

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



US & ASEAN

**Washington relies on
ASEAN's 5-Point
Consensus to deal with
the Burma crisis**

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio
on visit to Southeast Asia

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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

BEWARE THE 'TEAHOUSE WARRIORS'

The Myanmar revolution has never been fought only on the battlefield. It has also been fought in the realm of information, morale and public confidence. As the armed resistance and civilian movement continue their struggle against military rule, another challenge has emerged - one that comes not from junta airstrikes or artillery, but from persistent voices claiming the revolution is failing while contributing little to its success.

Within Myanmar, resistance forces continue to operate under extraordinary conditions. People's Defence Forces (PDFs), Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs), local defence groups and countless civilian supporters endure daily risks that include airstrikes, arrests, displacement and severe shortages of food and medical supplies. Their assessment of the conflict is inevitably shaped by the realities they experience on the ground rather than by online speculation.

Yet social media has increasingly become home to self-appointed commentators who confidently declare that the resistance has reached a dead end. Many of these critics are far removed from events inside Myanmar. Some left the country years ago. Others have never visited resistance-held territory or spoken directly with those leading operations. Nevertheless, they offer sweeping conclusions about military setbacks, political divisions and the supposed inevitability of junta victory.

Constructive criticism is essential in any democratic movement. No revolution should be immune from scrutiny, debate or honest assessment. Resistance organizations have made mistakes and continue to face significant political and military challenges. Open discussion of strategy and accountability is healthy and necessary.

The problem arises when criticism becomes detached from reality and evolves into relentless pessimism that undermines morale without offering practical alternatives. Constant declarations that the resistance is losing can become a form of psychological warfare, whether intentional or not. Such narratives are readily exploited by the military junta, whose own propaganda has consistently sought to portray the resistance as fragmented, exhausted and on the verge of collapse.

Those risking their lives inside Myanmar understand that victory was never likely to come quickly. The revolution is now several years old because dismantling a deeply entrenched military dictatorship is an immensely difficult undertaking. Progress has often been uneven, with gains in some regions offset by setbacks in others. That is the nature of prolonged conflict rather than proof of inevitable defeat.

Supporters abroad have an important role to play. They can advocate internationally, raise humanitarian assistance, support independent media and provide financial assistance to communities resisting military rule. They can also contribute thoughtful analysis that acknowledges both successes and failures without surrendering to despair.

What Myanmar's revolution does not need is a chorus of "teahouse warriors" whose greatest contribution is spreading defeatism from the safety of keyboards and café tables. The future of Myanmar will ultimately be decided not by those who endlessly speculate online, but by the people who continue to sacrifice, organize and resist under some of the world's most dangerous conditions. Their resilience deserves informed support rather than careless pessimism disguised as expertise.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Southeast Asia by AFP



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio speaks on a visit to Bangkok. Photo: AFP

US & ASEAN

WASHINGTON RELIES ON ASEAN'S 5-POINT CONSENSUS TO DEAL WITH THE BURMA CRISIS

Burma's future appears to hinge on ASEAN's efforts to bring peace. Despite the fact the 5-Point Consensus is close to dead in the water, international diplomatic efforts to tackle the Burma crisis seem to revolve around a deal signed by ASEAN and the Burma junta leader in April 2021 – an agreement recently officially rejected by the junta parliament.

On US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's latest visit to Southeast Asia, the US commitment to the region was on display, including a \$2.5 billion security package, support for free international sea lanes, a commitment to tackle scam centers and money laundering in the region, and an adherence to ASEAN's line on Burma.

IMPOSING SANCTIONS

Secretary Rubio attended the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting last week, with the Burma crisis as one of the subjects on the agenda. While the US has clamped down with sanctions on Burma's illegal junta, brought in after the February 2021 military coup that ousted elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, Washington currently appears to be leaning on ASEAN to tackle the Burma crisis.

US Ambassador to ASEAN Mr Kevin Kim gave a press briefing on 24 July on the US participation in the ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting last week, attended by Secretary Rubio, in which Mr Kim mentioned the US stance on the Burma crisis and joint efforts to deal with

illegal scam centers in Burma and the region.

"Secretary Rubio had an incredibly successful trip to Manila, engaging with ASEAN and regional leaders to advance the U.S. vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific," Ambassador Kim said. "Secretary Rubio, through his engagements both in multilateral and bilateral settings, was able to reaffirm our commitment to ASEAN centrality, strengthened the U.S.-Philippines alliance, and bolstered many of our relationships – key relationships here in Southeast Asia. And I think at the core, this all stems from the fact that President Trump last year at Kuala Lumpur stated that the United States is with ASEAN 100 percent."

RESPECTING THE PLAN

In response to a question in the press briefing, Ambassador Kim said that while the US has its own position on the Burma crisis, it "respects ASEAN's 5-Point Consensus" (5PC) peace plan.

"ASEAN as an institution operates based on consensus, so the United States respects ASEAN's decision to form a consensus regarding the Five-Point Consensus," Ambassador Kim said. "The United States will of course have its own perspective on the issue – the ongoing issues in Burma, but we will always work with ASEAN on any issues where it's formed a consensus."

The 5-Point Consensus plan is as follows: First, there shall be immediate cessation of violence in Bur-



US Ambassador to ASEAN Mr Kevin Kim, left, with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio at a meeting in Bangkok. Photo: AFP

ma and all parties shall exercise utmost restraint. Second, constructive dialogue among all parties concerned shall commence to seek a peaceful solution in the interests of the people. Third, a special envoy of the ASEAN Chair shall facilitate mediation of the dialogue process, with the assistance of the Secretary General of ASEAN. Fourth, ASEAN shall provide humanitarian assistance through the AHA Centre. Fifth, the special envoy and delegation shall visit Burma to meet with all parties concerned.

Five years after the coup, there has been little or no forward momentum through this plan to deal with the crisis.

Ambassador Kim noted Rubio's "successful visit" to Southeast Asia and his attendance at the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting. Secretary Rubio met with a number of Southeast Asian leaders. He stressed the importance the US put on a free and open Indo-Pacific, open international sea lanes, and reaffirmed the "centrality of ASEAN", a key relationship for Washington. Burma was on the agenda but only in terms of ASEAN's approach using the 5PC.

FALLOUT FROM IRAN WAR

Foreign ministers from fuel-stressed Southeast Asia called for freedom of navigation in international straits as they wrapped up a week of meetings largely overshadowed by the US-Iran war.

A joint communique issued at the ASEAN gathering in Manila also repeated calls for self-restraint in a Middle East conflict that has carried economic ripple effects throughout the region. All countries, including Burma, have been negatively affected by the lowering of fuel supplies and rise in prices.

Visiting US Secretary Rubio warned ASEAN envoys that Iranian control of the Strait of Hormuz would set a "dangerous precedent".

"There is a fundamental principle about freedom of navigation that is threatened," he told media.

US BACKS SECURITY FOR SOUTH-EAST ASIA

In the 24 July press briefing, Ambassador Kim mentioned the \$2.5 billion Washington was investing in security in Southeast Asia.

"The US wants to work with ASEAN for stability and security in the region," he said.

This includes joint efforts to deal with transnational crimes including money laundering and cracking down on illegal scam centers, the latter a problem in a number of countries including Burma. The US Federal Bureau of Investigation has been working with a number of countries to tackle this issue, in part because of the negative effects posed to Americans through the scams, Ambassador Kim noted.

DEALING WITH THE BURMA CRISIS

The ASEAN foreign ministers have faced the difficult question of how to deal with the Burma crisis. Burma has been formally excluded from such summits like last week's since the country's military junta seized power in 2021.

In May, the bloc's leaders emerged from an emotional meeting in Cebu that ended with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos calling for a "fine-tuning" of the long-stalled 5-Point Consensus to end Burma's bloody civil war.

ASEAN members appear to have mixed views of how to tackle the challenge of bringing Burma back into the fold, given it has not only failed to adhere to the 5-Point Consensus but also formally rejected it.

Burma's military-backed parliament in Naypyidaw officially passed a motion last week rejecting ASEAN's 5-Point Consensus, dismissing the "regional peace roadmap" as "foreign interference in domestic political sovereignty".

CRITICS' FEARS

Critics of the junta have claimed that the invitation to the Burmese foreign minister to a recent "informal" ASEAN meeting offered an element of legitimacy when the Burmese junta has failed to provide any action or progress on the 5PC.

None of the five points have been adhered to and Naypyidaw has given it the official thumbs down.

This effectively puts the ball back into ASEAN's court. Yet ASEAN appears to be split. The Philippines – currently the chair of ASEAN with minister Theresa Lazaro as Special Envoy for Burma – is under attack.

The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) criticized the Philippines for poor judgment and a failing approach in handling its ASEAN chairmanship regarding the Burma crisis.

Specifically, SAC-M rebuked Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary and ASEAN Special Envoy Lazaro for convening an informal meeting with the Burma junta's foreign minister in Thailand without securing any concessions from junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) dismissed the SAC-M statements as "malicious and misleading". The Philippines maintained that its diplomatic strategy remains firmly anchored in ASEAN's 5PC and involves engaging all stakeholders in the conflict.

The Philippines is now suggesting the ASEAN Special Envoy for Burma needs to be a long-term role – not changed every year.

A MORE PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Meanwhile, Thailand is adopting a pragmatic, "calibrated re-engagement" policy on Burma, focusing on informal dialogue, border security, and regional bridge-building rather than strict isolation.

Driven by a 2,400-kilometer shared border, Bangkok aims to manage acute spillover effects like refugees, illicit trade, toxic haze, and polluted rivers. Bangkok appears to be pushing to reintegrate Burma into ASEAN frameworks using a four-point metric checklist - reducing violence, expanding humanitarian aid, sustaining peace talks, and releasing political prisoners. In addition, they have been hosting Track 1.5 and informal regional consultations in places like Bangkok and Pattaya to bridge gaps between the Burma junta and ASEAN.

In addition, Bangkok has been demanding that Burma's military regime grant the ASEAN Special Envoy physical, face-to-face access to detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi to verify her well-being. They have been facilitating informal talks involving ASEAN ministers, Burma's foreign ministry representatives, and select ethnic armed organizations.

Thailand has also offered an invitation to Burmese junta leader Min Aung Hlaing to visit Bangkok on 6-7 August.

DANGERS OF SOFT RE-ENGAGEMENT

Needless to say, critics and pro-democracy networks argue that soft re-engagement undermines formal ASEAN consensus and provides a diplomatic lifeline to a weakened military regime.

Certain member states favour complete isolation of the generals, creating friction with Bangkok's neighbour-first, practical mediation strategy.

Lack of ASEAN unanimity has clouded the drive to hold the Burmese junta to account. And it makes it more difficult for Western countries supporting Burmese freedom, democracy and resistance to know what path to back.

Western countries, including the US, say they are committed to tackling the Burma crisis. But where is reliance on ASEAN leading?

Sources: Mizzima, US government, AFP



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio attends an ASEAN meeting. Photo: AFP

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



TNLA fighters.
Photo: AFP

TNLA HOLD TALKS WITH THE JUNTA IN NAYPYIDAW

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), a member of the Northern Three Brotherhood Alliance, held a rare round of talks with Myanmar's military regime in Naypyidaw on July 19, highlighting growing political and military pressures facing one of the country's most influential ethnic armed organizations.

The TNLA delegation was led by Vice Chair Tar Gyoke Gyar and External Relations Officer Tar Moe Hein, accompanied by six other representatives. While the junta described the meeting as part of its ongoing "peace process," political observers argue that the talks reflected strategic calculations rather than any genuine breakthrough toward peace.

Analysts say the TNLA's primary objective is to preserve security and stability in the territories it still controls, while navigating increasing pressure from China. During Operation 1027, the TNLA captured 12 towns, including several strategically located along the China-Myanmar trade corridor. However, following sustained Chinese pressure, the group relinquished a number of those towns to the military. It now maintains control over Namkham, Manton, Namtu, and Namhsan, while Kutkai is administered by its ally, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).

The shrinking territory under TNLA control has increased the importance of consolidating its remaining strongholds. Analysts believe this, together with Beijing's continued pressure for border stability and negotiations, explains the group's willingness to engage with the junta despite deep mutual distrust.

Political observers caution against interpreting the meeting as meaningful peace negotiations. They note that neither side has demonstrated confidence in the other, making substantive agreements unlikely. Instead, the talks are viewed as part of the junta's broader political strategy after junta leader Min Aung Hlaing declared himself president and launched a 100-day initiative to hold separate discussions with individual ethnic armed organizations. China has also reportedly encouraged members of the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC), including the TNLA, to participate in the process in an effort to stabilize the border region.

The meeting has nevertheless triggered criticism from some supporters of Myanmar's resistance movement, who accuse the TNLA of legitimizing the military regime by engaging in direct talks. Political analysts, however, argue that the organization is operating under multiple constraints, including Chinese diplomatic pressure, changing dynamics among allied ethnic armed groups, and the need to safeguard the security and administration of its remaining territories.

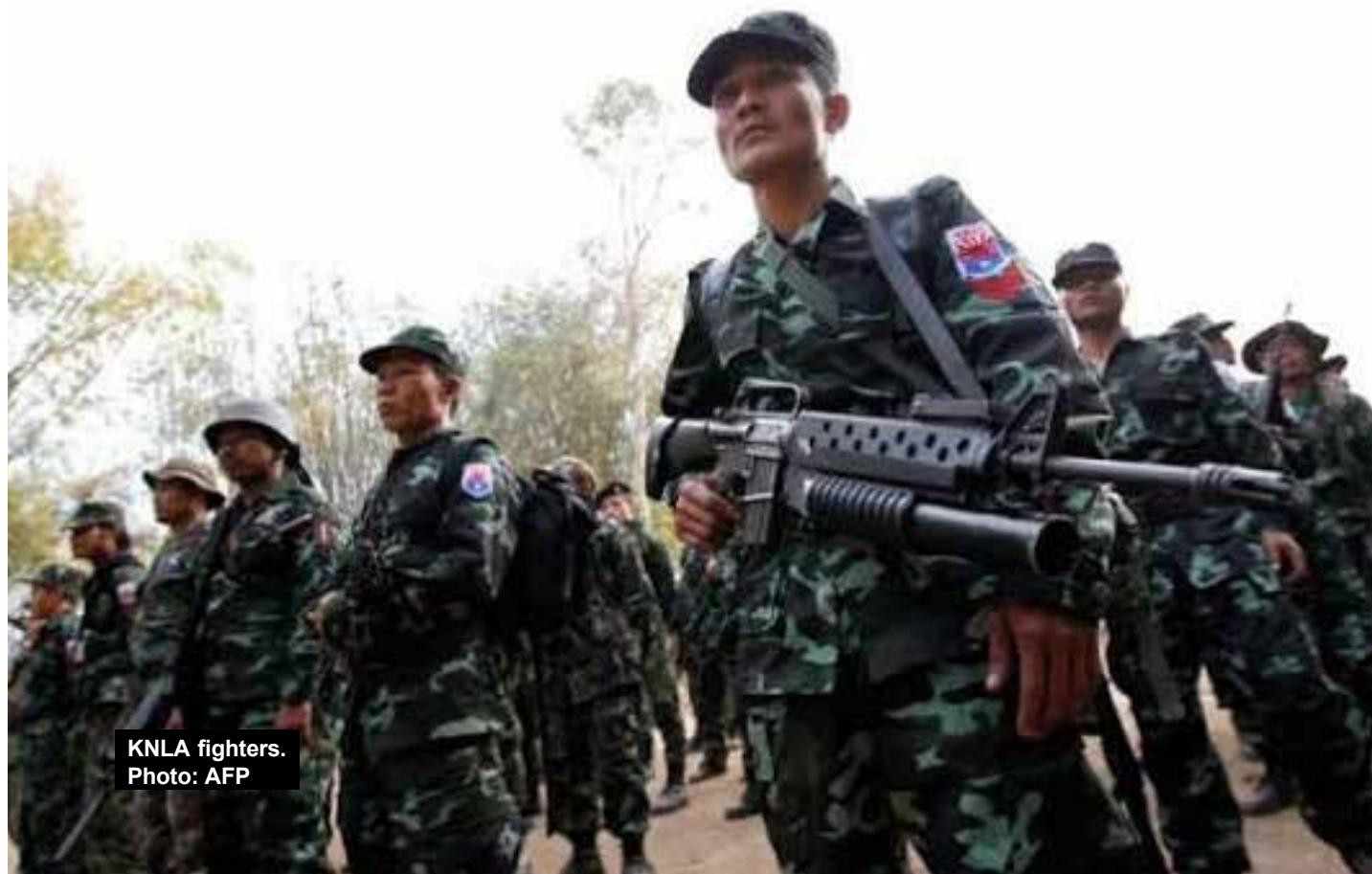
Following the meeting, purported discussion notes circulated widely on social media. A source close to

Naypyidaw told local media that the documents, which were intended to remain confidential, were deliberately leaked by the junta to sow distrust among revolutionary forces. The leaked notes indicated that the TNLA proposed recognition of a Ta'ang State, while the junta responded that such a demand would have to proceed through a parliamentary process, arguing that self-administered status had already been granted.

Fighting intensifies in Karen State

The Myanmar military has intensified its offensives in Karen State, launching simultaneous operations in the south around Myawaddy and in the north toward Hpapun in an apparent effort to regain lost strategic ground along the Thai-Myanmar border. Despite deploying large numbers of troops, reinforced by allied militias and sustained airpower, junta columns continue to face determined resistance from the Karen National Union (KNU) and its allied revolutionary forces.

South of the border trade hub of Myawaddy, the junta is attempting to reconnect with its remaining strategic stronghold at Wawlay, the last military outpost under its control in southern Myawaddy. Military sources say



KNLA fighters.
Photo: AFP

the operation is being led by the No. 22 Light Infantry Division and the No. 13 Military Operations Command, supported by breakaway factions of the Border Guard Force (BGF) and the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA).

The Wawlay outpost lies roughly 60 kilometers south of Myawaddy in a straight line and has become a key objective for the junta as it seeks to restore its military presence along the border. However, resistance forces have mounted fierce counterattacks around Phalu, Min Let Pan, and Lay Kay Kaw, preventing junta troops from making significant advances despite their numerical superiority and heavy firepower.

A Karen military source told local media that fighting continues daily in multiple locations. "There were engagements again today in at least three areas. Every time clashes occur, the junta column is forced to retreat," the source said, referring to the ongoing battles near Lay Kay Kaw.

Clashes have also intensified in the Phalu area after junta troops advanced into KNU-controlled territory with guidance from local pro-junta militias familiar with the terrain. As resistance stiffened, the military increasingly relied on airstrikes to support ground operations. On July 28, a junta aircraft dropped a 500-pound bomb on a monastery in the Three Layer Curve area, killing a monk and destroying several buildings within the monastery compound.

Meanwhile, in northern Karen State, the military is mounting another major operation aimed at reinforcing its strategic headquarters in Hpapun, the last remaining junta stronghold in the township after KNU-led forces captured most of Hpapun town in March 2025. The resistance has since surrounded the junta headquarters and two remaining military battalions, leaving them largely isolated.

To break the encirclement, the junta has assembled a force reportedly numbering around 2,000 troops, including newly conscripted soldiers, at Myaing Gyi Ngu, the headquarters of the DKBA. With logistical support from the DKBA and the Karen National Army (KNA), the military is attempting to transport food, ammunition, and reinforcements through Kamarmaung toward Hpapun.

The operation has been underway since early June, with junta forces gradually advancing along the Hpapun-Kamarmaung route. After securing Kataiti village, roughly one-third of the distance to Hpapun, the column has recently established a position at Hpar Lay Lone village. However, KNU, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), and allied revolutionary forces continue to launch near-daily attacks on the advancing column, forcing the military to rely heavily on air support and artillery fire from the strategic bases at Kataiti and Kamarmaung.

A local resident told Mizzima that the junta's advance has been much slower than expected. "They are still around Myaing Gyi Ngu and have not even reached Kamarmaung. The column is being filled up to around 2,000 personnel, many of them newly conscripted," the source said.

The simultaneous offensives in southern Myawaddy and northern Hpapun underscore the military's determination to preserve its remaining footholds in Karen State. Yet the slow progress of both operations, despite superior manpower, airpower, and support from allied militias, illustrates the growing challenges the junta faces in reclaiming territory from increasingly coordinated resistance forces.

Arrests admitted in military conscription drive

The Myanmar military regime has publicly acknowledged that it is arresting eligible conscripts who refuse to report for military service, an admission that lends further support to widespread reports of forced recruitment across the country.

During the junta's third session of its military-appointed parliament, Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Major General Min Thu responded to questions raised by Hkamti representative Gonwone regarding allegations of forced conscription. The representative pointed out that authorities had been detaining eligible youths at roadblocks, town entrance checkpoints, and even inside homes, exceeding the powers granted under the Conscription Law and its implementing regulations. He also noted that some of those arrested were students.

In response, Min Thu argued that the arrests were necessary because many eligible youths were attempting to evade military service. He acknowledged that security personnel had been conducting inspections along travel routes and at residences to summon or detain draft evaders, actions that "appear to the public as forced arrests." His remarks amount to one of the clearest public admissions by the junta that security forces are actively pursuing those who refuse conscription.

The admission comes as reports of arbitrary recruitment continue to emerge from different parts of Myanmar. In Patheingyi, a 17-year-old Grade 12 student was reportedly seized from the student hostel where he was staying on the night of July 23, despite being below the legal conscription age. A local resident told DVB that soldiers, accompanied by men in civilian clothes, forcibly arrested the teenager during the nighttime operation.

Another controversial case involved 26 Myanmar fishermen who were repatriated from Port Blair, India. After arriving in Myanmar by air on July 23, the returnees were reportedly registered by junta authorities and sent directly to military training instead of being allowed to return to their families.

Forced recruitment has also intensified along the Bagan-Nyaung U tourist route, where junta authorities and pro-military militias have reportedly detained travelers and local youths for military service.

Local residents say the arrests have recently expanded beyond the legal draft age, with men aged between 40 and 45 also being detained despite the Conscription Law limiting mandatory military service to males aged 18 to 35. Those arrested have been transferred to military training schools in Shan State and military units in Meiktila. Local sources estimate that more than 100 people were conscripted in the area during June and July alone.

Residents say families are increasingly unable to secure the release of detained relatives through bribery, a practice that had previously enabled some conscripts to avoid military service. According to one local source, payments that once ranged from 10 million to 20 million kyats are no longer sufficient. Families are now reportedly being asked to pay between 40 million and 80 million kyats (approximately US\$9,000–18,000), amounts beyond the reach of most households. Even then, only a handful of detainees have reportedly been released, suggesting that higher-level orders have tightened control over the recruitment process.

Local residents say ward and village authorities have effectively turned conscription into a lucrative business by detaining eligible youths and demanding enormous sums from their families for their release. The practice has deepened fear and insecurity among young people, including in Yangon and other major cities, where many now avoid travel or public places for fear of being forcibly recruited.



Conscripts forced to join the Myanmar military. Photo: Supplied



59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Post-Ministerial Conferences and Related Meetings



Photo: AFP

ASEAN AGREES TO DRAFT BENCHMARKS FOR MYANMAR PEACE PLAN

ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in Manila have agreed to develop benchmarks for measuring progress on Myanmar's Five-Point Consensus and have begun discussing a longer-term special envoy to replace the current annual rotation, Philippine Foreign Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro said.

According to Lazaro, who also serves as the ASEAN chair's special envoy on Myanmar, the proposals emerged from an extended informal consultation held on 21 July on the sidelines of the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting. She said senior officials have been tasked with refining the details before submitting them to ASEAN leaders at the November summit.

The Five-Point Consensus was adopted in April 2021 following Myanmar's military coup.

Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said ministers reaffirmed the consensus and called for concrete and measurable steps toward its implementation, including a permanent end to violence, the release of all political prisoners, and safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout Myanmar.

Brunei proposed establishing a unit within the ASEAN Secretariat to support the envoy's work, though funding and operational arrangements remain unresolved, officials said.

Myanmar was represented at the Manila meetings by the permanent secretary of its foreign ministry rather than a political minister, consistent with ASEAN's exclusion of Myanmar junta leadership from high-level meetings since 2021.



Photo: AFP

EAST ASIA SUMMIT EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER CONFLICTS AND HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN MYANMAR

The 16th East Asia Summit (EAS) Foreign Ministers' Meeting convened on 23 July in Manila covered a range of issues in East and Southeast Asia including the dire situation in Myanmar.

The Meeting was chaired by Ma. Theresa P. Lazaro, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines, in her role as Special Envoy for Myanmar for the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Meeting reaffirmed its commitment to further strengthening the EAS as the premier Leaders-led forum for dialogue and cooperation on broad strategic, political, and economic issues of common interest and concern with the aim of promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia, in line with the EAS foundational documents and based on the established principles, objectives and modalities of the EAS, according to their final statement on the Meeting.

Regarding developments in Myanmar, the Meeting expressed its deep concern over the ongoing conflicts and humanitarian situation in Myanmar, and encouraged progress on the implementation of the ASEAN Leaders' Five-Point Consensus (5PC).

The Meeting reaffirmed its united position that the 5PC remains as ASEAN's main reference to address the political crisis in Myanmar and further reaffirmed the relevant Leaders' decisions.

The Meeting denounced the continued acts of violence against civilians and public facilities and urged all parties involved to take concrete action to immediately halt indiscriminate violence, exercise utmost restraint, ensure the protection and safety of all civilians and civilian infrastructures, and create a

conducive environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people in need in Myanmar without discrimination, and inclusive national dialogue.

The Meeting also welcomed what the statement described as "continued progress" in the provision of humanitarian assistance to Myanmar by the AHA Centre in support of Point 4 of the ASEAN Leaders' 5PC.

The Meeting noted with appreciation the contributions by ASEAN Member States, external partners, the United Nations (UN), the private sector and the continued support from all stakeholders in Myanmar that have enabled the AHA Centre to ensure an effective response. The Meeting noted with appreciation the continued support from the international community for ASEAN in the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus.

The Meeting commended the dedicated efforts of Ma. Theresa P. Lazaro as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar, since her appointment in January 2026. In carrying out her mandate, the Special Envoy has actively engaged a wide and diverse range of Myanmar stakeholders. The Special Envoy has also engaged ASEAN Member States, ASEAN Dialogue Partners, Myanmar neighbouring countries, international and regional partners, civil society organisations, humanitarian actors, and think tanks towards finding an inclusive and sustainable resolution to the crisis. This inclusive engagement reflects ASEAN's commitment to collaborative efforts in addressing the complex challenges in Myanmar, the statement says.



Photo: Supplied

AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S PARTICIPATION INDISPENSABLE TO RESOLVING MYANMAR'S POLITICAL CRISIS: NLD

The Central Working Committee of the National League for Democracy (NLD) issued a statement declaring that the participation of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi — who it says holds the popular will and legitimate mandate — is indispensable to resolving Myanmar's political crisis, and stressed the importance of preventing any international recognition of an administration resulting from the military junta's sham election.

In the statement, dated 20 July ahead of the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM), the NLD said the root cause of Myanmar's political crisis lies in the military coup that annulled the results of the 2020 general election. It said any political process excluding Aung San Suu Kyi, ethnic forces, and political organizations will fail to secure public trust and acceptance.

The NLD said the continued detention of political prisoners remains the primary obstacle to resolving the crisis, and urged the creation of an environment in which Aung San Suu Kyi and other political leaders can freely engage in dialogue.

While welcoming the constructive efforts of the United Nations, ASEAN, and friendly nations, the party

reaffirmed that the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus remains the core framework for resolving the crisis.

The NLD said ASEAN's engagement policy could steer toward a practical political solution, but cautioned that such engagement must not extend to recognizing an administration produced by the junta's sham election.

The statement also demanded an immediate end to violence against civilians, unhindered access for humanitarian aid, and the implementation of all-inclusive dialogue.

The NLD reiterated its commitment to resolving political issues solely through negotiation and dialogue, saying the building of a future democratic federal union and the peace process must be anchored in the public will, democratic principles, and the rule of law.

The statement was released as the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) opened in Manila on 20 July. ASEAN foreign ministers are scheduled to hold an informal consultation specifically on Myanmar on 22 July as part of the week's meetings, according to the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs.



SCEF meeting. Photo: Supplied

SCEF SENDS OPEN LETTER TO ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING ON MYANMAR CRISIS

The Steering Committee for the Establishment of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) announced 21 July that it has sent an open letter to the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair ahead of the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting and related meetings in Manila.

During a press conference on 20 July, Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Dominic Xavier Imperial confirmed that the Myanmar issue will be included in the meeting's agenda.

The open letter says the current ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting comes at a critical juncture not only for Myanmar but for regional peace and ASEAN's credibility, and urges effective implementation of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus through result-oriented, measurable, and practical approaches.

SCEF said ASEAN must assess its engagement with Myanmar based on tangible outcomes, demanding an immediate halt to violence — including airstrikes against civilians — and unhindered, effective delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need.

SCEF also demanded the immediate release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, while urging support for a Myanmar-owned political process backed by appropriate monitoring mechanisms.

The letter said genuine pressure and escalating consequences should be imposed on the junta over its persistent failure to comply with ASEAN agreements, including reinstating ASEAN's punitive measures such as barring high-ranking junta officials from attending meetings.

SCEF stressed that a sustainable political solution in Myanmar requires the meaningful participation of all stakeholders, including the National Unity Government (NUG), Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs), democratic forces, minority communities, and civil society organizations.

The letter also said SCEF — composed of democratically elected representatives and EROs — functions as an alliance-based leadership mechanism holding democratic legitimacy and territorial control in Myanmar, and said the committee remains ready to pursue constructive cooperation with regional and international partners.

The Permanent Secretary of the military junta's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is currently attending the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting. Although barred from participating at the ministerial level, he is present to conduct informal discussions.



UN MYANMAR CRIMES INVESTIGATORS CUT STAFF AMID FUNDING CRISIS AS EVIDENCE MOUNTS

The United Nations' Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar has cut a fifth of its regular-budget staff positions and now retains only half the personnel funded by voluntary contributions compared to last year, even as the body reports collecting evidence from more than 1,600 sources, including testimony from 756 witnesses, according to its July 2026 bulletin.

The Mechanism, commonly known as IIMM, was established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2018 to collect, preserve and analyze evidence of serious international crimes committed in Myanmar, so that it can be used in future criminal proceedings before national or international courts. Myanmar's military, led by Min Aung Hlaing, ousted the country's elected government in a February 2021 coup, triggering an armed conflict that continues across large parts of the country.

The staffing cuts, driven by what the bulletin describes as a UN liquidity crisis and a decline in voluntary contributions, have affected specialized investigative capacity, including analysis of Burmese-language evidence, open-source investigations, and work on sexual and gender-based crimes and crimes against children. The Mechanism's ability to fund witness protection has also been reduced, the bulletin said.

Despite the cuts, the Mechanism said it has shared 146 packages of evidence and analysis with national and international investigative, prosecutorial and

judicial authorities to date. Eight universal jurisdiction complaints tied to alleged crimes in Myanmar are currently active across as many countries, according to the bulletin, with outcomes ranging widely. In Argentina, a Federal Criminal Court ordered the arrest of 25 suspects in February 2025 over alleged genocide and crimes against humanity committed against the Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim minority from Rakhine State. In the United Kingdom, the International Criminal Court's investigation into the Bangladesh/Myanmar situation, opened in November 2019, remains ongoing, with the Mechanism sharing evidence with UK authorities.

Other complaints have fared less well. Australian Federal Police rejected a complaint over alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes in June 2026, months after it was submitted by Legal Action Worldwide. Germany's Federal Public Prosecutor rejected a similar complaint in September 2023. Complaints filed in Indonesia, the Philippines, Timor-Leste and Türkiye have received no public response from authorities, the bulletin said.

Separately, the Mechanism concluded a judicial cooperation convention with France that entered into force on 1 July, following similar legislative steps taken by Austria and Belgium in 2022 to enable cooperation with the body.

The bulletin also noted that civil society organizations working with the Mechanism face their own constraints, including unreliable internet access in parts of Myanmar and scarce funding, which affect their ability to securely document and share information with victims and survivors. In early July, the Mechanism held its fourth in-person Civil Society Dialogue, bringing together 22 representatives of ethnic community organizations over three days. The proportion of participants who reported a clear understanding of the Mechanism's mandate rose from 6 percent before the dialogue to 80 percent afterward, according to the bulletin.

"Accountability may take time, but it remains within reach," said Nicholas Koumjian, Head of the Mechanism.



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.



Photo: Supplied

NSO DEMANDS HALT TO FORCED CONSCRIPTION IN NAGA REGION, BOYCOTTS JUNTA-APPOINTED CHIEF MINISTER'S VISIT

The Naga Students' Organization (NSO) peacefully boycotted the welcoming ceremony for Myanmar junta-appointed Sagaing Region Chief Minister Ko Lay's visit to Lahe, demanding an immediate halt to forced military conscription in the Naga Self-Administered Zone.

During his first visit to Lahe on 19 July, Ko Lay — a retired Major General and current Sagaing Region Chief Minister — inspected local development projects and transport infrastructure, prompting the students' boycott.

An NSO official told Mizzima: "We previously petitioned the former chief minister and constantly negotiated with the Naga Self-Administered Zone Leading Body to stop forced recruitment, as our region is peaceful. However, they only cited 'orders from above.' That is why we are boycotting."

According to the NSO, exact figures for arrested Naga youth are unavailable, but forced recruitment is most prevalent in Leshi Township, with numerous youths also forcibly conscripted in the Khamti and Homalin areas.

The NSO warned that towns are now nearly depleted of young people, and that continued forced conscription could trigger regional instability and conflict.

The organization said it has repeatedly urged the quasi-military administration and regional authorities to

halt forced recruitment to preserve peace and stability in the Naga region amid nationwide armed conflict and political instability.

Despite these appeals, youth traveling for work, education, medical treatment, trade, or other legitimate reasons continue to be abducted from checkpoints, roads, hotels, and even their homes for forced military service, the NSO said.

A youth from Kyun Khaung village in Lahe Township was arrested on 14 July but was released before being sent for conscription due to the NSO's intervention.

However, some detainees have had to pay ransoms ranging from 30 to 40 million kyats (approx. US\$9,700 to \$12,900) for their release, while those unable to pay are forced into military service, according to the NSO.

Condemning these actions as violations of justice, human dignity, and the rule of law, the NSO urged an immediate halt to forced conscription in the Naga region, calling for respect for public will, sustainable peace and mutual trust, and constructive dialogue with the Naga community.

During his trip, Ko Lay also visited the Htein Nyo Mountain viewpoint on the Khamti-Sinthe-Lahe Road, traditional heritage sites, a small-scale hydropower project, and upland monsoon paddy fields.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA BOMBS MONASTERY AND VICINITY IN THANDWE, INJURING SEVEN INCLUDING MONK AND CHILD

The Arakan Army (AA) announced 24 July that seven people, including a Buddhist monk and a child, were injured after the military junta bombed a monastery and its surrounding area in Ngapali, Thandwe Township, Rakhine State.

The attack occurred 23 July at around 12:00 pm, when a military junta jet fighter twice bombed the Pyi Yadanar Monastery and its vicinity in Jittaw (Ward 5), Ngapali, Thandwe Township.

The strike injured six people and destroyed eight homes. Later at 1:30 pm, a junta jet fighter dropped two bombs on the AZ Family Resort at Linthar Beach, according to the AA statement.

This subsequent attack injured one local resident and damaged bungalows at the AZ Family Resort along with several nearby civilian homes.

Additionally, the military junta conducted airstrikes targeting three townships in Rakhine State on July 19.

The attacks targeted Ma-ei, Thandwe, and Ponnagyun townships. The strike on Ma-ei killed five local residents and injured 22 others, including a monk and several children. The attack on Thandwe injured four residents, while the raid on Ponnagyun injured two monks and one civilian, according to the AA.



AROUND 500 PRISONERS, INCLUDING 100 POLITICAL PRISONERS, ABRUPTLY TRANSFERRED IN SHACKLES FROM TAUNGGOO TO THARRAWADDY PRISON

Around 500 prisoners, including 100 male political prisoners, were suddenly transferred from Taunggoo Prison in Bago Region to Tharrawaddy Prison on the morning of 23 July, according to the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM).

Prison authorities called out the names of the transferees a day in advance and placed them in shackles before transporting them to Tharrawaddy Prison in 12-wheel trucks at around 3:30 am 23 July.

"During the transfer, each prisoner was allowed to carry only three blankets and one set of clothes. Prison authorities confiscated all remaining personal belongings and parcel deliveries," the PPNM statement detailed.

"Prison transfers are never announced in advance. We ourselves experienced being woken up in the early morning and taken away abruptly with strict limitations on what belongings we could carry. The prisoners had already settled in at Taunggoo Prison. Their families could easily send food or visit them there. This sudden transfer will cause financial and travel hardships for their families," said Yaung Ni Lin, PPNM information officer.

Prisoners whose families live far from Tharrawaddy Prison are expected to face difficulties with prison visits and food deliveries. The PPNM official added that because prisoners were allowed to bring only minimal clothing during the rainy season, they risk developing skin infections and illness from damp clothing.

PPNM pointed out that shackling, confiscating personal property, and conducting sudden early-morning transfers represent systematic physical and psychological torture against prisoners.

Furthermore, PPNM announced that it will continue to monitor and expose such human rights violations and abuses against political prisoners and other inmates.

According to data from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) updated on 22 July, a total of 31,551 individuals classed as political prisoners have been arrested since the February 2021 military coup, with 22,506 still currently behind bars.



THIN MA VILLAGE IN MAGWAY'S MYAING TOWNSHIP BURNED FOR TWO CONSECUTIVE DAYS

The bodies of slain local residents have been discovered in Myaing Township, Magway Region, where junta columns are advancing, and Thin Ma village has been set on fire for two consecutive days, from 21 to 22 July, according to the Anya Myay Civil Society Organization (Myaing).

"We learned that Thin Ma is being burned today. The arson started yesterday and continues today. Thin Ma has about 500 households, and we understand the majority of them are burning. While the exact extent of the damage cannot yet be confirmed, we can confirm massive destruction due to the two-day consecutive arson," a representative of the Anya Myay CSO (Myaing) told Mizzima on 22 July.

The military column currently operating in Myaing Township advanced from Thauk Shar Pin village in Pauk Township, Magway Region, on 13 July, and remains stationed in Thin Ma village today.

Between 13 July and today, the bodies of victims killed by the junta have been recovered across several locations: Two elderly men from Kan Net village, one man from Myin Ko Thit village, one man from Kaing Taw Ma village, one man from Wah Yin Chyaing village,

two men and one burned body from Kun Lat village, seven burned bodies in Baw Ton village and one elderly man in Than Chaung village.

"The victim from Than Chaung was an elderly man, around 60 to 70 years old. He suffered from mental illness. He was beaten severely to death, with his skull crushed," the Anya Myay CSO representative said.

Due to the ongoing military offensive, approximately 15,000 residents from about 10 villages in Myaing Township are currently displaced.

In addition to Thin Ma, other villages in Myaing Township — including Kan Net, Let Khoke Pin, Nyaung Kone, Kaing Taw Ma, and Htan Nge Taw — have also suffered arson attacks.

During the junta's first offensive in Myaing Township in June, six locals were killed: one from Thar Si village (southern Myaing), one from Hnan Si Kan village, two from Meiktila village, one from Wet Poke village, and one from Kone village. The junta also killed five locals, including a woman with a mental health condition, in Thauk Shar Pin village, Pauk Township, according to statements released by the Anya Myay CSO (Myaing).



HUMANITARIAN CRISIS WORSENS AS MYANMAR JUNTA COMMITS DAILY ATROCITIES AMID ARMED CLASHES

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar is worsening primarily because the junta is committing daily atrocities against civilians, rather than because of active armed clashes, Ma May Hnin of the Emergency Management Committee - Mandalay (EMC-MDY) said on 22 July.

She made the remarks during an online press conference co-hosted by Progressive Voice and eight civil society organizations to release a joint briefing paper titled "Blocked Aid and Resilient People: Resisting the Military Junta's Weaponization of Aid."

"Rather than active armed clashes, the terrorist military is instilling fear in the public by committing increasingly severe daily atrocities. Consequently, our humanitarian crisis is worsening, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is rising, and aid supply routes are being systematically severed," Ma May Hnin said.

From 2024 to the present, there have been over 1,000 airstrikes in Pyin Oo Lwin District, Mandalay Region, alone, resulting in over 70 mass casualty incidents, she said. These incidents were unrelated to armed clashes, she said, specifically targeting schools, hospitals, and public markets instead.

"If we look at the military offensives and arson attacks, the military is imposing collective punishment on the public. If IDPs flee to Village A, the military launches airstrikes on Village A to intimidate villagers against sheltering them," Ma May Hnin added. "As a result, those IDPs merge with local villagers and flee to another village. You can visualize military aircraft tracking and bombing the routes along which these

displaced people flee."

Independent analyst Adelina Kamal said the junta deliberately commits atrocities to trigger humanitarian crises while simultaneously blocking humanitarian aid, which she said flagrantly violates the "Do No Harm" principle.

She said that through military checkpoints, administrative barriers, and the arrest of humanitarian aid workers, the junta is intentionally weaponizing aid. "If humanitarian aid operations are carried out only after obtaining their permission, it bestows legitimacy upon the junta. This shows how the junta is politically orchestrating a humanitarian crisis," Kamal said.

According to data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA Myanmar), there are nearly 3.8 million displaced people across Myanmar, most of whom have been displaced multiple times.

The junta, meanwhile, imposes administrative restrictions to prevent aid from reaching these IDPs, blocks deliveries at checkpoints, confiscates aid supplies, and restricts civil society organizations, including volunteers, from carrying out aid operations, according to the briefing.

As a result, IDPs in the Anyar (Central Myanmar) region have had to resolve humanitarian crises through self-reliance, Ma May Hnin said. She urged international organizations to coordinate directly with civil society organizations operating on the ground, noting that international aid channeled through the junta rarely reaches those in actual need.



KNDF REORGANISES AND MERGES BATTALIONS INTO MILITARY REGIONS

The Central Committee of the Karenni National Defence Force (KNDF) announced 22 July that it has restructured and merged its battalions into designated military regions.

According to the announcement, eight battalions formerly operating under Tactical Commands 4, 5, and 7 have been consolidated and redesignated as Battalions 5, 6, and 7, under Military Region 2.

Similarly, seven battalions under Tactical Commands 2 and 7 were merged and restructured into Battalions 8, 9, and 10 and regrouped under Military Region 3.

Furthermore, five battalions under Tactical Commands 3, 5, and 6 were consolidated and redesignated as Battalions 11, 12, and 14 and regrouped under Military Region 4.

The KNDF stated that these organizational reforms aim to build standardized, compact, and highly capable forces, elevate morale, ensure strict compliance with military discipline and laws, and ultimately establish a single, unified Karenni State defense force as desired by the public.

The newly restructured battalions will remain deployed in their respective operational areas within Karenni State to continue executing their military duties.

The KNDF previously established Military Region 1 "Alpha" in April 2026 and is currently in the process of reorganising the remaining military regions.

Phoe Thaw

MMA FIGHTER PHOE THAW, NEARING RELEASE, HIT WITH ADDITIONAL CHARGE UNDER COUNTER-TERRORISM SECTION 51(C)

MMA fighter Thaw Htoo Naing, also known as Phoe Thaw, currently serving a seven-year sentence for anti-junta activities and explosives offenses and nearing his scheduled release, has been hit with an additional charge under Section 51(c) of the Counter-Terrorism Law, according to sources close to the judiciary.

Phoe Thaw was arrested following an explosion at Team PT Gym on Kandawgyi Lake Road, Yangon, on 5 May 2021, and is currently detained at Insein Prison.

With only a few months left before completing his sentence, Bahan Myoma Police Station filed the additional charge on the orders of the Yangon Region Minister of Border Affairs and Security, according to a source close to the matter.

"He was regularly scheduled for release in September. However, after he sent a congratulatory message to Aung La Nsang on his retirement, they filed the additional charge under Section 51(c). The Bahan Police Station initiated the prosecution under

the signature of the Border Affairs Minister. The letter to Aung La Nsang was officially transmitted through the Correctional Department's channel," the source told Mizzima on condition of anonymity.

The trial for the additional charge began at Kamayut District Court in July, presided over by Judge Zin Mar Aung, with Nay Aung as state prosecutor.

When world champion MMA fighter Aung La Nsang announced his retirement, Phoe Thaw sent a congratulatory letter via the Correctional Department's official mail channel, which Aung La Nsang subsequently shared on social media.

Section 51(c) of the Counter-Terrorism Law penalizes the illegal possession or transportation of weapons, ammunition, and explosives intended for or used in terrorist activities, carrying a prison sentence of five to ten years upon conviction.



26 LOCALS KILLED IN MYAING WITHIN TWO MONTHS OF MYANMAR JUNTA OFFENSIVES

Ongoing Myanmar junta offensives over the past two months in Myaing Township, Magway Region, have killed 26 local residents, according to local sources and regional organizations.

On the morning of 22 July, artillery fired indiscriminately by junta forces stationed in Thinma village landed and exploded in Wetpho village, killing two residents.

According to records compiled by the Anyar Myay Civil Society Organization (Myaing), the junta column killed 24 other individuals — including elderly people, people with mental health conditions, and women — during its operations in the township. While the recorded death toll stands at 26, the organization said actual casualties could be higher, as communication remains cut off for several residents.

The victims include one each from Thazi, Hninsi Kan, Wetpote, Kone, Kannet, Myin Koe Thit, Kaing Taw Ma, and War Yin Chyaing villages; two each from Kunlat, Meiktila, and Than Chaung villages; and five each from Htauk Shar Pin and Bawton villages.

Local organizations have urged residents to remain vigilant, reporting that the junta column torched Thinma village on the morning of 22 July before departing in the afternoon to advance into nearby areas.

At least 180 homes across the villages have been destroyed by arson.

Since the military operations began in June, residents from at least 14 villages have been forced to flee their homes.



Photo: Supplied

REFUGEES FACE SECURITY CONCERNS OVER MALAYSIA'S TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF UNHCR REGISTRATION

The Malaysian government's directive to temporarily suspend all United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registration processes could increase the number of undocumented refugees and escalate security risks, said James, Chairman of the Alliance of Chin Refugees (ACR).

According to a Free Malaysia Today report published on 23 July, the Malaysian Cabinet has decided to direct UNHCR to temporarily halt all refugee registrations while the government restructures its refugee management system through the Dokumen Pendaftaran Pelarian (Refugee Registration Document, DPP) programme. The report cited Malaysia's Deputy Foreign Minister, Datuk Lukanisman Awang Sauni, telling the Senate that the goal is to register and manage refugees more systematically under direct government oversight — in response to an inquiry from Senator Hussin Ismail, who sought clarification on how the government is addressing the issue of Rohingya refugees lacking Myanmar-recognized identification documents. The FMT report also cited the Deputy Minister as saying that plans are underway to deport approximately 5,000 Myanmar nationals currently held in Malaysian immigration detention centres using Malaysian navy vessels, depending on Myanmar's readiness to receive them.

James, the ACR Chairman, told Mizzima: "Difficulties will arise. If the number of undocumented people increases and they do not receive UN cards, security will be a major concern." He added that while the government describes the suspension as temporary, it could persist long-term, potentially leading to increased arrests and legal action against refugees.

"Through the DPP programme, the government can better manage identity verification, monitoring, and regulation without relying on the records of foreign organizations," the Deputy Minister said, according to the FMT report. He added that registration under the DPP programme will be conducted in cooperation with law enforcement agencies, registering only eligible individuals to prevent illegal immigration.

Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, does not officially recognize refugees, and generally classifies them as undocumented migrants. The country is reportedly attempting to scale back UNHCR's mandate and transition refugee data management under its own government administration.

There are currently an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 Myanmar refugees in Malaysia. Most are employed in dangerous, dirty, and difficult (3D) sectors — such as construction, agriculture, factories, and cleaning services — which local citizens generally avoid.



NEARLY 400 MYANMAR MIGRANT WORKERS ARRESTED IN MALAYSIA'S JOHOR STATE

Nearly 400 undocumented Myanmar migrant workers were arrested in Malaysia's Johor State in July, according to Min Thant, Chairman of the Johor Senai School Funeral Service Association. The arrests occurred between 1 and 23 July, with over 100 Myanmar nationals detained in a single raid in Pulai on 17 July.

An additional 172 undocumented Myanmar migrant workers from one factory were also apprehended, Min Thant said, requiring assistance.

Min Thant said there has been a significant increase in undocumented Myanmar migrants in Malaysia, many of whom entered the country through illegal channels. He said Myanmar's embassy in Malaysia no longer issues new passports, only renewing existing ones or replacing lost documents, which creates considerable difficulties for new arrivals.

In Pekan Nanas town, undocumented border crossers are typically brought before the court every Thursday. On 16 July, 372 people were prosecuted, and on 23 July, over 300 more faced charges for illegal

entry into Malaysia. Approximately two-thirds of those prosecuted are Myanmar nationals, with more expected to appear in court on 30 July.

A Myanmar national in Malaysia advised migrants to avoid drawing undue attention, specifically citing the public application of thanaka, wearing traditional longyi, and chewing betel quid. Complaints from neighbours about noise have also led to arrests.

Undocumented migrant workers frequently face exploitation, including wage theft, demands for bribes from police to avoid arrest, and financial scams under the guise of processing legitimate documents. Employers who hire undocumented workers and are fined sometimes deduct these penalties from the migrants' wages instead of paying them themselves.

Those arrested for immigration offenses typically receive prison sentences ranging from five months to one year, depending on the offense. Fines can range from approximately 4,000 to 8,000 Malaysian ringgit (approx. US\$980 to \$1,960), depending on the severity of the offense and the discretion of the judge.

Photo: AFP

MYANMAR REFUGEES WARNED OF SECURITY RISKS AS PROTESTS ESCALATE IN NEW DELHI

Myanmar community leaders have urged refugees residing in New Delhi to exercise heightened vigilance as education-related protests continue to escalate in the city.

The anti-government protests, led by affected students and opposition groups, erupted following the cancellation of exam results amid allegations of a question paper leak in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET-UG 2026). Protesters are demanding the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Clashes with police broke out on 20 July as demonstrators attempted to march toward the Indian Parliament as its session commenced; security forces blocked roads and dispersed the crowds. Opposition Congress Party leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were separately detained on 21 July while leading a sit-in protest near Prime Minister Narendra Modi's residence, demanding accountability over the NEET paper leak.

"As protests intensify and political tensions rise, Myanmar refugees in Delhi must exercise extreme caution. We urge them to avoid protest sites and steer clear of crowds as much as possible," a Myanmar community representative told Mizzima.

According to current reports, tensions remain high between protesters and security forces in central

New Delhi, particularly near Parliament, India Gate, Connaught Place, Jantar Mantar, Patel Chowk, and Janpath. With at least five downtown metro stations temporarily closed, the representative urged refugees to avoid these areas.

If travel is essential, he advised refugees to carry their UNHCR identification cards, inform family or friends of their whereabouts, and check ahead for road closures and security updates from local authorities.

Despite the ongoing unrest, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has not yet issued any specific security advisories for Myanmar refugees.

The protests have reportedly spread to other states, and Indian media report that farmers from neighbouring Punjab state are marching to Delhi in solidarity with the students, potentially escalating the demonstrations further.

Approximately 12,000 Myanmar refugees reside in New Delhi. Without regular assistance from the Indian government or UNHCR, they support themselves through work in restaurants, daily-wage labour, small factories, and translation services.



Photo: AFP

MIN AUNG HLAING ATTENDS MARTYRS' DAY CEREMONY AS AUNG SAN SUU KYI BARRED AGAIN

The 79th Martyrs' Day ceremony was held under tight security at the Martyrs' Mausoleum in Yangon on 19 July, with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing in attendance while Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of independence hero General Aung San, was barred from participating for another year.

Union-level officials, parliament speakers, and newly-appointed military chiefs of staff attended alongside Min Aung Hlaing. The junta's two vice presidents were notably absent.

Representing General Aung San's family, Ye Aung Than — grandson of the General's elder brother, Aung Than — and his wife attended, marking the second consecutive year the couple has represented the family at the ceremony. A wreath sent by General Aung San's son, Aung San Oo, and his wife was also present.

Security in Yangon was heavily tightened during the ceremony, with increased troop deployments around the Martyrs' Mausoleum. Residents reported temporary disruptions to mobile networks and communication services in several townships.

Under the previous military regime, Aung San Suu Kyi was occasionally permitted to attend Martyrs' Day ceremonies while under house arrest. She has been completely barred from the events throughout her detention since the 2021 coup.

Although the junta claims she has been transferred from prison to house confinement, her communications with the outside world remain strictly restricted. Mizzima has been unable to independently verify her health status or current detention conditions.

Despite ongoing "Proof of Life" campaigns demanding concrete evidence of her health and survival, the junta continues to isolate Aung San Suu Kyi from the outside world.

Since the coup, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi has faced 19 charges resulting in a cumulative 35-year sentence, which has since been reduced through periodic amnesties, including a partial pardon in 2023 and blanket sentence-reduction orders in 2026, to a remaining total of nearly 19 years.

Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA SAYS 72 OF 77 SCAM-LINKED BUILDINGS DEMOLISHED IN SHWE KOKKO; LOCALS SAY OPERATIONS ARE EXPANDING

Despite the Myanmar junta's claim that only five buildings used for cyber scam operations remain to be demolished in Shwe Kokko, local residents say these operations are expanding significantly on the ground. Locals dismiss the junta's assertion that the demolition drive is nearing completion as a performative effort to appear to be cracking down on the scam industry.

On 13 July, the junta announced plans to demolish 77 buildings associated with cyber scam activities in the Shwe Kokko area of Myawaddy Township, saying 72 had already been demolished, with five remaining. A local resident alleged that the junta is demolishing only vacant buildings, deliberately ignoring operational facilities currently hosting scam activities.

"New ones are even being added," a Shwe Kokko resident said. "New sites are being established in previously deserted jungle areas like Htee Lone. Guest houses and dormitories are all full. If you see black or green tarpaulins covering buildings along the roads, those are cyber scam operations. Mizzima's own review of online job advertisements for cyber scam operations along the Thai-Myanmar border on 24 July found a continuous stream of new postings.

Residents say cyber scam operations persist in homes, high-rise buildings, hotels, and guesthouses within Shwe Kokko and surrounding areas, with new

construction actively underway. While ordinary civilians face strict entry and exit restrictions in Shwe Kokko, new scam workers reportedly arrive daily, residents said.

The Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), which met with the junta in Naypyidaw on 9 July and agreed to cooperate on combating online fraud, is reportedly relocating cyber scam operations from its historically controlled area of Kyauk Khat to Shwe Taung Ni, near DKBA headquarters in Son Zun Myaing, citing instability in Kyauk Khat.

A resident of Son Zun Myaing confirmed the expansion. "Places that were cleared at the beginning of the year are now completely filled with buildings. In Son Zun Myaing village, there are only scam operations in places like Phu Shwe Wah's house and other leaders' residences. The areas around the village are purely for scam operations," the resident said.

According to sources, online scam operations are expanding not only within traditional strongholds in Karen State along the Thai-Myanmar border — including Shwe Kokko, Yekalel, Thit Htwee Kote, Phar Kaloo, Kyauk Khat, Son Zun Myaing, and Myawaddy — but are also extending along the route from Karen State toward Mae La.



Lt. Gen. Tar Jote Jar.
Video screenshot

TNLA DELEGATION CONFIRMED TO BE HOLDING TALKS IN NAYPYIDAW

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), a member of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, confirmed to Mizzima that its senior leadership met with the military junta's peace negotiation body, the National Solidarity and Peacemaking Negotiation Committee (NSPNC), in Naypyidaw on 19 July.

The talks were attended by a TNLA delegation led by Vice Chairman (1) Lt. Gen. Tar Jote Jar, while the junta's team was led by Lt. Gen. Yar Pyae.

TNLA spokesperson Lway Yay Oo confirmed the ongoing discussions with the junta in Naypyidaw

but said specific details of the agenda are currently unavailable. She said details of the discussions and any resulting agreements would only be confirmed once the delegation returns.

Despite capturing numerous towns during the "Operation 1027" offensive, TNLA lost control of six towns — including Naungcho, Kyaukme, Hsipaw, Momeik, and Mogok— back to junta forces in 2025. It currently retains control over six towns: Namtu, Namhkam, Namsan, Mantong, Mongngaw, and Monglong.



Photo: AFP

THE BURNING HEART OF MYANMAR: WHY ASEAN'S AID PLAN WILL FAIL

The humanitarian collapse in Myanmar has reached a scale that defies comprehension. Over 16.2 million people, nearly one-third of the population, now require urgent humanitarian assistance, while chronic poverty grips more than 80 percent of the country. Nationwide, internal displacement has skyrocketed from roughly 300,000 prior to the military's 2021 illegal coup attempt to a staggering 3.8 million people today, contributing to a total of 5.3 million forcibly displaced across the country and its borders.

Yet, these overwhelming national statistics obscure the localized epicenter of the military junta's cruelty: Myanmar's central Dry Zone.

Spanning the Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay Regions, the Dry Zone was described by Myanmar's human rights group, Progressive Voice, in its 2022 briefing paper as a "tinderbox." Today, as documented in our newly updated 2026 follow-up report, that tinderbox has been deliberately incinerated by the military junta's desperate attempt to crush democratic resistance. Sagaing alone has become the undisputed epicenter of displacement, hosting 1.34 million IDPs, more than 35 percent of the national total, followed by Magway with nearly 300,000.

Compounding this nightmare of the military's campaign of violence, a devastating magnitude 7.7 earthquake struck central Myanmar in March 2025, killing over 3,700 people and leaving 3.5 million tonnes of unresolved debris blocking crucial supply routes into 2026.

Engineered Starvation and the "Four Cuts"

Rather than allowing the international aid agencies to offer relief to a traumatized population, the junta has aggressively expanded its notorious "Four Cuts" strategy into the Dry Zone, a doctrine designed to sever civilian access to food, funds, intelligence, and recruits to the democratic resistance. What is happening in central Myanmar is not a conventional war; it is a calculated campaign of collective punishment.

The military has escalated its campaign of terror, launching 2,165 airstrikes between January and November 2025, a sharp increase from the 1,716 recorded in all of 2024. The junta has transitioned from sporadic bombings to mass-barrage aerial attacks that systematically obliterate schools, markets, and displacement sites. Health infrastructure, too, has been deliberately targeted; over 1,815 attacks on healthcare facilities have been recorded since the

coup, culminating in atrocities like the total destruction of the Mrauk-U General Hospital in late 2025.

On the ground, scorched-earth tactics have left over 121,000 homes in ashes, alongside burned food reserves, slaughtered livestock, and farmlands contaminated with internationally banned landmines - making Myanmar the country with the highest number of landmine casualties globally.

Crucially, the junta has weaponized humanitarian aid itself. Junta checkpoints routinely block and seize shipments of food, medicine, and vital survival equipment like solar panels and water pumps. Meanwhile, massive international funding shortfalls have forced the United Nations' 2026 Humanitarian Response Plan to slash its target population to just 4.9 million people, leaving over 11 million vulnerable population without formal international support.

A Dangerous Diplomatic Regression

Against this backdrop of engineered starvation and international aid contraction, the diplomatic response remains paralyzed, most glaringly represented by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the current Philippine chairship.

In mid-July, Philippine Undersecretary Ma. Theresa P. Lazaro, the ASEAN Chair's Special Envoy on Myanmar, announced plans to lead a "humanitarian mission" to Myanmar in the fourth quarter of 2026. This announcement followed deeply concerning informal meetings in Thailand that included the junta-appointed foreign minister.

This diplomatic theater stands in direct contradiction to the commitments ASEAN made just months ago. During the ASEAN Summit in October 2025, leaders adopted a review of the Five-Point Consensus. Point #25 of that decision explicitly called for the advancement of safe, effective, and transparent humanitarian assistance, emphasizing that aid must directly reach internally displaced persons without discrimination, including efforts routing aid through alternative border pathways.

Point #25 provided a clear, actionable mandate to bypass the junta's weaponized aid channels and deliver life-saving assistance in direct collaboration with legitimate governance structures on the ground: the National Unity Government (NUG), Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs), and frontline grassroots networks.

Yet, nine months later, that mandate remains a hollow promise. Instead of operationalizing the border-based delivery routes explicitly mandated by Point #25,

Manila's leadership is moving backward. By engaging the very architects of the crisis in informal meetings in Thailand this July, Manila is lending legitimacy to a military junta that actively weaponizes aid. This capitulation has not gone unnoticed. In a statement issued on 18 July, the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) issued a blistering rebuke, criticizing the Philippines' approach to engaging the refashioned junta with civilian skins as a "failure" and warning that the Philippines' ASEAN chairmanship is now in a "tailspin."

When Manila assumed the chairship, there were high expectations that a democratic nation would take a principled stance against the junta's atrocities. Instead, Manila's tenure is shaping up to be the most ineffectual and disappointing since the Five-Point Consensus was first drafted.

Trusting the Frontline

Survival in the Dry Zone currently depends entirely on local resilience and locally led solutions. Grassroots networks, women-led civil society groups, and local strike committees are doing the heavy lifting. They are smuggling in emergency food, running mobile clinics, and establishing makeshift schools, all while under constant threat of bombardment.

The international community must stop waiting for ASEAN to find its backbone, and ASEAN must stop pretending that the junta can be a partner in peace.

It is time for the Philippines and international donors to implement Point #25 in practice, not just in rhetoric. This means halting all diplomatic engagements that confer legitimacy on the junta and immediately channeling direct, flexible funding to the local humanitarian organizations that actually have direct access to the displaced populations through border-based networks.

The people of Myanmar's Dry Zone cannot eat diplomatic statements without action, and they will not survive a "humanitarian mission" curated by their executioners. It is time for the world to stop watching the country burn and start empowering the local frontline responders fighting to put out the fire.

Contributors: Khin Ohmar (founder of Progressive Voice, Myanmar human rights organization); May Hnin (a member of Emergency Management Committee - Mandalay); Shin Thant (a former political prisoner of the Spring Revolution and a member of Butalin Township Strike Force, Sagaing); and Moe Swe (a member of Ah Kayar Civil Society, Magway)



Photo: AA

THE ARAKAN ARMY SEEKS INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION WHILE DENYING RECOGNITION TO THE ROHINGYA

MISBAH MUSHOROF

On 26 March 2024, Arakan Army Commander-in-Chief Twan Mrat Naing wrote on X:

"Nothing is wrong with calling Bengalis 'Bengalis'. They have been our neighbours, our friends and fellow citizens for centuries. Let's be honest and embrace this reality to build a better future."

This post was not a small language issue. It was a political message. It told the Rohingya that the Arakan Army and its political wing, the United League of Arakan, do not recognise us by the name we use for ourselves.

The word "Bengali" has a dangerous political meaning in Myanmar. For decades, the Myanmar military and anti-Rohingya nationalists used it to describe the Rohingya as foreigners from Bangladesh. This label helped them deny our citizenship, history and belonging in Arakan.

Twan Mrat Naing knows this history. The ULA knows it too. Therefore, his statement cannot be treated as an innocent choice of words. It continues the same political idea that was used to remove the Rohingya from their homeland.

The Rohingya are not asking the Arakan Army to invent a new identity for us. Our identity already exists.

We have called ourselves Rohingya for generations. Historical records, official documents and political participation after Myanmar's independence also show the use of the Rohingya name.

The right to self-identify is basic. The Arakan Army cannot demand respect for Rakhine identity while refusing the same respect to the Rohingya.

This is the biggest contradiction in the Arakan Army's political campaign.

The AA and ULA want international recognition. They want neighbouring countries, foreign investors, international organisations and the media to treat them as the new authority in Rakhine State. They speak about administration, security, trade, ports, pipelines and development.

They promise to protect foreign businesses and international projects. But they do not give the same clear promise to the Rohingya people living in the land they control.

How can they ask the world to recognise their authority while they deny recognition to one of Arakan's own communities?

The ULA may show photographs of reopened mosques, Muslim religious events or a few Muslim

officials. But these photographs do not prove equality. A mosque can be opened while a people's identity is still denied. A ceremony can be allowed while movement, work, education and land rights remain restricted.

Real recognition means more than allowing worship. It means calling us by our name. It means accepting that Rohingya belong to Arakan. It means citizenship, freedom of movement, access to healthcare and education, protection of property and equal participation in public life.

Reports from areas under Arakan Army control raise serious concerns. Human Rights Watch reported movement restrictions, arbitrary detention, forced labour, unlawful recruitment and seizure of property affecting Rohingya communities. Refugees also said they could not freely travel, farm, fish or work.

These reports are painful because they look very similar to the old system created by the Myanmar military.

The most serious allegation concerns Hoyyar Siri village. Human Rights Watch reported evidence that Arakan Army fighters may have killed at least 170 Rohingya men, women and children there on 2 May 2024. The ULA denied responsibility.

Its denial should be reported. But a denial cannot close a case involving the possible killing of so many civilians.

If the Arakan Army believes the allegation is false, it should allow independent investigators into the area. It should protect witnesses, provide information about missing and detained people, preserve evidence and punish any fighter or commander responsible for crimes.

The AA and ULA cannot investigate themselves and then ask the world to accept their answer.

This issue is not only about individual soldiers. It starts with the leadership. When Twan Mrat Naing publicly says that nothing is wrong with calling the Rohingya "Bengali," he gives permission to officials, fighters and supporters to treat Rohingya identity as false.

First, a community's name is denied. Then its history is questioned. After that, its movement, work and land are controlled. Finally, the whole population is treated as a security threat.

This is the same road followed by the Myanmar military.

The Arakan Army may fight the junta, but fighting a brutal enemy does not automatically make it a just movement. A force cannot call itself a liberation army while using the language and politics of persecution against another people.

The suffering of the Rakhine people under Myanmar military rule is real. They have the right to freedom, dignity and political power. But Rakhine freedom cannot be built on Rohingya exclusion.

Freedom for one community cannot mean silence, fear and statelessness for another.

China, India, Bangladesh and other international actors may need practical contact with the Arakan Army because it controls important territory. But territorial control is not the same as legitimacy.

Any engagement with the AA and ULA should include firm conditions: recognition of the Rohingya identity, freedom of movement, protection of land and homes, an end to forced labour and forced recruitment, full humanitarian access and independent investigations into alleged crimes.

The international community should not reward the Arakan Army only because it defeated junta forces. Military success is not proof of justice.

The real test is how it treats civilians, especially a community that has already survived decades of persecution and genocide.

Twan Mrat Naing's X post made the problem clear. The Arakan Army wants the world to recognise its name, authority and political future. But it refuses to recognise the Rohingya by our own name.

Recognition cannot work in only one direction.

Until the AA and ULA recognise the Rohingya as an equal people of Arakan and answer serious allegations of abuse, their demand for international legitimacy should be treated with great caution.

A new flag does not create a new political future if the old hatred continues beneath it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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This commentary does not necessarily reflect the views of Mizzima Media.

An Update to Mizzima Readers

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



1. FUNDING REALITY

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

2. HOW MIZZIMA IS SUSTAINING ITSELF



YouTube and digital monetization



Training and Mizzima Media Training Institute



AI and Mizzima EAE for research, content regeneration and production



Content repackaging across TV, Facebook, YouTube and digital platforms



Mizzima Weekly, Mizzima English and policy products



HH Channel and diaspora community services



Production services, events, partnerships and sponsorships



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



Thank you for standing with Mizzima.

Mizzima

Truth. Voice. Future.

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

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

AN UPDATE TO MIZZIMA READERS AND FRIENDS

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

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

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

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

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

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

Truth. Voice. Future.

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



Photo: Darmau

A DAM TOO FAR? CHINA'S HIMALAYAN HYDROPOWER GAMBLE

SUN LEE

For years, India has argued that China's plan to construct the world's largest hydropower project on the Yarlung Tsangpo was not merely an engineering challenge but a strategic and environmental gamble. Beijing consistently dismissed these concerns, maintaining that the project was scientifically planned and posed no significant downstream risks. Ironically, the strongest validation of those concerns has now come from within China itself.

A recent study by researchers from Chengdu University of Technology and the China Geological Survey has confirmed that the Paizhen Fault, an active tectonic fault, runs directly beneath the Medog hydropower project in Tibet. The geological team

describes the surrounding rock formations as loose, weakly bonded and vulnerable to slope failures under prolonged water immersion and continued tectonic activity. They also note that the fault has remained active since the Pleistocene epoch and continues to generate seismic activity, including the magnitude 6.9 earthquake that struck its northern edge in 2017.

These are not speculative warnings issued by external critics. They come from Chinese geologists working on a Beijing-backed study. Their assessment raises uncomfortable questions about the structural resilience of a project expected to cost around US\$137 billion and located barely 50 kilometres from the Indian border.

The Medog project has often been framed as another milestone in China's remarkable infrastructure story. It is intended to generate more than three times the electricity of the Three Gorges Dam and support Beijing's twin ambitions of energy security and carbon neutrality. Yet reducing the project to a renewable energy success story misses a much larger point. This is not simply a dam but an attempt to reshape one of Asia's most strategically significant river systems through an engineering intervention of unprecedented scale.

The eastern Himalayas are among the youngest and most geologically unstable mountain ranges in the world. They sit at the collision point of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates, making the region exceptionally prone to earthquakes, landslides and glacial hazards. Unlike many hydropower projects built in relatively stable terrain, the Medog dam is being constructed in an environment where the landscape itself remains in constant motion.

Reservoir-induced landslides are already recognised as one of the principal hazards associated with large dams. In Medog, researchers warn that prolonged water storage could weaken already fragile slopes while tectonic movements continue beneath the project. The combination of active faulting, unstable geology and an enormous reservoir creates a level of cumulative risk that deserves far greater scrutiny than it has received.

China is no stranger to the consequences of building large infrastructure in seismically active regions. The devastating 2008 Wenchuan earthquake renewed debate over whether reservoirs can influence local seismic activity by altering underground stress fields, a phenomenon known as reservoir-induced

seismicity. Although scientists continue to debate the extent of this relationship, the experience demonstrated that geological uncertainties surrounding mega dams cannot simply be treated as theoretical concerns.

The Yarlung Tsangpo becomes the Brahmaputra after entering India before flowing into Bangladesh. Nearly 130 million people across these three countries depend directly or indirectly on the river for drinking water, agriculture, fisheries and livelihoods. Any major disruption, whether caused by dam operations, slope failures or extreme geological events, would not remain confined within China's borders.

Beijing has repeatedly insisted that the project is a run-of-the-river hydropower station that will not significantly reduce downstream water flows. That reassurance addresses only one dimension of the debate. The larger concern is not merely the quantity of water but the management of an increasingly complex river system. Reservoir operations, sediment transport, seasonal discharge patterns and emergency responses during natural disasters all have downstream implications. In transboundary river basins, transparency is therefore as important as engineering.

China has consistently treated transboundary rivers as matters of sovereign jurisdiction rather than shared governance. Unlike many international river basins governed by legally binding agreements, the Brahmaputra lacks a comprehensive water-sharing or basin management framework between China and downstream states. Hydrological data sharing remains limited, largely seasonal and vulnerable to political disruptions. This asymmetry places downstream countries in the difficult position of relying on assurances rather than institutional guarantees.

The confirmation of an active fault beneath the project only amplifies those concerns. If Chinese researchers themselves acknowledge significant geological vulnerabilities, neighbouring countries are justified in asking what contingency planning exists should those risks materialise. To date, Beijing has offered little insight into independent safety assessments, emergency preparedness mechanisms or long-term monitoring arrangements.

For more than two decades, Beijing has demonstrated extraordinary confidence in solving political, economic and geographical challenges through engineering. High-speed railways across deserts, artificial islands in disputed waters and mega dams on major rivers all reflect a governance model that prizes technological capability and state capacity. These projects undoubtedly showcase China's engineering prowess. Yet they also reveal a recurring tendency to treat infrastructure as a solution in itself, even when the surrounding political and ecological conditions remain deeply contested.

The Medog project risks becoming the latest example of that approach. Rather than encouraging regional confidence through greater transparency and consultation, Beijing has largely framed criticism as politically motivated while continuing construction. The latest geological findings suggest that many of the concerns raised by India and environmental experts were neither exaggerated nor hypothetical.

Renewable energy remains essential to global climate goals, and hydropower will continue to play an important role in that transition. But the pursuit of

clean energy cannot come at the expense of geological prudence or regional stability. A project of this magnitude demands more than engineering confidence; it requires transparency, independent scrutiny and meaningful engagement with downstream stakeholders.

The discovery of an active fault beneath the world's largest hydropower project should serve as a moment of reflection, not only for China but for the broader international community. The question is no longer whether Beijing possesses the technical capacity to build such a dam. It is whether it has adequately accounted for the geological, environmental and geopolitical risks that accompany it.

For a country that increasingly presents itself as a responsible global power, reassurance cannot rest solely on official statements. It must be earned through openness, scientific accountability and a willingness to acknowledge that even the most ambitious engineering projects have limits. The Himalayas have never been easily subdued by human ambition, the Medog dam may yet prove that they still are not.

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

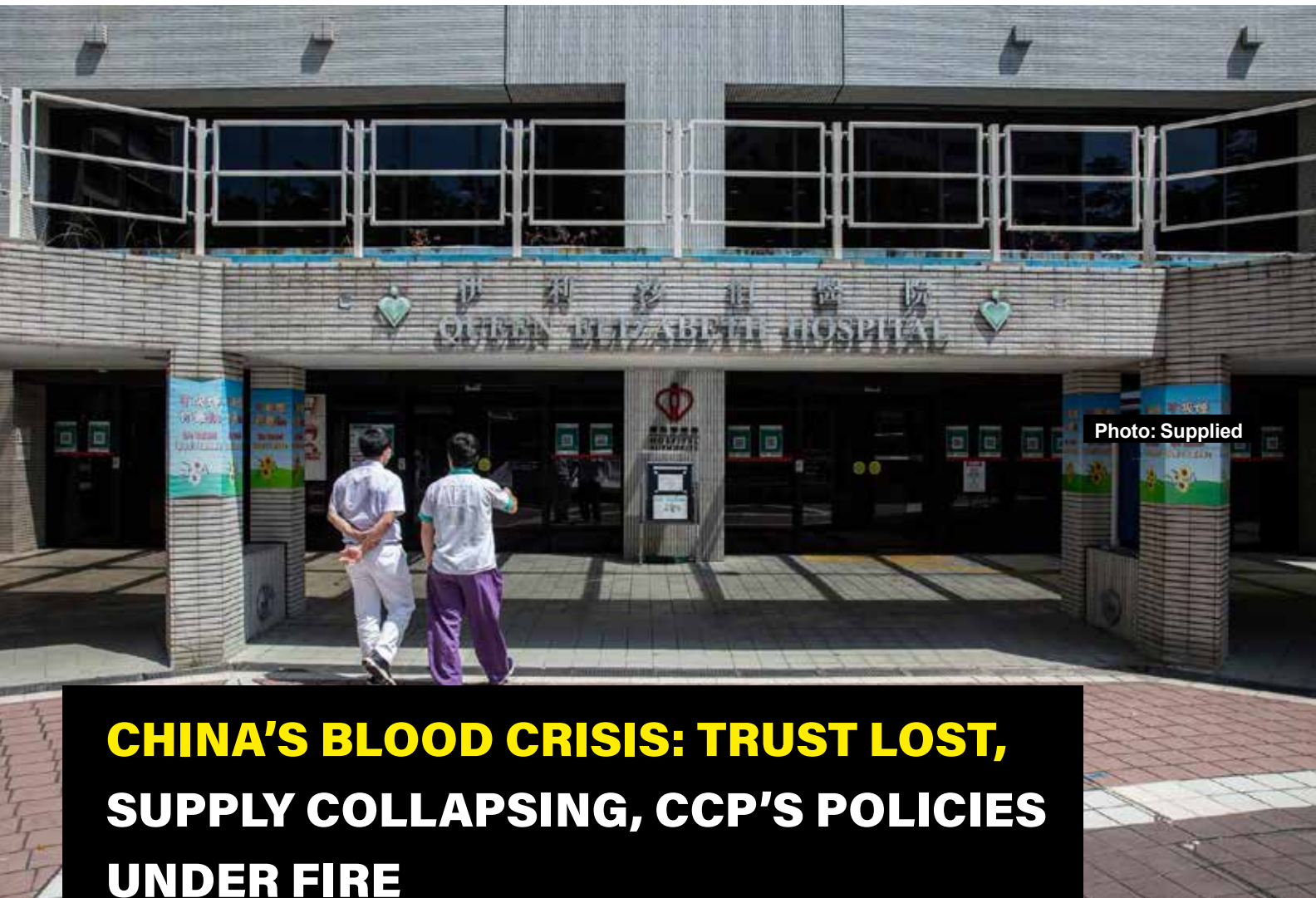


Photo: Supplied

CHINA'S BLOOD CRISIS: TRUST LOST, SUPPLY COLLAPSING, CCP'S POLICIES UNDER FIRE

SUN LEE

China today faces a blood donation crisis that is both medical and political in nature. Blood banks across the country are running critically low, while public willingness to donate has plummeted. This shortage is not simply the result of demographic decline but also of a profound collapse in public trust toward the system and the ruling authorities. What was once a relatively stable system of voluntary donation has now become a flashpoint of discontent, exposing the deeper fractures in China's governance and healthcare policies.

The statistics paint a grim picture. By mid-2026, China's national blood donation rate stood at just 10.9 donors per thousand people, barely above the World Health Organization's minimum recommended threshold of 10 per thousand. In contrast, high-income countries average 31.5 donors per thousand. Clinical demand for blood in China continues to rise at nearly

9% annually, with major provinces such as Guangdong reporting growth rates of 10–15%. Yet voluntary donations have increased by only 1.69% in the same period. The imbalance is stark: hospitals require thousands of units daily, but donation centres remain empty, forcing postponements of non-urgent surgeries and leaving patients vulnerable.

The decline is most visible among young people. University students, once the backbone of China's donation system, have withdrawn en masse. Their contributions fell from 2.36 million in 2023 to just 1.06 million in 2025, a collapse of 55% in two years. This demographic retreat is compounded by China's broader population crisis. With record-low birth rates and a rapidly aging population, the pool of eligible donors shrinks every year. The CCP's attempt to legislate its way out of this demographic reality by raising the maximum donation age from 55 to 65 and shortening

the interval between donations from six months to three only underscores the desperation of the state. These measures may temporarily boost supply but cannot reverse the structural decline in donor availability.

Beyond demographics, the deeper issue is trust. Citizens increasingly view blood donation as a trap: they give freely, yet hospitals charge exorbitant fees for transfusions. A typical 200 ml transfusion costs around Yuan 1,000, while platelet transfusions are even more expensive. Blood centres, officially public institutions, operate in practice like profit-driven entities. They collect blood at no cost, sell it to hospitals, and hospitals then bill patients or insurance companies. This commodification of blood has turned a humanitarian act into a lucrative business model, eroding the moral foundation of voluntary donation.

The CCP's promises of reciprocity have also collapsed under bureaucratic reinterpretation. Official propaganda long claimed that donors and their families would enjoy lifetime priority access to transfusions. Yet in practice, hospitals have denied patients' blood on the grounds that their donation certificates had "expired." Only after public outrage did authorities intervene, retroactively validating the certificates. Such incidents reinforce the perception that policies can be rewritten overnight, leaving citizens with no guarantee of rights or benefits. Each reversal chips away at public confidence, making voluntary participation ever less likely.

Suspicion runs deeper still. Many Chinese citizens fear that blood donation feeds into a darker system of organ procurement. China's ability to locate compatible organs for transplantation within days or even hours has long raised questions. Medically, such speed is impossible without a live database of potential donors. Blood samples collected during donation or routine medical exams are believed to be used for organ matching. Whether openly discussed or not, the suspicion of forced organ harvesting hangs over the system, driving citizens to avoid blood tests and donation campaigns altogether. In this climate, no amount of propaganda can restore trust.

The CCP's response has been heavy-handed. Universities have reportedly required students to donate blood before receiving diplomas, effectively turning voluntary donation into coercion. Hospitals

have ordered excessive blood draws during routine procedures, leaving patients dizzy and suspicious that their blood is being siphoned for purposes beyond medical necessity. These practices only deepen public resentment, reinforcing the belief that the system exploits rather than serves citizens.

At its core, the blood crisis reflects the CCP's governance model. The state seeks to extract loyalty and resources from its citizens while offering little in return. Blood donation is framed as patriotic duty, yet the system is riddled with profiteering and mistrust. The ulterior motive is clear: blood is not just a medical resource but a financial asset and a potential data source for organ matching. By embedding donation into ideological campaigns, the CCP attempts to mask systemic failures with political loyalty. But loyalty cannot be coerced in matters of health. Citizens may be compelled to chant slogans, but they cannot be forced to bleed for a system they no longer believe in.

The implications are profound. A shortage of blood is not merely a logistical challenge; it is a crisis of legitimacy. As trust in the system collapses, so too does the willingness of citizens to participate in state-organized campaigns. The CCP's inability to secure voluntary blood donations reveals the limits of its control. It can legislate, propagandize, and coerce, but it cannot rebuild trust once lost. This crisis, rooted in both demographics and governance, will only worsen over time unless the state confronts its exploitative practices and restores genuine reciprocity.

China's blood crisis is therefore more than a medical emergency - it is a political reckoning. The collapse of voluntary donation exposes the fragility of a system built on coercion and profit rather than trust and transparency. Unless the CCP addresses the structural causes - demographic decline, exploitative economics, and public distrust - the shortage will deepen, and the legitimacy of the system will erode further. In the end, blood donation is not just about supply and demand; it is about the social contract between state and citizen. And in China today, that contract is bleeding out.

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



THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED

“We have to get rid of this military dictatorship. Otherwise the whole country and the coming generations will be in a really troubled situation.”

Mun Awng, born in 1960 in Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar, is a renowned Kachin singer, songwriter, and pro-democracy activist. He grew up in a modest family — his father was a teacher and headmaster, and his mother was a nurse. His childhood in northern Myanmar was shaped by the ongoing conflict between the Burma Army and the Kachin Independence Army, and his family often prepared trenches to shelter from fighting. Growing up amid such instability, Mun Awng found solace in music, singing in church and learning by ear from what he could catch on the local radio. “We only had shortwave radio that I could listen to, so that was my main source of knowledge about music,” he notes. Western pop and rock — particularly The Beatles — inspired him, even though such influences were condemned under General Ne Win’s regime.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Mun Awng began performing publicly, playing at community events and church fundraisers. His band, The Rhythm, gained

a following for performing original songs rather than copying Western tunes with Burmese lyrics, which was the norm at the time. In 1984, with the support of his family, he released his debut album 8/82 Inya, which became widely popular among university students. The album featured collaborations with several notable musicians, including Lieutenant General Rukhkyawng Hkawng Lum of the Kachin Independence Army, who played bass guitar. Despite strict censorship and government suspicion of musicians, 8/82 Inya marked a new chapter in modern Burmese music.

Mun Awng’s growing success coincided with a period of political repression. Censors demanded that artists include songs about religion or national pride in every album. Lyrics were reviewed line by line for political content, and anything critical of the government was deleted. Over time, Mun Awng became disillusioned with the system. He famously failed his final university exams deliberately so he could devote himself to music. By the mid-1980s, he realized that true artistic freedom was impossible under the dictatorship, which viewed musicians as dangerous or subversive.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/6/22/episode-560-the-day-the-music-died>



Myanmar junta leader examines food products destined for export. Photo: Government media

MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER ENCOURAGES JAPAN TO INVEST MORE IN MYANMAR

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has urged Japanese investors to expand their participation in Myanmar's key sectors, including agriculture, livestock and agro based industries, renewable energy, education and healthcare, as well as technology and digital services, according to a report in the Global New Light of Myanmar (GNLM) 29 July.

Japan accounted for 4.38 per cent of Myanmar's total trade, making it Myanmar's sixth-largest trading partner, said Min Aung Hlaing at the Myanmar-Japan Business Forum at the Myanmar Convention Centre (Yangon) in Mayangon Township, Yangon Region on 28 July.

The forum, jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Association of Myanmar Japan Socio-Economic Development Cooperation, and INGO PEACE of Japan, underscored efforts to deepen bilateral ties and drive comprehensive socioeconomic growth, according to the GNLM.

The Myanmar leader unveiled the Myanmar-Japan business forum.

Speaking at the forum, Min Aung Hlaing reported that Myanmar-Japan bilateral trade totalled US\$1,334.8 million in the 2023-2024 financial year, declined to US\$1,194.4 million in 2024 -2025, and rebounded to US\$1,343.7 million in 2025 -2026, according to official trade statistics.

He noted that in the 2024-2025 financial year, Myanmar's exports to Japan were valued at US\$1,058.6 million, while imports from Japan stood at US\$135.8 million. The total bilateral trade between the two countries during that period reached US\$1,194.4 million.

The Myanmar leader explained that Myanmar's major export products to Japan include garments, footwear, pulses and beans, pearls, and electrical equipment. The main import products from Japan are textiles, transport equipment, electrical machinery, machinery and mechanical appliances, and lace and lace fabrics. So, the President expressed his hope that the Myanmar-Japan Business Forum will further promote bilateral trade between Myanmar and Japan to a greater extent than before, the newspaper reported.



EGG PRICE RISE DOMINATES MYANMAR SOCIAL MEDIA

The story dominating Myanmar social media last week was the price of a single egg, which has climbed to nearly 700 kyat (about \$0.33), a sevenfold rise since the 2021 military coup that has turned a household staple into a financial strain.

Under the previous civilian government, an egg cost roughly 100 kyat. Industry sources attribute the latest surge to junta restrictions on importing breeding hens, poultry feed, and veterinary vaccines, part of efforts to conserve foreign currency, compounded by a global fuel price shock driving up transport and production costs nationwide.

On Facebook, posts checking prices at neighbourhood shops confirm figures near 700 kyat in townships including Hakha and Kalay, with users noting the hike affects households regardless of political affiliation.

A widely shared post has highlighted a scheme pressured by authorities offering eggs at a discounted 550 kyat (about \$0.26) in Yangon, though commentators describe long queues and limited stock. Other posts point to rising livestock input costs as the driver. An explainer video on the price surge drew thousands of views within days. Recurring comments describe households shifting from meat and fish to eggs now cutting back further, note many who queue for the discounted price still go home empty-handed, and question why shop prices differ from official figures.

The World Bank's June Economic Monitor put Myanmar's annual inflation at 24.6 percent in April, with food prices among the fastest-rising, as the economy remains strained by conflict, fuel costs, and currency pressures five years after the coup.

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.