them from their homes.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of Myanmar junta leader arriving in Laos by AFP



REBUFFING THE JUNTA: EUROPE MUST SERIOUSLY ENGAGE WITH THE MYANMAR RESISTANCE

MIZZIMA COMMENTARY

Putting a face on the Myanmar resistance is a tough call. There are a myriad names - from exiled Myanmar politicians to People's Defence Force fighters to ethnic armed organization commanders.

Yet there is no recognizable Che Guevara, Mao Zedong or Ahmad Shah Massoud. Aung San Suu Kyi is a symbol of freedom, for sure, but she remains unseen, and contrary to the Myanmar resistance's call for war, analysts assume she still takes Mahatma Gandhi's pacifist line.

This prompts the question: When European diplomats and government leaders seek to engage with the Myanmar resistance, who should they deal with?

This dilemma is becoming more and more obvious as Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing's battle for legitimacy intensifies, and amidst the moves of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to edge cautiously towards a deal. The Myanmar civil war is Asia's deadliest conflict, sparked by Min Aung Hlaing's military coup in 2021 - and any amount of posturing cannot deflect from the fact that he is responsible for the bloodshed.

THE GAMES THE LEADER PLAYS

While the former commander-in-chief of the Myanmar armed forces has been called a lot of names - one thing is for certain, he is shrewd. Since engineering his way into the role of "president" following a "sham election" held six months ago, Min Aung Hlaing has changed his clothes from green to white and is seeking regional and international legitimacy. His recent high-profile visits to India and China have helped cement his position. And last weekend, ASEAN's acceptance of his foreign minister, Tim Maung Swe, at an "informal" foreign ministers meeting in Bangkok appeared to provide one further step by the junta towards returning to the fold.

But not so fast.

ASEAN is torn between a more pragmatic approach to the Myanmar junta and keeping the doors locked. As Ma Theresa Lazaro, Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar, explained, in the talks with the Myanmar foreign minister they were able to have "candid and constructive discussion on implementing the 5-Point Consensus and how ASEAN may assist Myanmar in normalizing its relations with ASEAN."

This meeting is significant as this is the first time that ASEAN Foreign Ministers had an in-person engagement with the Myanmar counterpart since 2021, as mandated by the Leaders during the 48th ASEAN Summit in Cebu, reports the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs. "The Special Envoy reiterated that Myanmar remains an integral part of ASEAN."

On 13 July, the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar engaged with Myanmar ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), as well as representatives of the junta-aligned National Solidarity and Peacemaking Negotiation Committee (NSPNC) to discuss the way forward on the inclusive national political dialogue between and among parties in Myanmar. All sides expressed openness to the dialogue process and emphasized the importance of constructive dialogue and ensuring careful preparation of all parties involved, reports the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs.

Lazaro went on to hold online talks with the National Unity Government (NUG). An official from an NUG ministry told Mizzima: "We met online very briefly. She did not raise anything significant. The NUG conveyed its stance in accordance with our official statements."

The opposition Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) has been at pains to point out that this recent meeting with ASEAN representatives does not signal the commencement of formal political dialogue or negotiations with the military junta.

The statement clarified that SCEF members held a private discussion solely at the invitation of the ASEAN Special Envoy, the Philippine Foreign Minister, and the Thai Foreign Minister, and did not meet jointly with junta representatives.

During the meeting, the SCEF emphasized to ASEAN representatives that the ground realities in Myanmar have fundamentally shifted.

"Governance in Myanmar is no longer centralized in Naypyidaw. In vast areas of the country, local revolutionary authorities have assumed executive, judicial, and public security responsibilities on a state and unit-by-unit basis," the SCEF stated.

Consequently, the SCEF warned ASEAN that any peace process must recognize and engage these legitimate ground authorities, cautioning that premature attempts to normalize relations will only worsen the current crisis.

Don't ignore the representatives of the Spring Revolution.

THE DILEMMA

So how should the European states handle the Myanmar crisis, given a moment of strategic reckoning on Myanmar appears to be upon us, if international analysts are to be believed?

Europe, after all, is part of the Western world that has stood up for the Myanmar people.

The challenge is two-pronged. Firstly, diplomacy. There appears to be a slow but growing acceptance by ASEAN that the blood-soaked Myanmar leader has to be dealt with, in line with his hefty allies China, India,

and Russia, with the hope that the civil war can be damped down and a more humanitarian approach can be taken. ASEAN is tired of having to deal with this “black sheep” in the family, and is seeking to get the junta to adhere to their 5-Point Consensus – an agreement barely on life-support. Myanmar leader Min Aung Hlaing is seeking legitimacy for his illegal rule and hopes the results of his election provides a fig-leaf of acceptance, backed by powerful neighbours China and India.

Secondly, warfare. Analysts recognize that things are not going well for the Spring Revolution resistance. “Myanmar’s armed forces – known as the Tatmadaw – are on a steady roll of countrywide advances that have thrown the opposition onto the defensive,” according to security analyst Anthony Davis, writing for Asia Times. “This has nothing to do with the strategic acuity of new Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief General Ye Win Oo, a soldier whose elevation stems from his unblinking loyalty to Min Aung Hlaing and, after years as national intelligence chief, a grasp of political undercurrents in the army and across society more broadly.

“It has everything to do with a methodically unfolding strategy that began in the dry season of early 2025, was sustained through the mid-year rains and continues today,” Davis writes. “The long-term campaign, which Ye Win Oo is now overseeing rather than planning, is aimed in the medium term at reasserting control over key economic centers and border trade hubs lost in the serial disasters of late 2023 and mid-2024 to the so-called ‘Operation 10.27.’”

Other analysts recognize that given this war of attrition is slowly turning the tables on the Myanmar opposition, the resistance have to get their act together quickly on the battlefield and on the diplomatic front.

PUTTING A FACE ON THE REVOLUTION

Myanmar resistance supporters such as the European nations need to do more to bolster the battle against the junta – beyond sanctions and public statements. But they also need to be clear about who they should be meeting with. The fact that there are a myriad resistance groups – from PDFs to EROs – is both a weakness and a strength. Right now, however, the EU needs to recognize the NUG and the newly-formed SCEF, which is a unified political and military alliance formed by Myanmar’s main anti-junta opposition forces.

Whilst there is no “face” in terms of a leader who stands out, many of the players under the NUG and SCEF have “in-the-trenches diplomatic experience” of arguing for support of Myanmar’s Spring Revolution since the drama of the military coup in 2021.

With no one individual standing out, they can be

considered the “face of the resistance”. They need to be listened to.

The NUG is viewed as the Bamar-dominated opposition, essentially remnants of Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD), which was ousted from elected power in the military’s 2021 coup, with a track record of diplomatic engagement.

The SCEF, set up in March 2026, comprises four key ethnic armed forces – Karen, Karenni, Kachin and Chin, the so-called “K3-C” – along with large numbers of PDFs affiliated with the opposition NUG. In its initial setup, the new grouping stands essentially as a political umbrella designed to reassure the international community that opposition forces can rise above the problems of ethnic splits and organizational dysfunction.

What is clear is the European nations need to be wary of leaning too much on ASEAN’s peace plan initiative, under the 5-Point Consensus, which they have tended to do over the last five years – an easy default position.

ASEAN’s position is not clear. The forum’s officials described last weekend’s informal foreign ministers meeting as an opportunity for Myanmar to brief its neighbours on conditions inside the country. But Richard Horsey, senior Asia adviser at Crisis Group told Reuters that the risk was that the meeting was a step in normalising political engagement before any change had been achieved.

“It would be a mistake for ASEAN to accept Myanmar back into the fold without getting anything meaningful in return,” he said.

Reuters said the meeting marked a test of whether ASEAN will hold the line on its own peace framework or allow Myanmar’s military-backed leaders to regain regional standing without meaningful steps toward ending the conflict, such as releasing political prisoners including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi or restoring full democracy.

Thailand has reportedly urged Myanmar’s military leadership to grant the ASEAN special envoy access to Aung San Suu Kyi during a planned upcoming humanitarian mission, as part of a renewed diplomatic push to resolve the country’s prolonged crisis.

DEALING WITH THE RESISTANCE PLAYERS

Given these circumstances, the European nations need to recognize that they need to deal with the main resistance players under the NUG and SCEF umbrella who claim to speak for battle-hardened commanders of various ethnicity on the ground, as well as the seasoned political players in exile.

Time is of the essence. According to a Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS) report dated 10 July, the Myanmar military junta is gradually regaining the initiative through Chinese and Russian backing. Therefore, the Europe will need to reconsider how it can remain relevant in dealing with the Myanmar crisis without abandoning its principles.

Since the 2021 coup, the European nations have pursued a policy of sanctions, diplomatic isolation of the junta, humanitarian assistance, and political support for democratic forces.

The Europe actively withholds direct government aid while extending restrictive measures - renewed until April 2027 - targeting key military leaders, junta-linked conglomerates, and human rights abusers.

According to the CEIAS report, however, the Europe stopped short of recognizing the NUG or providing more substantial support to resistance forces during the period when the junta appeared vulnerable after the launch of Operation 1027 in 2023.

Europe faces a difficult reality. Myanmar's military has historically demonstrated a remarkable ability to survive sanctions, international condemnation, and diplomatic isolation. If key regional actors such as Thailand, India, and eventually ASEAN move toward a policy of engagement with Naypyidaw, Europe risks becoming increasingly disconnected from developments on the ground if it relies solely on punitive measures.

PURSUING A NUANCED STRATEGY

Europe should pursue a more nuanced strategy, according to the CEIAS report.

First, it should continue targeted sanctions against military leaders and military-controlled enterprises while ensuring that humanitarian assistance reaches vulnerable communities.

Second, it should maintain a more robust engagement with democratic actors, including the NUG, the SCEF, ethnic organizations, and civil society groups, to

preserve political alternatives to military rule. Arguably, these organizations represent the voice of the people, and they should be listened to.

Third, the EU should strengthen cooperation with ASEAN members that remain concerned about human rights abuses, particularly Timor-Leste. As the report notes, Timor-Leste has emerged as one of the strongest regional voices demanding accountability for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. Supporting these efforts would allow the Europe to promote accountability through regional partnerships rather than appearing to impose external solutions. Timor Leste would be a useful dialogue partner within ASEAN.

Finally, European nations should prepare for a prolonged crisis rather than a rapid political transition. Myanmar's conflict is rooted in decades of civil war, ethnic tensions, and military domination. Peace is not around the corner.

A sustainable solution will require dialogue among all major stakeholders rather than simple recognition of whichever side currently holds the advantage. This includes talking to representatives of the Spring Revolution resistance fighting for the future of Myanmar - what they hope will be a federal democratic union.

The challenge for Europe is therefore not choosing between values and pragmatism. It is finding a way to defend democratic principles, support accountability, and maintain influence in Myanmar at a time when regional powers are increasingly shaping the country's future.

Given all these factors, dealing directly with the NUG and SCEF representatives would be a wise strategy.

Sources: Mizzima, Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs, Reuters, Asia Times, CEIAS



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing visits Laos, a member of ASEAN. Photo: AFP

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



Photo: AFP

WHAT STEPS HAVE THE MYANMAR JUNTA BEEN MAKING TO GAIN LEGITIMACY?

While ASEAN continues searching for ways to address Myanmar's political crisis, the military junta has been pursuing a parallel objective: gaining regional legitimacy following its election which opposition groups and many international observers have dismissed as neither free nor credible.

Since assuming the presidency earlier this year, Min Aung Hlaing has intensified his diplomatic outreach, making a series of high-profile visits to neighbouring countries. The trips reflect the junta's effort to demonstrate that it remains an accepted government despite widespread international isolation following the 2021 military coup.

Min Aung Hlaing's first overseas visit as president was to India. The visit served both political and strategic purposes. For the junta, it represented engagement with a major regional power and signalled that its leadership continues to receive official recognition. For New Delhi, Myanmar remains strategically important as India's gateway to Southeast Asia through projects such as the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. India is also concerned about cross-border insurgencies operating along the shared frontier and seeks to limit China's growing influence in Myanmar. These overlapping interests have encouraged both sides to maintain working relations despite Myanmar's ongoing conflict.

Just twelve days later, in mid-June, Min Aung Hlaing travelled to China, the junta's

most influential international partner. During the visit, he met President Xi Jinping, and the two sides signed 18 memoranda of understanding covering security cooperation, trade, health, science and technology, culture, media, education, human resource development, and other sectors. The visit reinforced Beijing's role as the junta's principal diplomatic and economic backer. It also renewed domestic speculation over the possible revival of the suspended Myitsone Dam project after Kachin State Chief Minister Hkyet Hting Nan publicly advocated for its resumption.

Earlier this month, the junta leader made his first official visit to an ASEAN member state, Laos. The two governments signed agreements covering a strategic partnership, a feasibility study on Mekong hydropower development, labour cooperation, aviation, border trade, information sharing on transnational crime, and the establishment of Naypyidaw and Vientiane as sister cities.

The diplomatic campaign is expected to continue. Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow recently confirmed to AFP that Min Aung Hlaing will visit Bangkok on 6-7 August under Thailand's "dual-track approach" to Myanmar. The planned visit has already attracted criticism from analysts and rights advocates, who argue that high-level engagement risks normalising a military government that has yet to implement ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus or make meaningful progress toward resolving Myanmar's political crisis.

Taken together, these visits suggest that the junta's diplomatic strategy extends beyond strengthening bilateral ties. They are also part of a broader effort to project political legitimacy, reduce international isolation, and build regional acceptance before moving ahead with its controversial election plans.



Photo: AFP

ASEAN's informal meeting and the message to Myanmar

For the first time since Myanmar's 2021 military coup, ASEAN foreign ministers held an in-person meeting with the junta's foreign minister, Tin Maung Swe, in Bangkok on 12 July. The informal meeting, hosted by Thai Foreign Minister, Sihasak Phuangketkeow, and co-chaired by Philippine Foreign Minister Ma. Theresa P. Lazaro in her capacity as ASEAN Chair and Special Envoy on Myanmar, was attended by all ASEAN foreign ministers except those from Malaysia and Cambodia.

The meeting marked the junta's first direct engagement with ASEAN's top diplomats in more than five years, raising questions over whether the regional bloc is shifting toward greater engagement with the military regime despite its continued failure to implement ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus (5PC).

Following the meeting, Lazaro reaffirmed that the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) remains ASEAN's primary framework for addressing Myanmar's political crisis. She also stressed the importance of expanding humanitarian assistance through ASEAN mechanisms and maintaining engagement to support efforts toward peace in Myanmar.

From the discussions and public statements made after the meeting, analysts identify three practical objectives behind the renewed engagement: facilitating humanitarian assistance to all communities regardless of political affiliation, encouraging a reduction in violence, and seeking access to detained former State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

One of the meeting's most notable moments came when the junta's foreign minister claimed that authorities were caring for Aung San Suu Kyi "like a relative, like an elder sister." Thailand's foreign minister welcomed the remarks and requested that ASEAN's

Special Envoy be allowed to meet her, a proposal that could become an important confidence-building measure if accepted.

The informal talks also reflected a broader shift within ASEAN. Earlier this year, Thailand promoted a policy of "calibrated engagement" with Myanmar, arguing that direct communication with the junta is necessary to advance humanitarian access and political dialogue. However, several ASEAN members remain cautious, noting that the junta has yet to honour any of its commitments under the Five-Point Consensus.

The Bangkok meeting has also drawn sharp criticism from rights advocates. The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) accused the Philippine chairmanship of pursuing a "malicious and misleading" approach that risks undermining ASEAN's own principles. Lazaro's office rejected the accusation, arguing that the meeting was fully consistent with the mandate granted by ASEAN leaders at the 48th ASEAN Summit and was intended to maintain constructive, policy-based engagement rather than weaken the Five-Point Consensus.

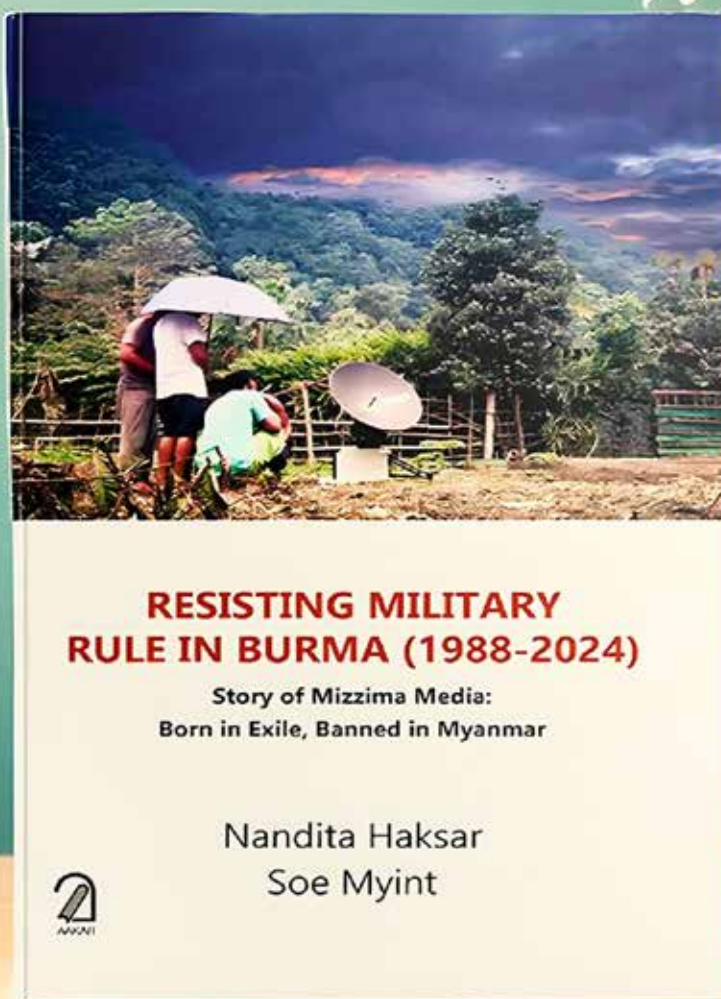
The ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) echoed similar concerns, warning that increased engagement without concrete concessions from the junta risks legitimising a military regime that has consistently ignored ASEAN's peace plan.

Myanmar observers see the Bangkok meeting as evidence of ASEAN's increasingly fragmented approach. While the Five-Point Consensus officially remains intact, member states are pursuing different strategies based on their own political and security interests. The formal ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Manila from 20-22 July is expected to reveal whether the bloc can maintain a unified position or whether "calibrated engagement" will gradually become ASEAN's new approach toward Myanmar.

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: Supplied

ASEAN ENVOY PLEDGES HUMANITARIAN MISSION TO MYANMAR

The Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs said Secretary Ma. Theresa P. Lazaro, the ASEAN chair's special envoy on Myanmar, will lead a humanitarian mission to Myanmar in the fourth quarter of this year to expand access to areas in need, according to a statement dated 14 July.

The pledge followed back-to-back meetings Lazaro held on Myanmar in Bangkok and Pattaya, Thailand, hosted by Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow, on 12-13 July. In Bangkok on 12 July, Lazaro chaired an informal meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers with junta-appointed Foreign Minister Tin Maung Swe — the first in-person engagement between the bloc's foreign ministers and Myanmar's since the 2021 coup, mandated by ASEAN leaders at the 48th ASEAN Summit in Cebu.

At the Bangkok meeting, Tin Maung Swe briefed the ministers on steps toward implementing the Five-Point Consensus (5PC), ASEAN's stalled peace framework, along with what the statement called the government's "100-day Peace Plan" and measures

against transnational crime. ASEAN foreign ministers underscored the 5PC as the bloc's main reference point and pressed for "concrete and measurable progress," without confirming any had been made.

The next day, Lazaro traveled to Pattaya for separate talks with ethnic armed organizations and the junta's National Solidarity and Peacemaking Negotiation Committee (NSPNC) on prospects for inclusive political dialogue. The statement said "all sides expressed openness" to the process but did not name the ethnic armed groups involved or specify a timeline.

The proposed humanitarian mission would confront one of the world's most severe crises. A separate UN report released 13 July found that nearly 3.8 million people are displaced across Myanmar and that donors have funded less than half of this year's \$890 million aid appeal, with shelter assistance reaching just 3 percent of its annual target.

Special Envoy Theresa Lazaro.
Photo: AFP

ASEAN'S RE-ENGAGEMENT RISKS LEGITIMIZING JUNTA WITHOUT DELIVERING FOR MYANMAR'S PEOPLE, SAYS APCR

ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) warns that ASEAN's shift toward "calibrated re-engagement" with Myanmar's military-appointed government risks normalizing a dictatorship without securing any tangible results for the Myanmar people, according to a press release 15 July.

"ASEAN cannot call this progress. What we are witnessing is the normalization of a dictatorship, dressed up as diplomatic language. Five years of impunity have not been met with accountability, instead, they have been given a seat at the table," said Mercy Chriesty Barends, Member of the House of Representatives of Indonesia, and Chairperson of APCR.

The Thai chair's statement invoked "confidence-building" and "conditions for calibrated re-engagement," language that sits uneasily alongside ASEAN's continued insistence that the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) "remains valid." This claim rings hollow just days after Myanmar's Pyidaungsu Hluttaw passed a motion calling on the regime to review the 5PC outright - a

direct rebuke of the framework ASEAN still calls its "primary reference" for resolving the crisis.

APHR notes that Singapore and Malaysia's public reaffirmations of the 5PC underscore a bloc more divided than united on Myanmar policy.

For Myanmar's people, enduring intensified military offensives and a widening urban-rural divide in safety, this meeting changes little on the ground. APCR urges ASEAN to ensure its diplomatic recalibration does not come at the cost of the accountability and justice Myanmar's people have been demanding since the coup.

APHR reiterates that any re-engagement with Naypyidaw must be measured against the key commitments under the 5PC - an immediate end to violence, constructive dialogue among all parties including pro-democracy groups, and unimpeded provision of humanitarian assistance.



Photo: SCEF

SCEF CLARIFIES ASEAN MEETING NOT START OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE WITH JUNTA

The Steering Committee for the Establishment of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) officially declared on 15 July that its recent meeting with ASEAN representatives does not signal the commencement of formal political dialogue or negotiations with the military junta.

The statement clarified that SCEF members, including the KNU, KIO, KNPP, and CNF, held a private discussion solely at the invitation of the ASEAN Special Envoy, the Philippine Foreign Minister, and the Thai Foreign Minister, and did not meet jointly with junta representatives.

During the meeting, the SCEF emphasized to ASEAN representatives that the ground realities in Myanmar have fundamentally shifted.

"Governance in Myanmar is no longer centralized in Naypyitaw. In vast areas of the country, local revolutionary authorities have assumed executive, judicial, and public security responsibilities on a state and unit-by-unit basis," the SCEF stated.

Consequently, the SCEF warned ASEAN that any peace process must recognize and engage these legitimate ground authorities, cautioning that premature attempts to normalize relations will only worsen the current crisis.

The SCEF pointed out that ASEAN itself has

acknowledged the lack of practical progress on its Five-Point Consensus, and that merely reaffirming these points will not yield change.

The statement stressed that for meaningful dialogue to occur, the junta must demonstrate genuine political will, a responsibility resting solely on Min Aung Hlaing and the military leadership. The SCEF demanded immediate concrete actions, including a halt to airstrikes on civilians, schools, and hospitals, the release of political prisoners, and unhindered access for humanitarian aid.

The SCEF firmly asserted that calling for political dialogue while continuing military attacks makes meaningful engagement impossible.

While welcoming international and regional support, the SCEF warned that external actors have no right to decide the path or outcome of Myanmar's political transition, and must refrain from pushing for hasty resolutions.

The peace process must be owned and led by the people of Myanmar. The statement concluded by emphasizing that the SCEF's ultimate goal is not to return to political normalcy, but to completely dismantle military dictatorship, resolve the root causes of the conflict, and establish a new federal democratic union.



MYANMAR AMBASSADOR TO THE UN CALLS FOR SUPPORT FOR THE SCEF AND THE MYANMAR PEOPLE

Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the United Nations in New York made a statement at the General Debate of the 2026 ECOSOC High-Level Segment-High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on 14 July.

Here is the statement:

Mr. President,

At the outset, I wish to thank the President of the ECOSOC for convening this high-level segment.

I also thank the Secretary-General and the PGA for their opening remarks.

Myanmar aligns itself with the statements of ASEAN, LDC Group and G77 and China.

Mr. President,

Only 36 percent of measurable SDG targets are on track or making moderate progress.

One in 10 people still live in extreme poverty, and food insecurity remains well above 2015 levels.

Violent conflict surged to its highest levels in decades, rapidly reversing years of development.

With 4 years remaining, it is imperative that we accelerate urgent and transformative actions to reach the furthest behind first in our implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Mr. President,

In my country, Myanmar, the illegal military coup and subsequent atrocities by the military junta have unfortunately erased our previous hard-earned development gains.

Since the coup, national poverty has increased to nearly 50 percent.

A third of the population is facing acute food insecurity.

Over 1 million children lack critical vaccinations.

More than 6.3 million school-age children and young people have been out of school.

Over 40 per cent of households have no safely managed drinking water service.

About 500,000 young people have left the country to escape forced conscription and insecurity.

In addition, more than 8,100 people have been killed by the military junta. Over 3.7 million people are internally displaced.

These tragic numbers clearly demonstrate that the military junta remains the primary driver of violence, instability, and regression in the country regardless of their nominal change in status.

Under this circumstance, painfully speaking, the people are struggling for survival, instead of for prosperity.

Without timely and decisive actions, Myanmar is at serious risk of losing an entire generation.

In conclusion, Mr. President, peace and stability are prerequisites to achieving sustainable development in Myanmar.

Any regional and international effort to remedy the situation should include steps to effectively address the root cause to avoid prolonging the conflict and suffering of our people.

Despite facing challenges, the National Unity Government (NUG) and major ethnic democratic forces are coordinating through the Steering Council for Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) to realize our goal of ending the military dictatorship and building a federal democratic union to leave no one behind.

Therefore, I urge the international community to support the SCEF and the people of Myanmar in their efforts to realize sustainable peace, stability and development in Myanmar.

I thank you.



ASEAN



THE PHILIPPINES' FAILURE ON MYANMAR IS EXISTENTIAL FOR ASEAN

Concern has been voiced in a statement issued 18 July over the Philippines' handling of the ASEAN Chair and its "poor judgement" in handling the sensitive issue of the Myanmar crisis.

This statement is issued by Dato' Sri Saifuddin Abdullah, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia and current member of the House of Representatives of Malaysia; Khun Kasit Piromya, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand; and three former UN experts on Myanmar who are founding members of the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M)

18 July 2026: The Philippines' term as ASEAN Chair is in a tailspin as Secretary of Foreign Affairs Ma. Theresa Lazaro brings a disastrous combination of timidity and poor judgment to her role as Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar.

Special Envoy Lazaro rewarded the Myanmar military junta's bloodshed and recalcitrance by agreeing to convene an informal meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers with the junta's "foreign minister", hosted on 12 July in junta-friendly Thailand.

In a baffling move by the Philippines' most senior diplomat, Lazaro agreed to the meeting without extracting a single concession from junta leader and accused war criminal Min Aung Hlaing. Lazaro did not even request a pause in the junta's atrocity campaign against civilians for the meeting's short duration. According to reports by the Karen Peace Support Network, junta airstrikes targeting Mutraw district in Karen State on 12 July injured four people, including an eight-year-old boy.

Five years after the high watermark of the Five Point Consensus (5PC), ASEAN appears adamant on adding humiliation of its own making to the junta's open contempt for the bloc's ham-fisted efforts at brokering an end to Myanmar's military-triggered crises.

The Bangkok meeting ended ASEAN's ban on high-level engagement with senior junta officials, a measure in place since 2021 after Min Aung Hlaing reneged on the 5PC before the ink was even dry.

Malaysia, which worked hard to build bridges with legitimate Myanmar stakeholders during its term as ASEAN Chair last year, had the awareness to send a lower ranked official to the meeting. Singapore's Foreign Minister Dr Vivian Balakrishnan – conscious of the catastrophe his country will inherit next year as ASEAN Chair – pressed the “central importance” of the 5PC and the need for “demonstrable progress” by the junta.

The world is watching ASEAN's implosion on Myanmar with growing alarm. Just last week, the UN Human Rights Council in its new resolution on the situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar expressed deep concern at the military junta's lack of progress in implementing the 5PC. The Council also called on ASEAN to engage in inclusive dialogue with the National Unity Government, ethnic organizations and broader civil society and affected populations, including Rohingya and other minorities.

ASEAN Foreign Ministers must use their approaching meeting in Manila, running 20-22 July, to stem their self-inflicted damage and to salvage ASEAN's shredded reputation. ASEAN must immediately restore its blanket ban on engagement with senior junta officials and demand the full and immediate implementation of the 5PC, including the cessation of all junta violence, the unconditional release of all political prisoners, and the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to all persons in need.

The junta's new proxy “parliament” has rejected the 5PC, so ASEAN should move swiftly to develop a new operating framework with a clear end game. This must include an escalating series of consequences triggered by continued junta non-compliance with the 5PC.

ASEAN Foreign Ministers should also convene a series of formal consultations with Myanmar's legitimate democratic stakeholders, given their professed commitment to facilitating a peaceful solution based on the genuine will and aspirations of the Myanmar people. These meetings should assemble the full membership of the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union including the National Unity Government, ethnic organisations, Myanmar civil society and representatives of minority communities, including those who have been forced to leave Myanmar.

ASEAN's failure on Myanmar while the country burns and the junta entrenches itself poses serious questions about the bloc's durability. Next week's Foreign Ministers' Meeting demands a reset. Myanmar lives and ASEAN's own future depend on it.

Dato' Sri Saifuddin Abdullah
Khun Kasit Piromya
Marzuki Darusman
Yanghee Lee
Chris Sidoti

The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar is an independent group of international human rights experts working to support the peoples of Myanmar in their fight for peace, genuine democracy, justice, and accountability.

Photo: AFP



WOMEN DRIVEN TO UNDERWORLD CRIME BY WAGE CRISIS IN MYANMAR'S COMMERCIAL CAPITAL

DHATU FOR MIZZIMA

Amidst flashing multi-coloured lights in the darkness, a crowd dances rhythmically to the deafening music down a backstreet in Yangon.

The majority of this crowd appears to consist of underage teenagers, both male and female, some estimated to be only around 14 years old.

They gather nightly in venues commonly known as "high rooms" (private party rooms), KTV lounges, and private party spaces, dancing until dawn.

Although strangers, they eagerly share and inhale from glasses packed with ice cubes. In drug user parlance, this inhalation is meant to "keep the high going without crashing."

This practice is driven by the belief that it sustains the high induced by party drugs like "E" (Ecstasy, coloured pills shaped like candies or cartoon characters), "K" (Ketamine, a white powder), and "Happy Water."

Ma Yun (a pseudonym) covertly meets a 16-year-old girl near the restroom of a private party room and slips some packages into her hand.

"Here is your order, sister. I guarantee the quality. Not shoddy stuffs. If the high doesn't last, I'll refund you," Ma Yun, 27, tells the young girl.

Having never met in person, the girl and Ma Yun built rapport on social media, trading these illicit goods purely on trust.

The young girl then slips into the restroom with her companions, including young men, to consume the drugs. Despite gender-segregated restrooms, patrons move in and out freely without any intervention from staff or security.

The items handed over by Ma Yun were packets of Ecstasy (E) and Ketamine (K). Making an easy 500,000 MMK (approx. \$250) that night helps her manage her mounting debts.

"I know this isn't decent work. I used to blame both dealers and users. But I've been unable to pay off high-interest loans (10% interest) from about five lenders for a long time. This is the only way I've found some financial relief," Ma Yun shares.

Ma Yun is an ordinary employee at a major auto parts shop. Despite years of hard work, her monthly salary never exceeded 350,000 MMK (approx. \$170).

While others resigned due to the unsustainably low wages, Ma Yun, a migrant from rural Myanmar living in a rented hostel in Myanmar's commercial capital, found it impossible to switch jobs amid the current employment crisis.

Frequent payroll delays from her company caused her to miss interest payment deadlines, trapping her in a cycle of debt. Furthermore, unfair salary deductions disguised as "fines" occasionally left her with only 250,000 to 300,000 MMK a month.

To pay rent, loan interest, and feed herself on that salary, Ma Yun had to cut back severely, rarely eat meat and survive on 1,000 MMK rice packs paired with cheap dishes like fried potatoes, eggs, or water spinach on a rotating basis.

While hostel rent, basic commodities, toiletries, and commodity prices soared monthly, wages remained stagnant. Desperate, Ma Yun turned to drug dealing, despite knowing it ruins lives. She adds that on some nights in the private VIP rooms, she also turned to occasional sex work when meeting wealthy, middle-aged men.

Similarly, Ma Pa Pa, a 24-year-old developer who moved from Mandalay to Yangon, found her salary of around 500,000 MMK at an IT firm entirely insufficient. Consequently, she also moonlights as a drug dealer.

"How can salary cover living expenses? I didn't want to live in a hostel, so I rented an apartment with two friends. Rent alone costs over 300,000 MMK a month. Under a three-month lease, it's 350,000 MMK, and that's just my share. Food costs, even for vegetables, are rising. Even after cutting down on personal care products, 500,000 MMK a month isn't enough. That's why I connected with acquaintances to do this," Ma Pa Pa explains.

Ma Pa Pa also admits to using the substances herself to test the quality of her merchandise.

According to Ma Pa Pa and Ma Yun, E (Ecstasy) goes for 40,000 to 50,000 MMK per pill, K (Ketamine) costs 100,000 MMK per gram, and "Happy Water" (a cocktail of six drugs) ranges from 400,000 to 500,000 MMK per sachet.

Drugs are big business. On International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking on 26 June 2026, the military regime in Naypyidaw incinerated seized drugs and precursor chemicals valued at 2.21 trillion MMK (approx. US\$603 million) nationwide.

Among these, drug seizures in Yangon accounted for the largest share, valued at over US\$321 million.

However, in reality, insiders estimate that over a thousand pills of Ecstasy alone are sold nightly in Yangon's private party rooms and KTVs.

Many, like Ma Yun and Ma Pa Pa, have entered the nightlife industry as drug sellers due to wage stagnation. More worryingly, Ma Pa Pa notes that some women are quitting their day jobs entirely to enter the world of high-end hostess or "sugar dating" (seeking wealthy sponsors) as an easy way out.

As Yangon grows more crowded, job opportunities are shrinking. Conversely, the illicit night trade of drug peddling is expanding rapidly in urban areas.

Salaries vary by company type, sector, and experience. According to data gathered by Mizzima, the breakdown is as follows: On average, junior staff receive 300,000 to 400,000 MMK; senior staff receive around 600,000 MMK; supervisors/foremen earn 800,000 to 1,100,000 MMK; and assistant managers make 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 MMK. Some companies reportedly pay even less than these standard rates.

Economists attribute low wages primarily to Myanmar's overall economic downturn, rising fuel prices, the aftermath of the military coup, political instability, inflation, and falling corporate revenues.

Under the current military-run Ministry of Labour, the minimum wage is set at 4,800 MMK per day plus an allowance of 3,000 MMK, totalling 7,800 MMK daily. Trade unions and economic analysts point out that this rate, yielding less than 250,000 MMK monthly, is grossly inadequate for basic food and housing in Yangon amid currency depreciation and soaring inflation.

"While basic living expenses and food prices have skyrocketed, labour wages remain flat. Given current conditions, even a basic worker needs at least 15,000 to 18,000 MMK daily to survive. The rate set by the ministry doesn't even cover one day's meals," a labour rights activist stated.

A June 2025 UNDP report revealed that out of Yangon's 6.2 million population, 2.7 million (about one in four households) face poverty. The report suggested a decent daily wage for a worker should range from 11,000 to 25,600 MMK (as of mid-2025).

The report highlighted that Yangon's poverty rate jumped from 10% in 2017 to 43% in 2023, following the military coup.

Currently, basic prices in Yangon are extreme: low-grade rice is 4,500–5,000 MMK per pyi; peanut oil is 24,000 MMK per viss (approx. 16 Kg); a large egg is 700 MMK; salt is 2,000 MMK per viss; small onions are 5,000 MMK per viss; palm oil is 18,000–20,000 MMK per viss (on the black market due to household registration-based rationing by the military); detergent is 10,000–20,000 MMK per kg; and a bar of soap is 2,800 MMK. Pharmaceutical costs have also risen exponentially.

With the US dollar trading above 4,400 MMK and pure gold exceeding 9.5 million MMK per tical (approx. 16.29 grams) on the open market, the Myanmar Kyat continues its downward spiral.

"Even locally made toothpaste costs 8,500 MMK now. My office salary is absolutely not enough, and I can't support my family. Selling drugs brings in hundreds of thousands of Kyat daily. Yes, it's highly risky. But we pay off bribes (protection money) to clear our route," Ma Yun says.

Myanmar's economy continues to struggle due to conflict and inflation. According to reports from the IMF and the Institute for Strategy and Policy (ISP-Myanmar), Myanmar's GDP contracted by 2.7% in 2025 compared to 2024, while domestic inflation surged to 30%.

ISP-Myanmar noted that the GDP has shrunk annually since the 2021 coup, contracting by a cumulative 16% over five years. This contraction has caused job losses, lower incomes, reduced access to credit, and disruptions in public services.

The flight of international investments post-coup has gutted urban job opportunities. Migrant workers, factory workers, and garment employees have borne the brunt of this crisis, closely followed by average office employees.

Although Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing claims the economy is recovering and jobs are abundant, ground realities prove the exact opposite.

"Prices keep rising, but my salary never goes up. I'll just have to keep selling drugs. If I get caught, so be it," Ma Yun sighs.



GOLD LAUNDERING PLOT LINKED TO MIN AUNG HLAING SHOWS URGENCY FOR GLOBAL ACTION AGAINST CRIMINAL MYANMAR JUNTA

A new Justice For Myanmar investigation has revealed a failed junta-linked plot to launder 800 kg of gold, valued at approximately US\$48 million, through Thailand, Laos and Hong Kong in the months following the Myanmar military's illegal coup attempt.

The plot was coordinated by Khin Thiri Thet Mon, the daughter of junta head Min Aung Hlaing.

The findings are based on draft contracts, letters of intent and private messages seen by Justice For Myanmar.

The junta network sought to sell the gold to a subsidiary of the Lao conglomerate, AIF Group and to process the payments through the partially state-owned bank, BIC Bank Lao.

The arms broker and close associate of Min Aung Hlaing's family, Tun Min Latt, acted as an intermediary together with his business partner, a Thai senator, routing the gold through a Thai company as the end seller on paper.

In the communications, reference is made to 200 kg of gold having already been sold, although Justice For Myanmar could not confirm if gold has indeed changed hands.

The proposed deal with AIF Group collapsed mid-2021 over disagreements regarding financial guarantees and sequencing.

While the plot failed, there is a continued transnational crime risk from the junta, its leaders, family members and cronies.

As found in Justice For Myanmar's latest report

and earlier investigations, Min Aung Hlaing, his family members and close associates are directly involved in money laundering and asset theft, including through property purchases in Thailand. Min Aung Hlaing also enriches himself from the exploitation of Myanmar's gold carried out by sanctioned military businesses.

Institutionally, the junta sits at the centre of a web of transnational criminal activities that include cyber scams, human trafficking, money laundering and illegal gambling. These criminal activities fuel the junta's ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against the Myanmar people and threaten the security of countries in the region.

Justice For Myanmar calls for coordinated and targeted sanctions against the junta and its cronies to block their access to funds, arms and aviation fuel, and for full accountability for the commission of international and transnational crimes.

Following a sham election orchestrated by Min Aung Hlaing in December 2025 and January 2026, the junta is falsely seeking legitimacy, which would only embolden its continued transnational and international criminal activities. Justice For Myanmar calls on governments to not recognise the junta as the government and stand with the people of Myanmar, who have courageously rejected the junta for over five years.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "Min Aung Hlaing and his illegal military junta have been terrorising the people of Myanmar for more than five years.

"Since the sham election, the junta has intensified indiscriminate airstrikes and continued its campaign of arbitrary arrests and torture, committing international crimes with total impunity.

"This junta is a criminal cartel that is responsible for a surge of transnational criminal activities, including the attempted gold laundering plot we have documented.

"The junta's ongoing criminal activities demonstrate once again that the junta is not a government and must not be awarded false legitimacy.

"Instead, we demand that Thailand and other governments in the region ensure accountability for the junta's crimes.

"The USA, UK, EU, Canada and Australia must urgently expand targeted sanctions on the junta and its cronies to block access to funds, arms and aviation fuel and support the Myanmar people's struggle for federal democracy."



MYANMAR'S ONLINE SELLERS FACE RENEWED SCRUTINY UNDER 2023 REGISTRATION RULES

A government document circulating on social media has renewed concern among Myanmar's online sellers about a three-year-old business registration requirement, after it showed a Ministry of Commerce department summoning an online shop for investigation following a consumer complaint.

The document instructed the shop to resolve the dispute with the consumer and comply with online sales regulations. While a single document does not prove an active crackdown on all online shops, analysts described it to Mizzima as a clear sign of heightened regulatory supervision driven by consumer complaints.

Following the launch of the online retail registration

system in 2023, entrepreneurs raised numerous questions. "It made us wonder whether taxes would increase, whether personal data would remain secure, and what legal consequences we might face if we fail to register," an entrepreneur said.

An entrepreneur told Mizzima the recent development has prompted some online shop owners to register. "With the recent news and threats of imprisonment, people are now hiring agents to get registered," they said.

Myanmar currently lacks a dedicated e-commerce law. The primary regulatory framework is Order No.

(51/2023) on Online Sales Business Registration, issued by the Ministry of Commerce in July 2023, which requires anyone selling goods or services via online platforms — including Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and websites — to register their business. Following the order, the ministry launched the "eComReg" online registration portal, allowing entrepreneurs to apply digitally and letting the public verify registered businesses.

By 2025, the Ministry of Commerce said more than 21,000 online businesses had registered under eComReg. Registration fees are set at 30,000 MMK (approx. US\$9.7) for individuals, 50,000 MMK (approx. US\$16.1) for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and 70,000 MMK (approx. US\$22.6) for companies, with certificates valid for two years.

Despite the requirement, the majority of online businesses remain unregistered, according to entrepreneur circles and e-commerce studies. While official statistics are unavailable, industry feedback points to several barriers: fear of increased tax burdens after registration, concerns over submitting personal data, reluctance to engage with the military regime's administrative system given current political and economic conditions, the belief that micro-businesses don't need to register, and general lack of awareness of the requirement.

Myanmar's system differs sharply from those of neighbouring and larger markets. In Thailand, Singapore, and the United States, online sellers must also register and pay taxes, but registered businesses there gain access to bank loans, official payment

gateways, legal sales channels on marketplaces like Shopee, Lazada, and Amazon, greater consumer trust, and stronger legal protections — benefits made viable by clearer, more predictable tax systems and legal enforcement.

In Myanmar, registered businesses do gain some benefits, including legal recognition, greater consumer trust, and access to official dispute-resolution channels. Business owners continue to raise concerns over tax ambiguity, data disclosure, and information security — concerns Mizzima's sources say are closely tied to the country's broader political and economic instability.

A legal basis for prosecuting non-compliant sellers already exists: in 2024, the Ministry of Commerce reiterated that operating an online sales business without a registration certificate is punishable under the Essential Supplies and Services Act, with convictions carrying prison sentences and fines. No official data has been released on how many unregistered shops have been prosecuted or penalized, making it impossible to confirm either a widespread crackdown or an absence of enforcement.

Recent cases of departments summoning online shops over consumer complaints suggest a gradual tightening of oversight, though current data is insufficient to conclude that enforcement has become uniform nationwide. Taken together, the pattern suggests Myanmar's online retail sector may be shifting from the basic 2023 registration system toward closer complaint-driven oversight — a trend worth watching through the rest of 2026, sources told Mizzima.



UK CUTS AID TO BURMA FROM £66 MILLION TO £55 MILLION

Burma Campaign UK has condemned the British government's decision to cut annual aid to Burma (Myanmar) from £66 million to £55 million in the current financial year, with the cut continuing until 2029 at least, in a press release 17 July.

In the press release, the campaign says yesterday, with no published media release or social media posts, hours before Parliament's summer recess and with news dominated by England's World Cup football loss, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office quietly published its annual report which, buried in the appendixes starting on page 233 of the 264 page report, contained details of savage cuts in UK aid in the coming years.

The Burma statistics on page 234 show that the people will only receive £55.3 million, which is around half what the UK gave before the 2021 coup, despite the huge increase in humanitarian need since the coup.

After initial cuts of 73% following the coup, in the past two years aid to Burma had started to increase again. Now cuts have begun again.

The cuts in aid will be welcomed by the Burmese military, which has deliberately created a humanitarian crisis targeting homes, schools and health clinics. Their strategy is to create a humanitarian crisis in order to demoralise and soak up the capacity of the resistance.

"British aid to Burma saves lives so these cuts will kill people," said Anna Roberts, Executive Director of Burma Campaign UK. "Keir Starmer and Yvette Cooper just gave the Burmese military a helping hand by cutting aid to Burma."

The cuts come as the humanitarian crisis in Burma continues to grow. Official estimates are that more than 3.6 million people are internally displaced, although local civil society put the figure much higher, with as many as 5 million displaced. 80 percent of the population live in chronic poverty.

The cuts in aid come on top of the British government failing to bring in any new sanctions against the Burmese military for almost two years. Since the 2021 coup, more than 100,000 people have been killed in conflict and there are more than 14,000 political prisoners. The Burmese military carries out an airstrike every two and a half hours, killing a child on average every 29 hours.

"This government is failing the people of Burma, cutting off aid instead of cutting off arms and money going to the Burmese military," said Anna Roberts.

Note: Figures of £92.8 million in the annual report for the past financial year relate to £25 million pounds given following the earthquake in Burma last year, on top of the core allocation of just over £66 million.



Video screenshot

RUSSIAN TROOPS TRAIN MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES IN NAYPYIDAW UNDER 'TROPICAL STORM' DRILL

Russian and Myanmar special forces conducted a joint training exercise, dubbed "Tropical Storm," at the National Defence College in Naypyidaw from 6 to 17 July, Russia's Defense Ministry said.

Myanmar's military-run media also referenced the drills in a video released 14 July by Lt. Gen. Pyae Sone Lin, head of the junta's Military Training Directorate.

The drills included a simulated defense of a high-ranking official during an attack on a motorcade and a joint assault on a mock terrorist base, the Russian ministry said, with both militaries deploying FPV drones and the Kurier ground robotic system. Russian instructors led training in drone operation, helicopter rappelling, countering drones with shotguns, and building assaults using a small-arms system called Blik, according to the Russian ministry's account.

The exercise follows a five-year military cooperation pact Moscow and Naypyidaw signed on 3 February, after a visit by Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu, and marks a departure from the three previous Russia-Myanmar joint exercises since the

coup, which were navy-to-navy drills conducted at sea. This one, by contrast, is the first to involve special forces training on land, inside the capital.

The training coincides with an escalating air war that Russian military support has helped sustain. Myanmar Air Force airstrikes have risen roughly 30-fold since the coup, from 90 recorded incidents in 2021 to more than 2,800 in 2025, according to data compiled by DVB, as Russia has supplied the junta with munitions, drones and anti-drone systems and completed delivery of six Su-30 fighter jets in December 2024. ACLED has recorded more than 100,000 conflict-related deaths in Myanmar since the military seized power in February 2021.

The exercise coincided with a diplomatic push in the opposite direction: junta-appointed Foreign Minister Tin Maung Swe held his first in-person meeting with ASEAN foreign ministers in Bangkok on 12 July, and junta leader Min Aung Hlaing — who declared himself "president" in April — is due to visit Thailand in August as part of a wider bid for regional recognition.



Photo: Antonio Graceffo

TEN UNDERGROUND HOSPITALS COMPLETED ACROSS MYANMAR, NUG HEALTH MINISTER SAYS

A total of 10 underground hospitals have been completed across Myanmar, Dr. Shwe Pon, the National Unity Government's (NUG) Union Minister of Health, told Mizzima in an interview.

Construction of the underground hospitals began in 2024 under then-Union Minister of Health Dr. Zaw Wai Soe, funded by international donations.

"To date, a total of 10 underground hospitals have been completed nationwide. Some are already operational, while others are undergoing final touches and being equipped with necessary medical supplies," Dr. Shwe Pon said.

The completed total marks an increase from June 2025, when Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson for the NUG Prime Minister's Office, told Mizzima the

NUG was targeting eight bomb-proof underground hospitals in NUG-controlled areas, with two then under construction.

The NUG says the hospitals are intended to guarantee secure healthcare access, saying the military junta intentionally targets not only schools but also hospitals and clinics.

According to a 5 July report by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), junta violence killed 67 civilians in June — 28 women and 39 men, including nine children under 18 — of whom 46 died in airstrikes specifically. AAPP said it is separately working to verify an additional list of 88 people reported killed in aerial attacks during the same period, which has not yet been confirmed.



Photo: Myanmar Internet Project

OVER 200 MYANMAR CSOS WARN ABOUT THE DANGERS OF STARLINK DEACTIVATIONS

Over 200 Myanmar civil society organizations have issued a letter to the United States government, SpaceX, and the international community regarding the inadvertent harms of Starlink deactivations in Myanmar and a call for targeted enforcement against cyber-scams, according to a press release by the Myanmar Internet Project on 17 July.

The following is the statement:

To: The Government of the United States, SpaceX, and the International Community

We, the undersigned humanitarian, civil society, and democratic organizations operating in Myanmar, stand in solidarity with global efforts to disrupt and dismantle the transnational cyber-scram syndicates operating in Southeast Asia. These illicit operations steal billions from global citizens, traffic and enslave hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people, and fuel regional instability. We fully support the objective of cutting off these syndicates' access to critical digital infrastructure.

However, we are deeply concerned by the unintended yet devastating collateral damage caused by recent blanket bans of Starlink terminals across

Myanmar. While these sweeping blackouts aim to target criminal compounds, they inadvertently sever the primary communication lifelines for schools, hospitals, and humanitarian aid workers.

In October 2025, Starlink publicly declared 2500 terminals which are along the Thai-Myanmar border in close proximity with scam centers. However, recent bans that are not publicly declared by SpaceX include terminals from Magway, Sagaing and Rakhine states, which are not in the close proximity of the locations of scam centers. These blanket bans created huge collateral damage on civilians and humanitarian efforts. Therefore, we urge SpaceX to seriously consider more precise bans of scam centers and immediately restore services to terminals outside the scam compounds.

The Reality on the Ground: A Matter of Life and Death

Due to severe infrastructure destruction from ongoing conflict and the military junta's deliberate, weaponized internet shutdowns, conventional telecommunications are non-existent across roughly 80 out of 330 cities in Myanmar. Approximately 13.3 million people live in these completely disconnected zones, where independent Low-Earth orbit (LEO)

satellite internet, as of now Starlink as the lifeline of communication.

In these conflict zones, Starlink is not a luxury, it is an infrastructure of survival:

Humanitarian and Medical Coordination: Local emergency groups and hospitals coordinate frontline ambulance pickups, deliver critical aid, and facilitate remote surgical and obstetrical consultations for local medical staff. These operations rely heavily on Starlink for internet access.

Civilian Safety and Airstrikes Early Warnings: In active war zones, real-time internet access allows community networks to distribute life-saving alerts regarding incoming airstrikes and military offensives, giving civilians time to flee to safety. Myanmar Now reported that hundreds of thousands of civilians were trapped in the conflict zone, banning Starlinks seriously impacted access to early warning systems against airstrikes in conflict zones.

Public Services and Democratic Governance: Local administrations, such as the Karen National Union (KNU), the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC), operate Starlink terminals to manage essential education, healthcare, and basic administrative infrastructure. A particularly compelling example is that there are 5963 interim community-based schools and 75 virtual schools registered under the National Unity Government (NUG), which are providing education to nearly a million students living in conflict areas. (Ministry of Education, 2026) These communities are entirely dependent on Starlink connectivity; consequently, the loss of access effectively denies education to hundreds of thousands of students living in conflict zones.

Independent Media and Human Rights Documentation: Satellite networks allow independent media and field teams to securely transmit hundreds of verified reports of war crimes and atrocities to United Nations investigators and international watchdogs.

Why Blanket Bans Do Not Stop Scam Centers

Empirical data and historical context show that broad network blackouts fail to achieve their intended goals against highly resourceful criminal actors:

Ineffective Deterrence: Cyber-scam syndicates operated at massive scale long before Starlink became operational in late 2021. Their presence is rooted in deep structural issues such as weak governance, human trafficking, and economic vulnerability, not a

specific internet provider.

Asymmetric Impact: A blanket ban only temporarily inconveniences rich syndicates while permanently blinding rural communities, schools, and hospitals that have zero alternative options.

Risking Market Dominance in the LEO satellite Sector: Myanmar represents a massive, underserved market where Starlink currently holds a dominant position. However, the LEO satellite sector is highly competitive. With China's Guowang LEO and SpaceSail preparing to launch services in the near future, these entities are poised to become significant rivals. By preemptively banning its own terminals, SpaceX risks ceding its market foothold without achieving the intended goal of disrupting cyber-scam syndicates, which possess the resources to pivot to alternative connectivity solutions.

Our Recommendations: A Call for Precision and Partnership

We firmly believe that tech policy can be precise, humane, and effective. We call on SpaceX and relevant regulatory bodies to implement the following actionable solutions:

Establish a Targeted Restriction Mechanism: Replace broad geographic blackouts with localized, data-driven enforcement. The coordinates of major, illicit scam compounds are already extensively documented in multiple open-source investigations and satellite analyses. Restrictions should be applied surgically to these verified locations rather than entire states or regions.

Service Restoration: Immediately restore services to terminals outside of the documented scam-compounds coordinates.

Build a Collaborative Verification Channel: Myanmar's civil society organizations are ready to act as an on-the-ground resource to help verify terminal ownership, helping authorities differentiate between legitimate humanitarian actors and criminal operations.

We stand ready to collaborate with SpaceX, the U.S. government, and the international community to ensure that the vital fight against transnational crime does not dismantle the very lifelines keeping millions of innocent civilians alive.



Photo: Supplied

32% OF CHILDREN IN SEVERELY FOOD-INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS FORCED INTO WORK, UN REPORT FINDS

Thirty-two per cent of children in severely food-insecure households in Myanmar are forced into the workforce, and 24 per cent are compelled to drop out of school, according to a joint UNDP and UN Women report released on 13 July.

The findings are part of "Uneven Burdens: Women in Myanmar's Crisis Economy," a joint UNDP-UN Women study.

The report says that as food insecurity escalates, households adopt different coping strategies depending on gender: women are more likely to cope by cutting essential spending, such as on healthcare and education, while men are more likely to respond by increasing their labour force participation.

Education remains a critical protective factor against food insecurity, the report says: completing high school increases a woman's likelihood of being food secure by 17.4 per cent, which the report cites as a reason to treat investment in girls' education as a long-term food security strategy.

Economic pressures have driven a broader food insecurity crisis in Myanmar, according to the report, which affects more than half of all women in the country.

"Nationally, women suffer more from food insecurity than men (53 per cent compared to 50 per cent), and this disparity widens in urban areas," the report states.

The situation is worse in conflict-affected states. In Rakhine State, only 19 per cent of women are food secure, compared to 30 per cent of men. In Karenni (Kayah) State, only 12 per cent of women are food secure.

To cope with food insecurity, 57 per cent of women reported that a household member had to migrate, compared to 43 per cent of men, the report found. It also warns that the consequences of food insecurity heavily affect children.

These patterns reflect compounding economic pressures and diminished access to basic services, the report says, warning of long-term adverse effects on human capital development.

The report recommends expanding second-chance and adult education programmes for women and girls who missed formal schooling, along with gender-responsive skills and digital literacy training to improve employability and economic resilience.



DELHI HIGH COURT TO HEAR MYANMAR REFUGEES' PLEA FOR UNIVERSITY ADMISSION WITHOUT PASSPORTS

The Delhi High Court will continue hearing a petition seeking to allow Myanmar refugees in India to secure university admission without a passport requirement.

The petition was filed by Maung Henry Htoo Aung Linn, a Myanmar refugee, and his legal team. It challenges Delhi University's mandatory passport requirement for foreign applicants as discriminatory.

"The outcome remains uncertain. The court has requested the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of External Affairs to verify if the applicant is a UNHCR-registered refugee or asylum seeker, and whether university admission can be granted without a passport. The court will proceed with the hearing after receiving these clarifications," a Myanmar refugee residing in New Delhi told Mizzima.

He added that despite Delhi University's strict admission criteria, some Myanmar refugees had previously been admitted without passports.

The applicant, Maung Henry Htoo Aung Linn, fled Myanmar in 2022. He completed his 10th standard

in Mizoram and 12th standard (Science stream) in Meghalaya, India. He currently resides under the protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

During the July 10 hearing, his lawyers argued that treating refugees - who possess distinct legal and humanitarian status - equally with ordinary foreign nationals violates Articles 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution.

During the proceedings, the judge questioned the university's counsel, asking, "How can you expect a passport from a refugee?" and demanded a formal response from the university.

The court has scheduled the next hearing for 20 July, pending clarifications from the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of External Affairs regarding refugee status and university admission guidelines.

A Myanmar refugee who previously graduated from an Indian university using a refugee card noted that securing admission to Delhi University is highly competitive, even for Indian citizens.

Meanwhile, the Chin Students' Union (CSU) is assisting Myanmar nationals in securing admissions to Indian universities and colleges, having signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with several institutions.

India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, nor does it have a specific national framework for refugees. Consequently, displaced persons entering the country are generally processed as foreign nationals under the Foreigners Act of 1946.

While the Indian government directly recognizes and assists Tibetan and Sri Lankan refugees, asylum seekers from Myanmar, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iran must undergo UNHCR vetting to receive official refugee status.



Photo: Supplied

AROUND 1,000 IDPS FACE FOOD AND SHELTER SHORTAGES IN TAUNGDWIN AREA OF MINKIN TOWNSHIP

Approximately 1,000 internally displaced people in the Taungdwin area of Minkin Township, Sagaing Region, are facing severe food and shelter shortages more than three weeks after fleeing a military junta offensive launched on 23 June to secure the road section, according to local residents.

"With the prolonged displacement, we face food shortages. Since it is the rainy season, we urgently need tarpaulins for shelter. We worry about children contracting dengue fever, and there is currently no medical care available," a local male resident told Mizzima.

To secure the route, junta troops from the Northwestern Command advanced into Minkin through Yinmarbin and Kani townships with heavy reinforcements, residents said.

Junta forces torched approximately 150 homes across Htonegyi, Letpantaw, Kyaukmaw, Konemaw, and Seikthar villages in the Taungdwin area, residents said.

"I risked returning to my village only to find only the monastery left. Everything, including the school, was reduced to ashes. I have no home to return to, and I still fear the Pyu Saw Htee threat if I go back," a local CDM teacher said.

Local resistance forces reported nine clashes with the advancing junta column, resulting in dozens of military casualties, including officers. The Taungdwin area is located about 16 miles west of Minkin town.

Photo: KHRG

KHRG: 93% OF 44 DISPLACED KAREN WOMEN INTERVIEWED REPORT FEELING INSECURE

Ninety-three percent of the 44 displaced women interviewed by the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) in southeastern Myanmar said they feel insecure, according to a new KHRG report, which found that junta attacks on displacement camps and travel restrictions have prevented many from fleeing to safer areas.

From January 2024 to January 2026, KHRG interviewed 51 internally displaced people — 44 women and 7 men — across seven districts administered by the Karen National Union (KNU). In May 2026, KHRG also interviewed three community-based organizations providing cross-border aid, and the report additionally draws on 37 field reports submitted to KHRG by community members in southeastern Myanmar during 2024 and 2025.

The 70-page report, titled "Struggling Amid Fear: The Experiences of Women Facing Compounded Challenges of Displacement and Insecurity in Southeast Myanmar," documents both the rights violations driving displacement and the deprivations displaced people, particularly women, face as a result of displacement conditions, including hazardous living conditions, destroyed livelihoods, and a lack of access to essential healthcare.

The report says women are more vulnerable to gender discrimination in employment and to sexual and gender-based violence, and bear a disproportionate share of the consequences of these abuses.

"Villagers in Karen State have faced the hardships of displacement for decades, even before the military coup. However, women are disproportionately affected," Saw Albert, KHRG's Research and Advocacy Director, said in the release.

"Even while displaced, they are expected to manage all household duties and take on leadership roles to protect their communities. Additionally, they face a heightened risk of sexual violence by junta soldiers. Despite these hardships, our research shows that women demonstrate remarkable resilience and capability to overcome these challenges, and continue to play a pivotal role in resisting the military dictatorship," he added.

The number of displaced people in southeastern Myanmar has surged since the 2021 coup. There are currently over 1.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region, according to the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP).

Most respondents told KHRG they struggled to secure safe shelter, with many sleeping on bare ground in forests or caves with no overhead protection. Villagers often attempt to return home once immediate violence subsides, the report says, but are frequently forced into indefinite displacement as the military loots, destroys, and burns their villages, stripping them of food, belongings, and livelihoods.

Landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) make travel perilous, the report says, while rising crime exposes travelers — particularly women — to risks including robbery, kidnapping, and sexual violence.

Displaced women interviewed by KHRG also reported employment discrimination, saying employers generally prefer to hire men, and that women who are hired receive lower wages.

The report says the human rights violations committed by the military junta have caused mass displacement and a severe humanitarian crisis in southeastern Myanmar.



MYANMAR IMPLEMENTS MANDATORY MOBILE PHONE REGISTRATION FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS

Myanmar's military-controlled media said 14 July that international air travelers entering the country with mobile phones bought abroad must register each device with the junta's Central Equipment Identity Register, submitting passport copies, boarding passes and flight tickets within 30 days of arrival or face fines on top of applicable taxes, under a procedure detailed for Yangon, Naypyidaw and Mandalay international airports.

According to the notice, the requirement — issued by the CEIR and EIR System Project Steering Committee, the body that launched the registration system in March — is one part of a wider drive the junta has also extended to travelers entering through land border crossings and sea ports.

The system, known as CEIR, requires the International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number of every handset — not just its SIM card — to be logged before the device can connect to a network.

Myanmar's military has controlled the country since seizing power in a February 2021 coup and has steadily tightened its grip on telecommunications infrastructure as it battles a nationwide armed resistance. Handsets already in use were automatically added to an approved list if linked to a Myanmar SIM card by 31 March; those that missed the deadline were given a 30-day grace period before facing service blocks, taxes and penalties.

Beyond phone registration, returning travelers already face a separate requirement. The regime's Ministry of Labour ordered in January that migrant

workers returning from abroad report their arrival to authorities — a directive industry experts described as part of a broader effort to monitor and tax the diaspora while enforcing the junta's conscription law. The CEIR procedure adds a second layer of paperwork for much of the same population.

The financial cost of falling outside the system is visible elsewhere in the country. In Dawei, unregistered or untaxed mobile lines have been cut off under the same CEIR system, with users forced to pay up to 10,000 kyats (about \$3.20) in fees and taxes to restore service, according to monthly monitoring by the rights group Athan. Athan's data show the policy falls hardest on people returning from abroad with foreign-purchased handsets — the same population the new airport procedure now targets directly.

The Myanmar Internet Project, a digital rights research group, has said the registration system significantly upgrades the junta's surveillance capabilities. In its report on the rollout, the group said linking a handset's IMEI number to its SIM registration allows authorities to trace a device's movements and identify its user, and warned that the same database could let the regime remotely disable a handset or cut off an individual's communications.

The CEIR and EIR System Project Steering Committee has said mobile users can check a device's registration status or pay applicable taxes at ceir.gov.mm, or by calling the CEIR call centre at 1577 or 1755.

MYANMAR FACES HUMANITARIAN CRISIS WITH MILLIONS DISPLACED AND CRITICAL AID SHORTAGE

Nearly 3.8 million people are displaced across Myanmar and more than 16 million need humanitarian assistance, but international donors have funded less than half of this year's aid appeal and relief agencies have reached only a third of the people they are trying to help, the United Nations said in a report released 13 July.

Myanmar has been mired in conflict and economic collapse since the military's February 2021 coup, and the crisis has deepened further amid recent offensives, airstrikes and mass displacement across several regions, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which issued the update.

The shortfall is stark against the need. Donors had provided just 43 per cent of the \$890 million required for this year's response as of the report's release, OCHA said. Humanitarian partners reached only 1.6 million of the 4.9 million people targeted in the first quarter, and shelter assistance — among the most basic needs for people forced from their homes — reached just 110,000 people, or 3 percent of its annual target. Much of the aid that was delivered, OCHA said, was short-term or reduced in scale, leaving gaps even in areas partners could access.

Magway Region has been the hardest-hit area in recent months, with more than 100,000 people

displaced since mid-May by intensified clashes, military operations, airstrikes and shelling across Myaing, Pakokku, Pauk and Saw townships — more than 80,000 of them from Pakokku Township alone. State media made no apparent mention of the displacement; when Mizzima checked the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar's website the same week, its front page instead led with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing — who declared himself "president" in April — touring agricultural and education projects in the region.

Fighting has driven further displacement elsewhere. In Bago Region, an estimated 25,000 people fled around 30 villages in Okpho Township, where more than 80 houses were reportedly damaged or destroyed, and another 12,000 were displaced in Nattalin Township. In Kachin State, clashes and airstrikes in Shwegu Township displaced more than 10,000 people and caused civilian casualties. In Sagaing Region, fighting in Tamu Township displaced more than 2,200 people, including about 900 who crossed into India, where new border restrictions imposed 9 June left others stranded, too afraid to move toward nearby towns.

Fuel shortages linked to global market pressures and domestic supply constraints are compounding the crisis, OCHA said, with rationing and unstable power supplies disrupting health facilities, water systems and telecommunications in conflict-affected areas and driving up the cost of humanitarian operations.



Photo: AFP

166 ARRESTED IN YANGON SINCE APRIL, WITH 16 MORE IN FIRST TWO WEEKS OF JULY

At least 166 people have been arrested in Yangon since April, including 16 in the first two weeks of July alone, according to data compiled by the Rangoon Scout Network (RSN), which tracks military movements in the city. RSN recorded 150 arrests between April and June, and 16 more between 1 and 13 July.

An RSN official told Mizzima that junta forces are conducting arbitrary arrests through a range of methods, including targeting pedestrians, seizing individuals inside railway stations, and carrying out search-and-arrest operations inside factories and workshops.

"We have confirmed 16 arrest cases during the first two weeks of July. While some were reportedly taken for military conscription, the exact reasons for the majority of the arrests remain unconfirmed.

The clampdown intensified about 10 days before the start of military training. We expect to see an escalation in arrests starting around 15 July," the official said.

The highest number of arrests occurred in South Dagon, North Okkalapa, and Mingaladon townships, predominantly working-class areas.

"The situation is worse near the North Okkalapa bus terminal. People are being snatched one after another daily. Just the other day around 8:00 PM, my husband and I were returning from having snacks at the street corner when a person was forcefully bundled into an Alphard-type vehicle right in front of us. The vehicle then drove close to us, forcing us to run," a resident of North Okkalapa told Mizzima.

According to local residents, the majority of those targeted in these arrests are youth aged between 20 and 30.

Residents also said the junta has intensified collection of military service exemption fees and increased overnight guest-registration inspections to track down individuals.

The compulsory military service law enforced by the junta has reportedly reached Batch 27.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR AUTHORITIES ACCUSE FIVE MASONRY WORKERS OF MURDERING ITS ASTROLOGER, DR. PE NYAN

The Myanmar authorities have accused five masonry workers of murdering Sayadaw U Pyinnya Wuntha, also known as Dr. Pe Nyan, who served as the junta's astrologer, announcing late on 13 July that the men had been arrested.

The Sayadaw was found dead with stab wounds on the afternoon of 2 July inside a building at Sandaku Myaing Monastery in Ward 2, Hmawbi Township. The junta said investigators monitored monastery visitors and conducted local inquiries to identify the suspects.

Authorities arrested Hmawbi resident Ko Thet Paing Htun, also known as Paing Lay, on 11 July, followed by two other men in Hmawbi and one in Hlaing Tharyar Township. A fifth suspect was arrested on 12 July in Taungoo Township.

According to the junta's statement, interrogation reports indicate that the five suspects, all masonry workers, met at Ko Thet Paing Htun's house on 1 July and planned to rob Sandaku Myaing Monastery due to their financial difficulties. The junta said the men entered the monastery around 10:00 PM that night to commit the robbery and stabbed U Pyinnya Wuntha to death after he discovered them inside the building. The junta's statement said that after the killing, the men stole two mobile phones and 500,000 MMK (approx. US\$161), which they divided among themselves. The junta said it has recovered the murder weapons and the stolen phones.

The five suspects are currently detained at Hmawbi Myoma Police Station and face prosecution under Penal Code Sections 302 (murder) and 394 (voluntarily causing injury in committing robbery).

The arrests came more than a week after the killing. Local sources told Mizzima that police faced pressure over delays in solving the case, and that low-wage labourers and impoverished individuals near the monastery were arrested and coerced into confessing. Mizzima has not independently verified these claims.

U Pyinnya Wuntha served as a state-level astrologer and cosmologist for the military junta, including for former dictator Than Shwe. He had resided as a monk at Sandaku Myaing Monastery in Hmawbi Township since 2011 until his death.



The late Dr. Pe Nyan



Union Minister of Finance and Revenue
Dr. Kan Zaw. Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA MINISTER CLAIMS TAX REVENUE NEARLY TRIPLED SINCE COUP, AS WORLD BANK PROJECTS CONTINUED WEAK GROWTH

Tax revenue collected by the Myanmar military junta has nearly tripled since the 2021 coup, Union Minister of Finance and Revenue Dr. Kan Zaw told the junta-convened 2026 National Assembly on 13 July — even as the World Bank projects continued weak economic growth and residents report sharply rising costs.

Dr. Kan Zaw said tax revenue rose from approximately 4,912 billion kyats (approx. US\$1.58 billion) in the 2020-2021 fiscal year to 14,070 billion kyats (approx. US\$4.54 billion) in the 2025-2026 fiscal year — a nearly threefold increase over five years.

In the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the Ministry of Finance and Revenue collected 14,070 billion kyats against a revised target of 13,460 billion kyats (approx. US\$4.34 billion), achieving 105 per cent of the projection, he said.

Dr. Kan Zaw attributed the increased revenue to the phased implementation of a tax reform strategy, saying expanded use of online tax payments and digital tax return filings had reduced physical contact between tax officials and taxpayers. Since the coup, the junta has expanded tax bases, raised tax rates alongside the rising values of special goods, increased commercial taxes, and raised the commercial tax on gold trading from 1 per cent to 3 per cent, he said.

Commenting on the junta's tax policy, Tin Tun Naing, Minister of Planning, Finance and Investment for the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), wrote on his Facebook page in July 2024: "With the country's economy utterly ruined by power-mad dictators, the public is bearing the brunt of skyrocketing commodity prices. The defeated military council's heavy taxation is akin to adding insult to injury for the suffering citizens."

Myanmar's economy has contracted since the coup. According to the World Bank's Myanmar Economic Monitor, released 16 June 2026, growth is projected at just 2 per cent for the current 2026-2027 fiscal year, down from an earlier 3 per cent projection, following a global fuel-price shock linked to the conflict in the Middle East.

Tax hikes have also driven up consumer costs: a mobile SIM card that cost 1,500 kyats (approx. US\$0.48) before the coup was subject to a commercial tax of up to 20,000 kyats (approx. US\$6.45) during the coup period.

Dr. Kan Zaw said the national tax-to-GDP ratio rose from 5.07 per cent in the 2020-2021 fiscal year to 8.55 per cent in 2025-2026, and that the junta is aiming to raise it further to 9.5 per cent in the current 2026-2027 fiscal year.



BLOCKED **AID**, UNBROKEN PEOPLE

RESISTING JUNTA'S AID WEAPONIZATION

RESISTING THE MYANMAR JUNTA'S AID WEAPONIZATION: NEW REPORT

Progressive Voice, together with eight civil society organizations, have launched a follow-up briefing paper titled "Blocked Aid, Unbroken People: Resisting Junta's Aid Weaponization" on 22 July 2026. This new publication follows the August 2022 Briefing Paper, *Setting the Tinderbox Alight: The Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar's Dry Zone* (Sagaing, Magwe, and Mandalay Regions).

The new report paints a stark picture of the worsening humanitarian crisis across Myanmar's Dry Zone, encompassing Sagaing, Magwe and Mandalay regions. The report argues that the military junta is not only escalating attacks against civilians but is also systematically using humanitarian deprivation as a weapon of war.

Based on interviews with 32 humanitarian workers, human rights defenders and internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as extensive secondary research, the report concludes that the crisis has deteriorated significantly since their similar assessment was published in 2022.

According to the report, the junta has intensified its long-standing "Four Cuts" strategy, designed to sever resistance movements from food, funding, intelligence and recruits. However, the strategy has evolved beyond counter-insurgency into a campaign of collective punishment targeting entire civilian populations.

The report identifies airstrikes, arson attacks and widespread landmine use as the defining features of this campaign. Between February 2021 and December

2025, more than 6,500 airstrikes reportedly killed nearly 4,000 civilians and injured over 7,000 others. Air attacks have increasingly targeted villages, schools, religious sites, markets, health facilities and displacement camps, creating constant fear among civilians.

The destruction extends far beyond military operations. The report states that more than 121,000 civilian homes have been destroyed since the coup, with the crucible of Sagaing suffering the greatest devastation. Landmines have become another major obstacle to civilian survival, contaminating villages, farmland, schools and transport routes while preventing displaced families from safely returning home. The report also notes that civilians have reportedly been used as human shields and human minesweepers during military operations.

Forced military conscription has emerged as another major concern. Since introducing compulsory military service in February 2024, the junta is estimated to have forcibly recruited more than 100,000 people. Young men and women reportedly face arbitrary arrest, abduction and deployment to front-line combat, prompting many to flee their homes or leave the country altogether. Families often live in fear of detention or extortion if relatives are suspected of supporting resistance forces.

The humanitarian consequences are severe. Millions remain displaced, many for several years, unable to return because of continuing military occupation, shelling, landmine contamination and destroyed homes. The report estimates that Sagaing alone now hosts more than 1.3 million internally displaced people. Many survive in makeshift shelters on farmland, in monasteries or abandoned buildings with limited access to food, healthcare, clean water

or education. Livelihoods have collapsed as villages, crops, livestock and farming equipment have been systematically destroyed.

Compounding these hardships is the obstruction of humanitarian aid. The report argues that the junta deliberately blocks aid deliveries through checkpoints, administrative restrictions and violence against aid providers while international funding for Myanmar has declined sharply. Essential goods, including food, medicine, fuel, batteries and water equipment, are frequently restricted, leaving communities increasingly dependent on local civil society organizations.

Despite these immense challenges, the report highlights the resilience of local humanitarian networks. Community organizations continue to provide emergency food, cash assistance, healthcare, education and livelihood support through trusted local channels, often reaching communities inaccessible to international agencies.

The authors conclude that donors should prioritize direct, flexible funding for these locally led initiatives rather than working through junta-controlled structures, arguing that local organizations remain the most effective means of reaching Myanmar's most vulnerable populations.



Rohingya capsized at sea.
Photo: AFP

OVER 500 FEARED DEAD AS ROHINGYA BOATS CAPSIZE OFF MYANMAR COAST

More than 500 people, most of them Rohingya, are feared dead after two boats that left Myanmar's Rakhine State in late June capsized in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said 16 July.

If confirmed, the toll would nearly triple this year's known death count on what the agencies called one of the world's deadliest maritime routes.

One boat, carrying an estimated 250 people, lost contact with authorities shortly after departure, according to preliminary information cited by the two agencies. A second, carrying about 280 people, is believed to have sunk off Myanmar's Ayeyarwady coast on 8 July. Passengers on both boats reportedly included Rohingya who had traveled from refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Neither the incidents nor the casualty figures have been officially confirmed.

IOM and UNHCR noted the boats sailed outside the region's regular sailing season, when maritime conditions are typically more hazardous, and that recent torrential rain and flooding had further raised the risks. If verified, the deaths would add to nearly 300 people already reported missing or dead this year in the

Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal, a toll that includes both Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi nationals.

The agencies linked the reported sinkings to worsening conditions inside Myanmar, where fighting has recently intensified in Rakhine State townships including Kyaukpyu, Ponnagyun and Sittwe, driving further displacement, according to a separate UN humanitarian report released 13 July. IOM and UNHCR said protracted conflict and displacement, combined with limited assistance and opportunities in Bangladesh's refugee camps, continue to push growing numbers of Rohingya to attempt the dangerous sea journey in search of safety.

The agencies also pointed to smuggling and trafficking networks that they said continue to exploit the desperation of people seeking safety, and called for stronger search-and-rescue efforts, greater access to asylum and protection, and action against those networks. While acknowledging Bangladesh's role hosting Rohingya refugees for years, IOM and UNHCR called for sustained international support for both refugees and the communities hosting them.



Photo: AFP

WHO BUILT THIS SYSTEM OF DEATH THAT HAS SEEN THOUSANDS OF ROHINGYA PERISH AT SEA?

MISBAH MUSHOROF

The Myanmar military created the system that drove the Rohingya from their homeland. The Arakan Army must not be allowed to continue that persecution under a different flag.

A boat does not become a coffin only because of bad weather. Long before it sinks, political decisions have already pushed its passengers toward the sea. Citizenship is removed, villages are attacked, movement is restricted, and access to education, healthcare and work is blocked. When every safe path is closed, even an overcrowded boat can begin to look like an escape.

More than 500 people, mostly Rohingya, are now feared lost after two boats reportedly disappeared off Myanmar's coast. One vessel was said to be carrying about 250 passengers when contact was lost after it left Rakhine State in late June. Another, carrying around 280 people, is believed to have sunk near the Ayeyarwady coast on July 8. UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration say the reports are still being investigated, so the exact number of victims has not been confirmed.

That distinction matters, but uncertainty must not become an excuse for silence. More than 500 families may be waiting for news that will never come. A conservative compilation of UN figures and current reporting indicates that more than 3,400 Rohingya have been reported dead or missing at sea since the 2017

genocide. The true number may be higher because some boats disappear unrecorded and many bodies are never found. Every number was a person with a name, a family and a reason for risking the journey.

The deeper question is not only how these boats disappeared. It is why so many Rohingya believed that a dangerous sea journey was safer than remaining on land.

The Myanmar military carries the greatest historical responsibility. For decades, Myanmar authorities treated the Rohingya as foreigners in their own homeland. The 1982 Citizenship Law effectively denied most Rohingya citizenship, while other policies restricted movement, education, employment, marriage and healthcare. The military did not attack only Rohingya bodies; it also attacked Rohingya identity.

In August 2017, this discrimination became mass violence. Villages were burned, civilians were killed, women and girls faced sexual violence, and more than 750,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh. The military cannot separate itself from today's boat tragedies because it created the conditions that produced them. It removed citizenship, destroyed villages and made

equal life inside Myanmar impossible. The Myanmar military built the prison, and the sea became one of the few exits.

The Arakan Army did not create the 1982 Citizenship Law or lead the military's 2017 campaign. That responsibility belongs mainly to the Myanmar military and state. But the AA now controls large parts of northern Rakhine State, including areas where Rohingya have lived for generations. Control brings responsibility.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have reported severe movement restrictions, forced labour, arbitrary detention, recruitment, property seizure and limits on farming, fishing, healthcare and humanitarian assistance in AA-controlled areas. Human Rights Watch has also accused AA fighters of killing at least 170 Rohingya civilians in Hoyyar Siri village in May 2024. The United League of Arakan, the AA's political wing, denied responsibility.

The AA has the right to respond, but denial is not accountability. If its leaders believe the accusations are false, they should allow independent investigators into areas they control, protect witnesses and cooperate with international justice mechanisms. The Myanmar military has spent years denying massacres and blocking investigations. The Arakan Army must not follow the same path. A movement does not become democratic simply because it fights a dictatorship. Liberation cannot mean freedom for one ethnic group and fear for another.

The Rohingya are trapped between two armed powers. The Myanmar military has forcibly recruited Rohingya men and boys to fight the AA, even while denying them citizenship. It refuses to recognise them as equal citizens but demands their blood when it needs soldiers. This also puts whole communities at risk because the AA may then view ordinary Rohingya civilians as military collaborators. A young man can be forced to fight by one side and punished by the other. That is not a real choice; it is a trap.

The danger does not end when Rohingya reach Bangladesh. Landslides in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps have killed civilians, including children, and displaced thousands. Heavy rain is natural, but the conditions that make it deadly are political. The rain did not remove Rohingya citizenship, burn villages or force families across the border. The genocide did. Rohingya families also face kidnapping, extortion and murder by armed groups and criminal networks inside the camps. The refugee community is not the perpetrator; it is the

main victim.

Responsibility is shared, but it is not equal. The Myanmar military carries the greatest responsibility because it built the system of statelessness, persecution and forced displacement. The Arakan Army carries responsibility for its treatment of Rohingya civilians and must answer serious allegations of killings, forced labour, recruitment, detention and movement restrictions. Traffickers and camp-based criminal groups also carry direct responsibility, while regional governments and the international community must answer for failures of rescue and protection.

Responsibility for the two latest missing boats has not yet been established. An independent investigation must determine who organised the journeys, who collected the money, who controlled the departure areas and what authorities knew. The investigation cannot stop at the water. It must follow the chain from the village to the broker, from the checkpoint to the shore and from the boat organiser to every authority that failed to act.

The Myanmar military built the machinery of Rohingya persecution. The Arakan Army must not be allowed to inherit it, repaint it and operate it under a different flag. The Rohingya are not military tools, a demographic problem or a source of profit. They are human beings, and Arakan is their homeland too.

How many more must disappear before responsibility is followed by justice?

About the author

Misbah Mushorof is a Rohingya genocide survivor, human rights defender and researcher based in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. He writes about the Rohingya crisis, accountability, displacement and human rights in Myanmar and the region.

The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of Mizzima Media.



Photo: Antonio Graceffo

BURMA'S EDUCATION CRISIS: FUNDING GAPS, SCHOOL ACCESS, AIRSTRIKES, AND DISPLACEMENT

ANTONIO GRACEFFO, PHD

Burma's education system has faced decades of underinvestment, political interference and outdated teaching methods. Long before the 2021 military coup, the system emphasized rote memorization over critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving. Since the coup, armed conflict, economic collapse and widespread displacement have further weakened access to quality education, particularly in conflict-affected ethnic areas.

In eastern Shan State, teachers and students describe a learning environment built almost entirely on memorization. Classrooms rely on blackboards, chalk and government-issued textbooks, and teachers have little freedom to adapt lessons or introduce outside material even when directly relevant to the curriculum. A Shan school teacher, 38, whose identity is withheld for security reasons, has taught Grade 8 Burmese language for more than ten years. Her official monthly salary is approximately 350,000 kyat, about 3,000 Thai baht at the time of the interview, insufficient for a family in a border community where Thai currency is used for daily transactions.

"My husband is a farmer, and although our small rice field provides enough food for the family, our household still depends on additional income," she

said. "I teach private tuition after school because my government salary alone is not enough to support my family." She charges approximately 300 baht per student each month and said she would prefer not to teach the extra hours but has no alternative. "Almost every teacher offers private tuition," she said. "Many teachers focus more on tutoring after school because it provides additional income that their salaries cannot."

The reliance on tuition places a financial burden on families in rural and conflict-affected communities. Sai Nong, a Grade 7 Shan student, said his family's poverty leaves him no choice but to attend. "I don't want to attend private tuition because my family is poor," he said. "But I have no choice. Without attending tuition, I have very little chance of passing the examinations."

Ying Hseng Kham, 16, a Grade 10 student near the Thai-Burma border, said tuition has effectively replaced classroom instruction as the primary source of learning. "School contributes only about thirty percent of our learning," she said. "Tuition is much more important. If you miss school, it is usually manageable. If you miss tuition, your chances of failing the examination become much higher." Regular class time, she said, is largely spent identifying which textbook passages are likely to appear on exams, while private tuition sessions, costing

around 500 baht per month at the high school level, provide more detailed explanation and memorization technique. Her daily routine consists of "school during the day, tuition in the evening, wake up early to study, complete homework, and repeatedly read our textbooks aloud so we can memorize everything for the examinations."

The exam-driven system these students describe correlates with a steep national decline in exam participation. More than 900,000 students sat Burma's matriculation exam in 2020; by 2025 only about 200,000 did, according to ISP-Myanmar. Basic education enrollment fell from more than 9.7 million students in the 2019–20 academic year to 6.1 million in 2025–26, well short of the roughly 10 million students annual enrollment should reach based on population growth since 2018–19, a target missed for five consecutive years. Roughly 7 million school-age children in 2025–26 are missing basic education, about 53 percent of the estimated 13 million school-age population, based on the 2019 interim census and UNFPA figures.

National literacy figures remain dated and inconsistent. Burma's 2014 census, the country's last full national census, put adult literacy at 89.5 percent, with males at 92.6 percent and females at 86.9 percent. A separate series from the World Bank and UNESCO Institute for Statistics shows a lower adult literacy rate of 75.551 percent for 2016, with males at 80.012 percent and females at 71.847 percent. No more recent national literacy survey exists, so the effect of post-2021 conflict and displacement on literacy has not yet been captured in a single dataset.

UNICEF's 2026 appeal estimates 16.2 million people, including 4.9 million children, will require humanitarian assistance, with 3.4 million children in urgent need of learning support. The appeal cites 667,000 children reached with formal or non-formal education, including early learning. Over 3.5 million people were internally displaced as of mid-2025, nearly 30 percent of them children, and 55 percent of Burma's children live in poverty.

Government forces frequently strike schools and other civilian targets. In 2023 and 2024, 217 attacks on schools and 141 instances of military use of schools were verified. Between February 2021 and January 2025, more than 125,000 teachers lost their positions, at least 37 were killed, and around 500 were arrested, of whom 396 remain in detention, according to the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies. In 2024, more than 750 children were killed or maimed

in conflict, including at least 250 by landmines and explosive remnants of war. In the first half of 2025, 357 casualties from landmines and explosive ordnance were recorded nationwide, including 96 children.

The March 2025 earthquake compounded the crisis, adding to the number of displaced people and those in need of assistance, and damaging or destroying more than 2,600 schools, per AHA Centre data cited in a World Bank damage assessment.

Burma's original 2025 UN Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, covering the country's standing conflict-driven needs, was funded at only 17 percent of its \$1.1 billion target. A separate \$275 million Earthquake Flash Addendum, launched after the quake, drew stronger donor response, so combined funding across both appeals reached 26 percent by December, down from 39 percent in 2024. Within the original plan, the education sector received only 6.5 percent of its required 2025 funding.

The UNDP reports that nearly one in five young people, around 3 million, are not in employment, education, or training. The rate reaches 25 percent among women and rises to 42 percent in Kayah State and 32 percent in Rakhine State.

These numbers, however, must be treated with caution because data collection is heavily skewed toward government-controlled areas. In resistance-controlled areas, very few people have jobs, and many teenagers are out of school. Apart from serving in a resistance army or volunteering with ethnic aid organizations, most young people have little or nothing to do.

Repeated displacement also forces families and even entire camps to relocate frequently, creating further interruptions in children's education. Furthermore, there are very few universities in resistance-controlled areas, meaning that even teenagers who manage to complete high school are unlikely to pursue higher education unless they have the means to leave Burma and study in Thailand or another country.

Consequently, the war is creating a combined crisis of brain drain and declining educational outcomes. Both problems are more severe in resistance-controlled areas, where UN data is less reliable. As severe as the UNDP figures appear, the reality is likely much worse.

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

PROOF OF LIFE IS A TEST OF CONSCIENCE

Why the World Must Demand
Independent Verification of
Aung San Suu Kyi's Well-Being

BY **ALAN CLEMENTS**



For many months now, I have joined countless people around the world in asking one question of Myanmar's military authorities, and it is a question so simple, so fundamentally human, that no government claiming legitimacy should hesitate to answer it with complete transparency.

Where is Aung San Suu Kyi?

Is she alive? Is she receiving appropriate medical care? Is she physically safe? Is she able to communicate with her family and legal counsel? Can independent observers verify the repeated claims that she is "in good health"?

These are not political questions. They are moral questions. They concern the dignity of a human being who has spent much of her adult life sacrificing her own freedom in the hope that one day her country might know freedom as well.

The military authorities have periodically issued reassuring statements about her condition. They have asked the world to accept these declarations as sufficient evidence. Yet assertions are not evidence. Repetition is not proof. Propaganda, however often repeated, does not become truth merely because those in power insist upon it.

In every civilized society there exists a simple principle that transcends politics: extraordinary claims require independent verification. If a government insists that an internationally recognized political prisoner is healthy and being treated with dignity, then it should welcome impartial confirmation of those claims. Independent physicians, humanitarian organizations, legal representatives, or internationally respected observers should be permitted to verify her condition.

Such transparency would strengthen confidence rather than weaken it.

Instead, silence continues.

Silence breeds uncertainty, and uncertainty inevitably erodes trust.

Our campaign for Proof of Life has never been an act of hostility toward Myanmar. It has never been an attempt to inflame division or deepen conflict. Quite the opposite. It is rooted in the conviction that truth is the beginning of reconciliation and that transparency is the first step toward rebuilding trust between a government and its people.

Throughout my years living in Burma, I learned something that has never left me. Beneath every political identity beats a human heart. Soldiers love their children. Civil servants worry about aging parents. Doctors take an oath to heal. Monks pray for compassion. Teachers hope for wisdom. Farmers pray for rain. Mothers dream of peace. Fathers dream of security. These shared aspirations remind us that conscience belongs to no political party. It belongs to our common humanity.

That is why this appeal extends to everyone whose work brings them into contact with the institutions of the state. I do not ask for vengeance. I do not ask for betrayal born of hatred. I ask only that every individual remember that loyalty to truth is ultimately higher than loyalty to fear.

History has repeatedly demonstrated that authoritarian systems depend upon secrecy far more than they depend upon strength. They survive by persuading ordinary people that silence is safer than honesty and that obedience is nobler than conscience. Yet history also demonstrates that every enduring movement toward freedom begins when enough people quietly decide that truth deserves to be spoken.

The future of Myanmar will not be determined solely by generals or politicians. It will also be shaped by countless individuals who, in moments both public and private, choose integrity over intimidation and compassion over indifference. Moral courage rarely announces itself with fanfare. More often it appears in the quiet decision to tell the truth, to refuse participation in falsehood, and to insist that human dignity cannot be erased by imprisonment.

If you are in a position to encourage greater transparency, whether as a public official, a diplomat, a humanitarian worker, a journalist, a lawyer, a religious leader, or a concerned citizen, I urge you to do so through lawful and peaceful means. Ask for independent access. Support credible monitoring. Encourage impartial verification. Help ensure that facts replace speculation and that accountability replaces rumor.

This is not merely about one remarkable woman. It is about the moral character of a nation and the principles upon which any just society must stand. A government confident in its actions has nothing to fear from independent observation. Transparency is not a concession to weakness; it is evidence of confidence and respect for the rule of law.

The people of Myanmar have endured decades of military rule, repeated political upheaval, immense suffering, and extraordinary sacrifice. Yet despite everything, they continue to demonstrate resilience that astonishes the world. Their longing for freedom has not disappeared. Their hope has not been extinguished. Their commitment to dignity has survived imprisonment, censorship, exile, and violence.

That resilience deserves an answer.

The international community also bears responsibility. Governments committed to democratic principles should continue to raise this issue consistently and publicly. Regional organizations should make humanitarian transparency a priority. The United Nations and respected humanitarian institutions should continue seeking meaningful access and independent verification. Human rights organizations should persist in documenting the facts with care, accuracy, and integrity.

None of these actions constitute interference in the internal life of a nation. They reflect universal principles that recognize the equal worth of every human being.

There are moments in history when a single act of openness can change the trajectory of a nation. Allowing independent verification of Aung San Suu Kyi's well-being could become such a moment. It would not resolve Myanmar's profound political crisis overnight, but it would signal a willingness to replace secrecy with accountability and suspicion with evidence.

That would serve not only the people of Myanmar but also those who currently govern it, for no society is ultimately strengthened by concealment. Durable legitimacy grows from truth, transparency, and respect for human dignity.

My appeal, therefore, is both simple and urgent. Permit independent verification. Allow qualified observers to confirm Aung San Suu Kyi's health and well-being. Demonstrate through action what official statements alone cannot establish. Replace uncertainty with evidence. Replace rumor with fact. Replace secrecy with openness.

History has an extraordinary way of remembering those who choose conscience when conscience is most difficult. Every generation is presented with moments that test its moral imagination. This is one of those moments.

May we choose truth over convenience, compassion over fear, and dignity over silence. May we remember that the measure of a nation's greatness is not found in the power it exercises over its prisoners but in the humanity it extends to them. And may this call for proof of life become not merely a political demand but a lasting affirmation that no person, regardless of circumstance, should disappear from the sight of the world without independent witness.

The future of Myanmar will ultimately be written not by fear but by conscience. Let us have the wisdom and the courage to ensure that conscience prevails.

About the Author

Alan Clements is an author, former Buddhist monk ordained in Burma, and longtime human-rights advocate whose life's work has centered on conscience, nonviolence, and the struggle against authoritarian rule. He is the author of seventeen books, including *Conversation with a Dictator*, *Unsilenced: Aung San Suu Kyi—Conversations from a Myanmar Prison*, and *Politics of the Heart: Nonviolence in an Age of Atrocity*. For more than three decades he has worked closely with Burmese democracy leaders, former political prisoners, monks, and civil-society voices. His essays and interviews have appeared in international media across Asia, Europe, and the United States.

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



The Mekong River. Photo: Supplied

CHINA'S RESERVOIRS: TICKING TIME-BOMBS IN THE RAINY SEASON

SUN LEE

China has built more reservoirs and dams than any other country in the world, nearly 100,000 by official estimates. These massive water conservancy projects were intended to store water, generate electricity, and control floods. Yet, every rainy season, these very structures transform into ticking time-bombs. Instead of protecting lives, they often unleash devastation on downstream communities, exposing the fragility of China's dam infrastructure and the negligence of its management practices.

in early July, submerging houses up to rooftops. Some residents survived only by climbing onto rooftops, while others were swept away in the darkness.

This lack of transparency is not accidental. By releasing water unannounced, officials shift responsibility away from dam failures and frame disasters as "natural floods." But the truth is clear: these tragedies are man-made, the result of deliberate mismanagement.

Unannounced Water Releases: A Silent Killer

One of the most alarming practices is the government's repeated release of floodwaters without proper notice. Reservoir authorities frequently open floodgates at night, depriving downstream residents of precious escape time. Villagers are often asleep when torrents of water surge through their homes, sweeping away families, livestock, and livelihoods. As eyewitnesses from Hang Joe in Guangxi province reported, floodwaters surged through residential areas

The Collapse of Liulan Reservoir

The most recent catastrophe unfolded on July 6th, when the Liulan Reservoir in Na Ning, Guangxi province collapsed after days of torrential rain from Typhoon Mesa. Villagers reported that water began surging around 3:00 a.m., long before any official notice was issued. By 7:00 a.m., the dam had breached, sending torrents downstream. Entire towns such as Yanbiao and Yunbiao were submerged, with crops destroyed, fish ponds washed away, and hundreds of residents trapped without food, water, or electricity.

Local interviews revealed heartbreaking stories: elderly villagers swept away, families unable to contact loved ones, and entire communities cut off by collapsed roads and power outages. One villager estimated that over 100,000 people in Yunbiao Town alone were directly affected. The Nanning Emergency Management Committee later admitted that “most parts of Nanning City experienced heavy to torrential rain,” but their notices came too late for those already engulfed by floodwaters.

Substandard Construction: A Recipe for Disaster

The collapse of Liulan Reservoir was not an isolated incident. In fact, a 2022 notice from the Ning Municipal Water Resources Bureau revealed that 65 water conservancy projects had failed to complete required engineering quality checks. Among them was the Liulan Reservoir Reinforcement Project. Despite public concerns raised last year, authorities ignored warnings. The result was predictable: substandard construction gave way under pressure, and lives were lost.

This pattern is disturbingly familiar. Many of China's reservoirs were built decades ago with poor materials and rushed engineering. Their multiple functions power generation, irrigation, flood control often conflict, leaving them structurally vulnerable. When heavy rains arrive, these weaknesses are exposed, leading to collapses that devastate downstream communities.

Historical Parallels: The Banqiao Dam Collapse

China's dam disasters are not new. In August 1975, the Banqiao Reservoir in Henan province collapsed after a typhoon, releasing nearly 700 million cubic meters of water. The flood killed tens of thousands instantly and left hundreds of thousands more to perish from starvation and disease. The Discovery Channel later ranked it the world's deadliest technological disaster, estimating 240,000 deaths. Yet, the Chinese Communist Party suppressed information for decades, silencing survivors and hiding the scale of the tragedy.

Today, history repeats itself. The same secrecy, the same negligence, and the same disregard for rural lives

continue to define China's reservoir management.

The Human Cost

Behind every statistic lies human suffering. In Hengzhou, villagers described how floodwaters reached the second floor within hours, leaving families stranded without supplies. A grandmother filming the flood was swept away; her body has yet to be found. Her husband also perished that morning. These are not isolated tragedies, they represent the lived reality of thousands who face floods every year, not as natural disasters, but as consequences of systemic mismanagement.

Why This Matters

China's reservoir system is vast, but its management is deeply flawed. The government's profit-driven ideology prioritizes power generation and industrial needs over human safety. By failing to issue timely warnings, by ignoring engineering standards, and by silencing criticism, authorities perpetuate a cycle of disaster. Each rainy season becomes a gamble for millions living downstream: will the dams hold, or will they collapse again?

The widespread use of mobile phones and social media has made it harder for the government to hide these tragedies. Videos from villagers now expose the reality in real time, challenging official narratives. Yet, without accountability, the cycle will continue.

Conclusion

China's reservoirs were meant to symbolize progress, but they have become symbols of peril. Built with substandard materials, managed with secrecy, and unleashed without warning, they are ticking time-bombs waiting to explode each rainy season. Until transparency, accountability, and engineering integrity are prioritized, downstream communities will remain at risk sacrificed to a system that values control over compassion.

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



COMRADES IN ARMS

"Comrade," answers Renata, a member of the People's Defense Force and a former political prisoner, simply when asked how she would like to be remembered.

In this powerful interview, Renata frames her experience in the revolution through the lens of that identity, explaining that what binds her to the struggle is not abstract nationalism or personal ambition, but loyalty to people who have suffered, fought, been imprisoned, and died. She says she continues because of obligation to them, one formed through her own experiences: protests, arrest, prison, jungle survival, airstrikes, and the arrests of nearly every member of her family.

Before the coup, Renata was as a law student, and she describes her life as pretty ordinary: hitting the books and doing some office work. She volunteered with NGOs, partly to gain experience beyond school, and partly to understand how such organizations functioned. She was also shaped by a family ethic that emphasized service over self-interest. Her parents, she explains, taught her, "Be the one for the people, but not for yourself!"

When the coup occurred in 2021, she says she did not initially believe it would reshape her life so completely. At first, she was cautious. In her village, where military retaliation was widely feared, she avoided joining early street protests and instead participated online. She refers herself as a "keyboard fighter" during that period, acknowledging both fear and uncertainty about what

public protest might ultimately cost. Over time, however, as shootings and crackdowns intensified, she felt compelled to participate directly in physical protest.

As the junta's repression intensified, her attempt to join an ethnic armed organization (EAO) was rejected because she was not a member of that ethnic community. She then began learning to make Molotov cocktails and small bombs using online tutorials, producing them at home for her brother and his friends. She describes this shift not as ideological escalation but as practical response to constraint: when one door closed, she searched for another.

In June 2021, she was arrested by the junta and imprisoned along with her mother and her four-year-old sister; her sister was the youngest political prisoner in the country at that time, and soon released to live with a neighbor. Renata was sentenced to three years with hard labor. Prison, she says, was not simply confinement, but a form of psychological injury, and she has experienced persistent trauma since. She contracted COVID-19 during her incarceration and was placed alone in a cold room without proper treatment for roughly twenty days. She survived through immersing herself in breath meditation. "I just know, 'Breathe in and breathe out,'" she says, describing it less as spiritual practice than survival. The authorities also pressured her to reveal the location of her father, who had been politically active before the coup; she refused. She says it was not heroism on her part, but family devotion: if continued imprisonment was the price she had to pay for safeguarding family members, she accepted it. Finally, after serving four months of her sentence, she agreed to sign a pledge not to participate in further revolutionary activity in order to get an early release.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/6/22/episode-559-comrades-in-arms>



MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER TO MEET THAI PM AUGUST 6-7 IN BANGKOK

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing will meet with Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul over August 6 and 7 in Bangkok, Thailand's foreign minister told AFP on 21 July.

Sihasak Phuangketkeow confirmed the sit-down after what he said was a "frank and candid" discussion with Southeast Asian foreign ministers in Manila on how best to pursue Myanmar's return to the diplomatic fold.

While still a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Myanmar has been formally excluded from the bloc's major meetings since the junta's 2021 coup toppled Aung San Suu Kyi's democratically elected government.

Thailand, which shares a long border with civil war-torn Myanmar and hosts millions of its refugees, has been leading a push for the pariah state's reintegration that has exposed deep divisions among members.

On Tuesday, Sihasak told AFP that coup leader turned president Min Aung Hlaing's upcoming visit to Thailand was part of "a dual-track approach".

"There are pressing bilateral issues we have to deal with, issues of ... transnational crime, scams, or the issue of drugs," he said, adding the approach did not mean an abandonment of ASEAN's long-standing five-point peace plan.

But he also said he had asked ASEAN counterparts to think about "how we measure progress" at a recent meeting in Bangkok with Myanmar Foreign Minister Tin Maung Swe.

"If the government in Myanmar provides access (to Suu Kyi) to the ASEAN special envoy, is that a measure of progress? If there's some reduction of violence, let's say along the Thai-Myanmar border ... is that progress?"

"Our point was that we have to be realistic," he said. "It's not going to happen overnight. Some progress will come incrementally."

He added that he hoped that the heavily restricted elections that saw coup leader Min Aung Hlaing installed as president would open the door to fresh talks with the country's armed ethnic groups and democratic opposition.

"Maybe we can help facilitate dialogue with those ethnic groups along the Thai side of the border," he added. "That's the building block."

Earlier in the day, Philippine Foreign Minister Theresa Lazaro had said the bloc was considering the appointment of a long-term, permanent envoy to Myanmar, conceding the current yearly rotation system had "not really been effective".

AFP



MYANMAR WANTS A SCAM CRACKDOWN, NOT A STARLINK BLACKOUT

Sudden cuts to Starlink satellite internet were dominating conversation on Myanmar's Facebook and Telegram channels last week, as residents in conflict areas describe losing their only reliable link to the outside world.

Since a 2021 coup, Myanmar's military has restricted telecom access in more than 130 townships, leaving communities reliant on Starlink. The same service has powered Myanmar's cyber-scam industry, where trafficking victims are forced into online fraud from compounds like KK Park near the Thai border. After a US congressional inquiry, SpaceX disabled 2,500 scam-linked terminals in October, then began a broader, unannounced wave of shutdowns on 2 July.

Reaction on Facebook backs the anti-scam goal but questions the method. "They should check which Starlinks the scam gangs use before cutting those off,"

one user writes, warning that a blanket ban leaves innocent people worse off. Others say the ban strips war refugees of a vital early-warning system against airstrikes, with one commenter calling on SpaceX and Washington to "study this carefully" rather than risk more lives.

On 17 July, more than 200 Myanmar civil society groups sent a joint letter to the US government, SpaceX and international bodies, echoing it: they back the anti-scam effort but say the newest bans are hitting Magway, Sagaing and Rakhine, states far from known scam hubs, and want SpaceX to restore the unrelated terminals.

Starlink has no licensed service in Myanmar, but for schools, hospitals and aid groups already cut off by years of state blackouts, it remains the only alternative.

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.