

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



SUPPORTING A FRAUD

Putin hosts Myanmar's coup-maker

Tachileik: Organized Crime, Economic Hardship and Social Vulnerability

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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.

MYANMAR JUNTA TIGHTENS NOOSE ON CIVILIANS

Myanmar's military junta is tightening its noose around civilians, turning everyday life into an increasingly dangerous exercise in survival, particularly in disputed areas of this crisis-ridden country.

More than five years after the 2021 coup, repression is no longer confined to battlefields or political activists. It is reaching into homes, workplaces, villages and families, creating a climate in which almost anyone can become a target – particularly youth.

The junta's methods are brutally familiar but increasingly comprehensive. Arbitrary arrests, forced conscription, curfews, surveillance and restrictions on movement are being combined with military operations designed to punish communities suspected of supporting resistance forces. In Yangon alone, monitors reported at least 166 arrests between April and mid-July 2026.

Forced conscription has become another powerful instrument of control. Young people face the prospect of being taken into an army widely accused of committing atrocities against civilians. Families desperate to protect their children are reportedly being forced to pay enormous sums to officials to avoid conscription. In central Myanmar, recent reports describe local administrators exploiting this fear for financial gain.

For poorer families, there may be no money to pay and nowhere safe to hide.

The military's violence from the air adds another layer of terror. A recent UN investigation found intensified aerial attacks against homes, schools, hospitals, religious buildings and displacement camps – one recent attack on a Buddhist monastery in Sagaing wiping out 14 meditators. The use of drones, motorized paragliders and other low-cost aircraft means civilians can face sudden attacks with little warning.

Meanwhile, humanitarian access is deteriorating as fighting and military restrictions make it harder to deliver food, medicine and other essential assistance. Millions of displaced people remain dependent on humanitarian support while the economy and public services continue to deteriorate. Human Rights Watch has described the junta's assault as having devastated Myanmar's infrastructure, economy, healthcare, education and civil and political life.

This is not simply a military campaign against armed opponents. It is a system of coercion intended to make resistance costly for entire communities. The message is clear: oppose the junta and risk arrest, displacement, financial ruin or death; remain neutral and you may still be punished; try to escape and you may confront another set of restrictions.

Yet the tightening noose also exposes the junta's weakness. A government confident of its legitimacy does not need mass arrests, forced recruitment and attacks that terrorize civilians into submission. These are the tools of a military struggling to impose control over a country that has repeatedly rejected its rule.

The international community should therefore look beyond diplomatic gestures and managed political processes. Myanmar's civilians need protection, humanitarian access and accountability – not another façade of normality.

As the junta tightens its grip, the world must ensure that Myanmar's suffering does not become invisible simply because repression has become routine.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo by AFP



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing shakes hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. Photo: AFP

SUPPORTING A FRAUD

PUTIN HOSTS MYANMAR COUP-MAKER

On 18 August, Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted Myanmar's coup-maker Min Aung Hlaing at the Kremlin, the ex-junta chief's first visit to Moscow since taking office as "civilian president" following what Western nations and democracy watchdogs claim was a "sham" election.

Russia was one of the few countries that backed Myanmar after the 2021 military coup that ousted the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, triggering a civil war estimated to have killed more than 100,000 people, a conflict in which civilians are suffering from military attacks.

Russia appears unabashed in its support for the fraud in which Myanmar's military chief illegally took away the people's democratic choice and changed from green to white – putting on civilian garb and passing himself off as president.

This official visit by Min Aung Hlaing to meet with Putin was full of pomp and ceremony – with both players understanding its importance to the Myanmar leader's drive for "legitimacy".

"Currently, the relations between our countries are developing swiftly," Min Aung Hlaing said, addressing Putin through an interpreter in a gilded Kremlin hall.

"Thanks to Russia's and your personal support we've achieved many results on the international stage," he said. "Myanmar is a reliable partner for Russia in southeast Asia."

Putin said the two countries were "actively cooperating on the international stage" and that "work needs to be done on the economic front".

He added that security ties were "developing".

"Your visit has a very full programme, so I'm sure there'll be a chance to discuss all these questions," Putin said.

At an earlier meeting with the Myanmar leader, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said Moscow was "moving forward with implementing the agreements on the construction of a small-capacity nuclear power plant in Myanmar".

Russia's energy ministry, for its part, said a memorandum of understanding was signed aimed at boosting cooperation between the two countries in the areas of electricity and the oil and gas industry. Its statement, which gave no further details, was published on the Russian state messaging platform Max.

Myanmar and Russia signed a five-year military cooperation pact in February, although few details were released.

The Myanmar military uses Russian-made jets against resistance forces and has been accused by UN investigators and rights groups of targeting civilians, in attacks some conflict monitors say amount to war crimes. Russian military advisors are also active in supporting the Myanmar coup-maker, in terms of military training and the use of offensive drones.

Moscow appears to be upfront in its support of the Myanmar junta's war on their people. Russia is helping keep fighter jets it previously supplied to Myanmar operational and sees prospects for future projects involving naval equipment, a senior Russian arms cooperation official said during the Moscow visit by Min Aung Hlaing.

Dmitry Shugaev, head of Russia's Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, told Russian state broadcaster Vesti on 18 August that Moscow and Naypyidaw had several joint aviation projects, including support to maintain the "flightworthiness" of previously supplied fighter aircraft, Russian state news agency TASS reported.

Shugaev said Russia had already supplied Myanmar with a large amount of military equipment and de-

scribed the country as a strategic partner in the region. Because Myanmar has access to the sea, he added, Russia also saw prospects for projects involving naval equipment.

This sixth official visit by Min Aung Hlaing to Moscow since the 2021 coup was engineered to continue to back the fraud that the former military commander in chief is the legitimate leader of Myanmar. It came shortly after he enjoyed an official visit to Thailand, and ahead of a planned bilateral visit to Cambodia, all providing opportunities to circumvent ASEAN's call to honour the signed Five-Point Consensus "peace plan", ignored by Naypyidaw.

Min Aung Hlaing is many things to many people but one thing is for sure – he is shrewd and calculating. He is working to build his legitimacy and recognizes that bilateral relations with countries provide stepping

stones to "acceptance" – leaving ASEAN to tie itself up in knots in trying to effectively respond to the trouble in their midst. Critics are alarmed. ASEAN parliamentarians, for example, have condemned Thailand's "dangerous normalization" of Myanmar's military junta.

Given these circumstances, it is important for Western countries and like-minded critics to keep up the pressure on the illegal junta, including sanctions, and calls for the release of political prisoners including Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar's coup-maker should not be allowed to get away with this fraud.

Sources: Mizzima, AFP



Fighter jets are a crucial part of the Myanmar junta leader's war on his people. Photo: AFP

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

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



CENTRAL MYANMAR – NATURAL DISASTERS, JUNTA ATTACKS, AND REPRESSION

People in central Myanmar, particularly in Sagaing and Magway regions, are facing a worsening humanitarian crisis as severe monsoon rains and flooding coincide with continued junta airstrikes and restrictions on humanitarian assistance. The combination has left communities struggling to evacuate, find shelter and access basic necessities while also fearing further military attacks.

On a Buddhist religious observance day, the junta carried out an airstrike on a monastery in Swelwe O village, Myaung Township, Sagaing Region, where people were attending meditation sessions. The attack killed at least 14 people at the scene and seriously injured around 30 others. A seriously injured woman later died. Most of the victims were men between 50 and 70 years old who were participating in meditation at the male meditation centre.

The attacks have continued as heavy monsoon rains cause widespread flooding. According to a report by the National Unity Government (NUG), junta forces conducted 237 airstrikes across Myanmar between August 8 and 23, killing 88 people and injuring 157. Sagaing recorded the highest number of casualties, with 37 people killed and 59 injured. The junta reportedly carried out 60 airstrikes in Sagaing and 95 in Magway during the period.

In Sagaing, flooding has been compounded by concerns over water released from the Thaphanseik Dam. Villages in Khin-U Township were affected by flash floods, while the junta

also launched an airstrike on flooded Kuntaing village on August 11, injuring a woman who was receiving treatment at a flood shelter.

The overlapping threats have created an extraordinary level of insecurity for residents. One local resident told RFA that villagers were surrounded by floodwater while facing airstrikes and the additional danger of poisonous snakes displaced by the flooding. The situation illustrates how natural disasters are becoming more dangerous because communities are simultaneously exposed to conflict and displacement.

Humanitarian access has also emerged as a major concern. Forty-three general strike committees and student unions have appealed to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and ECHO Director-General Maciej Popowski not to channel €10.5 million in aid through the junta. They accuse the authorities of releasing dam water without warning, attacking flood-relief volunteers, arresting volunteers, confiscating aid and medicine, and using helicopters and suicide drones in flood-affected areas.

Shin Thant of the general strike groups told Mizzima that they welcome European assistance but fear that aid delivered through the junta could fail to reach people most in need. For communities in central Myanmar, the crisis is therefore not simply a combination of flooding and conflict. It is a situation in which military attacks, restricted humanitarian access and natural disasters reinforce one another, leaving vulnerable communities with fewer safe options for survival.

Fears female conscription could expand

The Myanmar junta's recent military training for women has raised fresh concerns that female conscription could expand, although it remains unclear whether the latest trainees are being recruited under the country's compulsory military service law. The development has nevertheless increased anxiety among women, particularly factory and garment workers, while forced recruitment of men is already changing the way families and communities earn a living.



On August 10, the junta opened a basic military training course for women at the No. (4) Warrant Officer and Sergeant Training School in Hmawbi, Yangon Region. Most of the trainees reportedly came from industrial zones and workplaces in Yangon. However, a military source involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) said the training appears to be intended to recruit permanent female soldiers rather than women serving under the conscription system, which requires a shorter period of service.

The same training school hosted its first female batch in August last year. According to the source, the regime is seeking to replace women currently working in military factories and headquarters offices with trained female soldiers, potentially freeing existing personnel for other military duties.

Despite the uncertainty over whether the latest training represents the expansion of female conscription, the reports have already created fear among women. Some are concerned that they could eventually be drafted and have begun worrying about having to pay money to local authorities to avoid military service. At present, informal payments to avoid conscription are reportedly more commonly associated with men, but women now fear they could face similar demands if female recruitment expands.

The anxiety is particularly strong among women working in factories and garment factories, where employers have limited ability or willingness to protect workers from recruitment. The junta's electricity authorities have also encouraged garment factories to operate at night by offering lower electricity rates. As a result, some factories have extended working hours until around 10 p.m., raising concerns among female workers about travelling to and from workplaces at night.

"Employers cannot do anything if there is a draft. They only focus on production and do not care about the workers' security," a garment worker told media.

At the same time, forced recruitment of men is already pushing women into jobs traditionally performed by male workers. In Sagaing city, men increasingly avoid work that requires travelling around the city because junta troops and allied militias conduct forced recruitment in residential areas. Women have consequently begun taking over jobs such as delivering 20-litre drinking-water bottles from factories to households.

"Forced drafting is happening in urban areas during both day and night. Girls have to deliver the drinking-water bottles. Men only dare to work inside the factory compound," a local resident told Mizzima.

The emerging pattern suggests that even before any formal expansion of female conscription, military recruitment is already affecting women's lives. As men avoid public spaces to reduce the risk of forced recruitment, women and girls are increasingly exposed to economic pressure, workplace insecurity and potentially greater risks of military recruitment themselves.

NUG struggles with providing education for children

Myanmar's education system is facing a severe crisis as millions of children remain out of school while the National Unity Government (NUG) and ethnic armed organisations struggle to keep schools operating amid junta attacks.

According to an ISP-Myanmar survey conducted in late June, more than 6.3 million school-age children have lost access to education. Myanmar has around 13 million school-age children, but only about 6.7 million are enrolled in junta-controlled schools. The figures highlight the scale of disruption since the 2021 coup.

The NUG has attempted to fill the gap by providing education in areas under its control. During the 2023–24 academic year, NUG-administered schools provided education to more than 700,000 students. Its 2025 fourth-year report said there were around 15,500

schools under the NUG and another 870 schools in areas controlled by ethnic armed organisations. However, the NUG has not yet announced figures for the 2026–27 academic year.

Keeping schools open remains difficult because they have increasingly become targets of junta attacks. According to a 2025 report by the NUG and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, junta forces attacked 333 schools across Myanmar. Airstrikes have forced the NUG to close some schools, particularly in central Myanmar, prompting a shift toward online and offline alternative education. However, remote learning is difficult for many families because of limited internet access, unfamiliarity with digital technology and a preference for face-to-face teaching.

The problem also affects ethnic armed organisations. The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) provided education to about 70,000 students during the 2024–25 academic year, but has reportedly closed around 200 schools this year because of junta airstrikes in its controlled areas.

The latest incident is a July 14 airstrike on a primary school in Natmauk Township, Magway Region. A junta MI-35 helicopter reportedly attacked during the lunch break, killing a 13-year-old Grade 7 student and seriously injuring seven other students and a woman.

For the NUG, maintaining education is therefore not only about resources. It also means protecting students and teachers while finding alternatives when conventional classrooms become too dangerous.



Tachileik, Myanmar. Photo: Supplied

TACHILEIK: ORGANIZED CRIME, ECONOMIC HARDSHIP, AND SOCIAL VULNERABILITY

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Residents describe Tachileik as a border city where economic hardship, weak governance, and armed conflict have left many locals, particularly young men, women, and displaced populations, dependent on organized crime and its associated industries for survival.

Tachileik, located in eastern Shan State on the Myanmar-Thailand border opposite Mae Sai District, Chiang Rai Province, has long served as an important commercial gateway between the two countries. It has also become known specifically for drug trafficking and online scam operations.

In February 2026, junta troops and civilian officials raided a compound in Tachileik's Saykhan Ward and arrested more than 100 Chinese nationals accused of running telecom fraud, known locally as "zhapian."

A separate raid on an unlicensed building called the "International Hotel" in Tachileik's Mekong (2) Ward led to the arrest of 393 foreign nationals: 297 Chinese, 57 Vietnamese, 38 Malaysians, and one Filipino. They were charged with online fraud and gambling.

Authorities seized 174 computers, nine Starlink units, and 233 mobile phones.

Reporting on the broader Golden Triangle scam economy has found that crackdowns tend to displace rather than dismantle the networks. Operators shift back and forth between Tachileik and the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone across the Mekong in Laos as enforcement pressure rises and falls in each jurisdiction.

One young Tachileik resident who worked in the scam industry for nearly three years described the pattern to Shan Herald. Raids in one location simply push the networks to the other side of the river until the pressure eases. Operators then "come back here" and resume hiring, focusing on young people who already have experience in the trade.

Field reporting along the border found that Chinese-owned enterprises dominate major business activity on the Myanmar side, including hydropower, manufacturing, and import-export operations such as supermarkets handling both raw and finished

goods. Chinese investors accounted for 47 percent of Myanmar's total foreign investment inflows nationwide between 2021 and 2025, making China the country's leading source of foreign investment in the years following the 2021 coup.

"Nang Zarm" (a pseudonym), a 50-year-old Tachileik resident, said Chinese investment projects have driven up rental prices to levels many local families cannot afford. "Rental prices increased dramatically, making housing unaffordable for many local families," she said. She added that deforestation, water pollution, and rising crime have followed the same investment wave, and that wealthier investors and workers tied to Chinese-backed projects have pushed ordinary households out of the city center toward the outskirts of Tachileik or nearby communities where housing remains more affordable.

According to residents, the cost of living in Tachileik is significantly higher than in many cities in northern Thailand, including Chiang Mai, while wages for ordinary workers remain substantially lower.

Limited legitimate employment opportunities and civil conflict in Shan State have pushed some young people toward drug trafficking and organized crime. Several interviewees said that some young men become involved in these activities because they have few other ways to earn a living. Their accounts are consistent with regional data on Shan State's role in the synthetic drug trade.

Tachileik is controlled by Border Guard Force 1009 (BGF 1009), a militia allied with the Myanmar military. The International Crisis Group has found that large-scale methamphetamine production shifted to areas around Tachileik and neighboring Monghsat Township after the 2021 coup. In addition to drug production and trafficking, Shan State has become a center for unregulated hotels and casinos associated with illicit activity. The state hosts at least 60 unregulated casinos, more than a dozen of them in Tachileik alone.

Interviewees further described Tachileik's nightlife as closely tied to the drug economy, alleging that KTV establishments, nightclubs, guesthouses, restaurants, and transport stops are common locations where illicit drugs can be bought or used. Drug distribution networks, according to respondents, often target entertainment venues where both residents and visitors gather.

"Sai Aung Kham" (a pseudonym), a 48-year-old guesthouse and restaurant owner in Tachileik, said businesses relying on a single source of income struggle to survive. "If you rely on only one business, it is very difficult to survive," he said. Drivers and passengers frequently stop at his guesthouse and restaurant, some asking for kakoo, a drug made from opium residue mixed with dried herbs and smoked in a pipe, or kratom, which he said has become popular among young people; selling both brings in additional income. He alleged that much of the illicit drug supply in the area originates from militia-controlled territory aligned with the military regime.

Likewise, many young women reportedly seek employment in karaoke (KTV) venues, nightclubs, and the commercial sex industry as a means of financial survival. Detailed current data on Tachileik's KTV sector is limited, but earlier reporting provides a picture of the industry's wages and scale. In 2020, workers at the 1G1-7 Hotel, one of the town's largest entertainment complexes, reportedly earned THB 300 to 700 an hour as entertainers. The hotel employed roughly 100 KTV workers, most of them young Thai women who crossed into Myanmar for the higher pay. A separate 2020 account described the same venue as operating as a high-end brothel catering to Burmese generals and businessmen. Room rates ranged from 1,200 to 10,000 baht per night, while more than 20 VIP karaoke rooms rented for 500 to 2,000 baht an hour. At least 180 Thai staff worked on site.

More recent reporting confirms that Tachileik's KTV and gambling sector remains active, although similarly detailed wage and employment data is not yet available. In August 2025, gambling dens and KTV lounges were reported to be reopening openly across Tachileik after a January 2025 crackdown that operators had allegedly been warned about in advance. Workers reportedly earned 10,000 to 15,000 baht per month plus food and lodging. A local source said the establishments "usually hire young women just over 18," with some screening applicants based on appearance and recruiting workers from displaced populations as far away as Yangon and Mandalay.

The connection between Tachileik's KTV venues and the drug trade was documented by the International Crisis Group, which reported that a UWSA-owned entertainment complex in Tachileik that opened in early 2022 was the site of a shootout in April of that year. Authorities seized more than 12.5 million narcotic tablets from ten men involved in the incident.

Local residents also described Tachileik as home to a large population of commercial sex workers, many originating from conflict-affected regions across Myanmar. Interviewees said women seeking customers are commonly visible outside bars, karaoke venues, and nightclubs in the evening.

"Sai Luong" (a pseudonym), a 45-year-old Tachileik resident who works as an interior decorator for KTV venues and nightclubs, said ordinary jobs such as construction or restaurant work pay too little to support a family given the high cost of living. "If you work for organized crime groups or in the drug trade, you can earn much more money," he said.

He added that many young women in the entertainment industry entered the sector for lack of alternatives, some after fleeing conflict areas or attempting to avoid forced military recruitment.

Interviewees further alleged that individuals from Thailand with criminal backgrounds, particularly those reportedly involved in drug trafficking, have relocated to Tachileik. This claim finds some corroboration in Thai law-enforcement records.

Thai authorities have publicly named Thatchapon Trakulmungmeedee, described as a Thai drug kingpin, as running businesses in Tachileik, including gold shops, hotels, entertainment venues, and transport services valued at roughly 1 billion baht. He is also allegedly the mastermind behind the smuggling of drugs from Tachileik into Thailand via Mae Sai.

Separately, in December 2025, Myanmar police handed over three Thailand-wanted drug fugitives arrested in Tachileik and Mongton townships to Thai authorities under a bilateral narcotics-control agreement, along with a Thai national found residing illegally in Myanmar.

According to these accounts, some reside in the city without proper documentation by paying bribes to local authorities, allowing them to operate with relative impunity. These claims could not be independently verified but were consistently raised by multiple local sources during field interviews.

Sai Aung Kham alleged that authorities in Tachileik enforce drug laws selectively, targeting individuals who fail to share profits or pay informal taxes while allowing others to continue operating. Reflecting local perceptions of corruption, he cited a Shan proverb: "When water leaks from the roof, it is difficult to repair it," which he said captures the belief that corruption originating among those in authority is difficult to address through lower-level law enforcement alone.

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

ASEAN



THE DIPLOMATIC LITMUS TEST FOR LEGITIMACY: ASEAN MUST DECIDE WHAT COMES AFTER JUNTA'S NON-COMPLIANCE

NICHOLAS KONG

ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus (5PC), collectively adopted by ASEAN member states and accepted by coup leader Min Aung Hlaing in Jakarta in April 2021, has become a litmus test for the junta's genuine commitment to peace and prosperity for its own people as well as a test of ASEAN's credibility as a reliable and accountable regional organization committed to stability and prosperity.

The Test Has Been Taken, and Failed

More than five years after the coup, the 5PC's core commitments remain largely unimplemented. The junta is being tested on compliance, and ASEAN is being tested on enforcement. While the bloc has repeatedly reaffirmed the framework, the junta has persistently manipulated diplomatic engagement and continued to resist its substance and, increasingly, its legitimacy.

It is time to move beyond debating whether the junta will become a worthy partner in negotiation. That is already evident in its record of repeated non-compliance, dismissal of ASEAN's efforts, and recent demands to reconsider the framework.

In July, the military-engineered parliament called for a review of the 5PC and restoration of full participation in ASEAN. On August 10, the civilian branch of the military regime went further, rejecting the continuing role of the ASEAN Special Envoy and arguing that such engagement was no longer necessary following the election it organized.

Having failed the litmus test by refusing to implement ASEAN's framework and challenging the relevance of the mechanism itself, the junta has now shifted the test to ASEAN.

The bloc should stop treating the junta's positions as a diplomatic puzzle to be solved through repeated requests. ASEAN should therefore establish a clear relationship between behavior and engagement: measurable progress should produce deeper engagement, while continued obstruction should produce predictable collective consequences and a decisive response to non-compliance. Without such a relationship, repeated diplomatic requests risk becoming a ritual rather than an instrument of policy.

Changing the Rules Through Diplomatic Outreach

Min Aung Hlaing's transition from coup leader to self-appointed president has nevertheless changed his diplomatic posture. He now speaks through a rubber-stamped parliament and institutions that remain under military control. His regime increasingly presents itself as the sole legitimate voice of Myanmar, while marginalizing other political stakeholders.

This creates a new trap for ASEAN and international actors, who should not conveniently use "Myanmar" as shorthand for the military authorities in Naypyidaw. Myanmar is a nation, not synonymous with the institution that controls its state apparatus. A durable settlement will require engagement with multiple stakeholders, including the SCEF, a collective leadership body established by the NUG, CRPH, and major EAOs, as well as other EAOs outside the coalition, political parties, and civil society. ASEAN itself has emphasized the importance of engaging all key stakeholders.

The junta's current diplomatic strategy appears increasingly aimed not merely at resisting the 5PC, but at changing the diplomatic environment in which the 5PC operates. By demanding revision of the consensus, seeking fuller participation in ASEAN, and benefiting from expanding bilateral engagement, Naypyidaw can move the debate from "Why has the junta failed to implement ASEAN's framework?" to "Why should ASEAN continue to insist on it?"

The self-appointed president's overseas outreach now illustrates this broader strategy. On August 18, he met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, continuing a series of high-level foreign visits since assuming the nominal presidency. The discussions highlighted expanding cooperation in energy and defense, alongside other economic projects and efforts to deepen cooperation amid Western sanctions.

The Moscow visit followed his high-level engagement in Thailand and comes amid further reported plans for outreach to Cambodia in September. These successive bilateral openings give the junta additional platforms to demonstrate that it has alternatives to ASEAN pressure and can pursue diplomatic and economic relationships outside the bloc's collective framework.

Although states have legitimate national interests, and ASEAN members will continue to engage Myanmar for security, trade, migration, and other practical

reasons, ASEAN must ensure that such bilateral engagements do not undermine its centrality. The risk lies in the cumulative effect: if each bilateral channel advances independently while ASEAN's collective framework becomes increasingly secondary, the organization's centrality may gradually weaken without any member formally choosing to abandon it.

This is particularly worth watching as Myanmar expands its engagement in subregional mechanisms. China and Myanmar have agreed to strengthen Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) and develop an upgraded "LMC 2.0" framework, while China has simultaneously expressed support for Myanmar's participation in ASEAN mechanisms. There is no basis to assume that future Cambodian or Mekong-Lancang engagement is intended to circumvent ASEAN. But the expansion of alternative bilateral and subregional channels means that ASEAN's own centrality is something the organization must actively protect rather than simply assume.

The Test Now Is ASEAN's

The urgency is heightened by Singapore's upcoming 2027 chairmanship, which has emphasized measurable implementation of the 5PC and engagement with all key stakeholders. If ASEAN enters 2027 divided over whether the 5PC still governs its Myanmar policy, the junta may achieve something through persistence that it could not achieve through compliance: the gradual erosion of ASEAN consensus itself.

ASEAN therefore needs to move beyond statements and requests. It should establish a clear sequence linking behavior to engagement; maintain collective discipline when individual members pursue bilateral interests; and ensure that engagement with Myanmar's military authorities does not marginalize other stakeholders or dilute the 5PC.

The objective is not punishment for its own sake. Nor is it to deny Myanmar's evolving political realities. It is to ensure that diplomatic engagement produces incentives for compromise rather than rewards for non-compliance.

The junta has failed the litmus test and is now attempting to bypass or reject it. ASEAN must now decide whether failing the test has consequences, or whether the test was never meant to matter.

This commentary was previously published in the Eurasia Review.



MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER MIN AUNG HLAING VISITS EU-SANCTIONED BELARUS FERTILIZER PRODUCER AFTER RUSSIA TRIP

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing visited EU-sanctioned Belarusian fertilizer producer Grodno Azot on 20 August, as the company promoted chemical and fertilizer supplies to Myanmar during his follow-on trip from Russia.

Belarusian state reports said Grodno Azot had signed a memorandum on supplying an industrial chemical to Myanmar and expected future shipments of nitrogen fertilizers. However, neither side announced a binding nitrogen fertilizer contract, its value, volume, payment arrangements or a delivery timetable.

Min Aung Hlaing toured the state-owned plant in Grodno on the first day of his Belarus visit. Fertilizers, industrial chemicals and industrial textiles were among the areas discussed, according to the Belarusian state news agency BelTA.

Grodno Azot Director General Igor Lyashenko said the Myanmar delegation was interested in Belarus's approach to agriculture and the possibility of developing domestic fertilizer production. Discussions also covered trade and the mutual supply of goods, with further talks expected at the level of Belarus's state petrochemical group Belneftekhim.

Earlier the same day, Belarusian and Myanmar businesses signed a package of documents during a business forum in Minsk attended by Min Aung Hlaing.

Grodno Azot signed a memorandum with Myanmar company Myanmar Empire on the supply of hydroxylamine sulfate, an industrial chemical. Its Khimvolokno plant also signed a contract with the same company to supply polyester cord.

Belarusian state broadcaster News.by quoted a Grodno Azot official as saying that a cooperation memorandum had been signed for chemical supplies to Myanmar and that the company expected to supply nitrogen fertilizers. The report did not identify a separate binding agreement for the fertilizer shipments.

The value and volume of the chemical and polyester cord arrangements were not disclosed. Neither report provided details of financing, payment methods or delivery dates.

The visit also advanced proposals that had been discussed before Min Aung Hlaing arrived at the plant. Earlier Belarusian plans included exporting nitrogen fertilizers and providing technical advice through Grodno Azot and a Belarusian research institute to modernize fertilizer facilities in Myanmar.

Grodno Azot and its Khimvolokno branch remain under European Union sanctions. The EU describes Grodno Azot as a large state-owned producer of nitrogen compounds and says the company and its branch provide substantial revenue for the government of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

The EU also says workers who joined peaceful protests and strikes were dismissed, intimidated and threatened by company management and government representatives. It therefore holds the company responsible for supporting the Lukashenko government and repressing civil society. The EU listing was renewed in February 2026, while the wider sanctions regime remains in force until 28 February 2027.

Min Aung Hlaing travelled to Belarus immediately after an official visit to Russia, where he met Russian President Vladimir Putin and discussed energy, defence and infrastructure cooperation.

Details of the Grodno Azot visit and the commercial documents have so far come from Belarusian and Myanmar state sources. No independent confirmation of their implementation was available at the time of reporting.

Photo: AFP

THAI, MYANMAR MILITARY CHIEFS MEET AS POST-COUP THAW PROGRESSES

Thailand's top general welcomed Myanmar's military chief for talks on 20 August, the latter's first foreign trip in office as his coup-staging armed forces shake off their pariah status.

Myanmar's military ousted an elected government in a 2021 putsch, detaining its leader Aung San Suu Kyi and sparking a civil war in which it is accused of rampant rights abuses.

The post-coup leadership was isolated for five years but has started a diplomatic offensive, touting deeply restricted polls it staged around the start of 2026 as a return to normality.

After the elections, Min Aung Hlaing -- who led the coup as armed forces chief -- took over as civilian president, handing the office of military leader to staunch loyalist Ye Win Oo.

On Thursday, Thai military chief Ukris Boontanondha greeted Ye Win Oo at a hotel in the capital Bangkok.

Their talks are expected to focus on the nations' 2,400-kilometre (1,500-mile) border, where the war has seeded instability.

A former spymaster for Myanmar's ruling junta, Ye Win Oo has been sanctioned by nations including the United States for his role in the coup.

The ensuing civil war is estimated to have claimed 100,000 lives.

The international community is divided over how to deal with Myanmar since the elections.

Democracy watchdogs have derided the vote as

a charade to rebrand military rule while excluding the popular Suu Kyi, sidelining her party and punishing dissenters with prison time.

But Thailand is among a band of neighbouring nations, sharing unavoidable border issues with Myanmar, which have used the polls as a cue to reset relations.

This month, Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul granted Min Aung Hlaing a red-carpet welcome in Bangkok.

Defending the decision to host, Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow told reporters: "It's not about legitimacy, it's about reality."

But campaign group the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar said this week that "by embracing a warlord, Thailand has torched its credibility".

The decision to also allow a visit from Ye Win Oo was "adding to its ignominy", the statement added.

Last week, investigators from the United Nations said the military Ye Win Oo leads is escalating its aerial attacks on civilian targets.

The UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar's annual report also documented a pattern of arbitrary detentions, torture and sexual violence committed by the military.

Myanmar's government called the publication "one-sided allegations against Myanmar's security forces based on unverifiable and inaccurate information".

AFP



Photo: AFP

ASEAN PARLIAMENTARIANS CONDEMN THAILAND'S 'DANGEROUS NORMALIZATION' OF MYANMAR'S MILITARY JUNTA

ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) condemned the Thai government's deepening engagement with Myanmar's military on 20 August, warning that Bangkok is lending legitimacy to a junta responsible for what the group called one of the world's gravest ongoing human rights catastrophes.

The statement followed a visit to Bangkok this week by Myanmar military chief and former intelligence head Gen. Ye Win Oo for what APHR described as high-level talks, days after Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul hosted junta leader Min Aung Hlaing on 6-7 August.

"This is a betrayal of the people of Myanmar and blatant disregard for ASEAN's own commitments," said Mercy Christy Barends, an Indonesian member of parliament and APHR chairperson. She said the visits came barely weeks after ASEAN foreign ministers agreed to maintain restrictions on Myanmar's military leadership pending meaningful engagement with the Five-Point Consensus.

APHR said it was further alarmed by reports that Thai authorities had begun acting against Myanmar resistance groups on the junta's behalf, citing a recent seizure of equipment along the border. Any move by Bangkok to become an active partner in the junta's military campaign would make Thailand complicit in the suffering of Myanmar's civilians, the group said.

APHR called on the Thai government to immediately halt engagement that legitimizes Myanmar's military leadership and to refrain from security cooperation that facilitates the junta's campaign against civilians.

It called on ASEAN and its member states to publicly reaffirm their commitments to restoring peace and democracy in Myanmar and hold Thailand accountable, and on the international community to maintain and strengthen targeted sanctions and reject normalization of the junta absent genuine democratic progress.

US DESIGNATES CITIZEN HELD IN CHINA AS 'WRONGFULLY DETAINED'



The United States on 20 August said it has designated a US citizen held in China on accusation of espionage as "wrongfully detained" and called for his release -- along with that of another American.

The designation raises the diplomatic stakes around the detention, coming a month before Chinese leader Xi Jinping visits President Donald Trump in Washington.

Min Zin, a political analyst at a policy think tank focusing on neighboring Myanmar, was taken into custody in the southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan on June 3, the US government said.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio "has determined that US citizen Min Zin is wrongfully detained," said Assistant Secretary Dylan Johnson. "There are now two wrongfully detained US citizens in China: Mr Zin and Dr Youlin Chen."

"We will continue to advocate for Mr Zin and call for the release of all US citizens who are arbitrarily detained or exit banned in China," Johnson said in the statement.

Johnson said Min Zin "had traveled to attend an academic conference at the invitation of the Chinese government" when he was detained.

The Chinese foreign ministry has said he was held "on suspicion of engaging in espionage activities that endanger China's national security."

Min Zin is a founder of the Institute for Strategy and Policy Myanmar (ISP-M), which researches the

political, resource and conflict dynamics of Myanmar, a country plunged into civil war by a 2021 military coup.

Some ISP-M publications detail China's influence in the borderlands of Myanmar, where Beijing is accused of supporting both rebel factions and the military in pursuit of its interests.

The think tank is based in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai, a hub for political exiles from Myanmar since the 2021 coup ousted the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Meanwhile, the Institute for Strategy and Policy - Myanmar (ISP-Myanmar) said in a statement on 20 August that it welcomes the announcement that US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has formally designated their founding Executive Director, Min Zin, as wrongfully detained in the People's Republic of China (PRC). It sends a clear message that Min Zin's release is a top priority, ISP-Myanmar said.

"As an organization that keeps intellectual freedom at its core, this designation also reaffirms that independent, open-source researchers and academics should be able to conduct their work without fear of intimidation or arbitrary detention.

"We humbly ask that the US government continues to keep Min Zin's case as a top priority, particularly ahead of President Xi's visit to meet with President Trump next month, and that the People's Republic of China (PRC) facilitate his immediate and unconditional release. We sincerely hope he can reunite with his family and team soon."

AFP/Mizzima



Min Zin

CHINA DENIES US CITIZEN HELD SINCE JUNE IS WRONGFULLY DETAINED

China refuted on 21 August a claim from Washington that it has improperly held a US citizen since early June, saying the American was suspected of violating Chinese law.

"China is a country governed by the rule of law, and there is no such thing as so-called wrongful detention," said foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian in response to a question about the US State Department designating Min Zin as "wrongfully detained" on Thursday.

"It is understood that the relevant US individual in question is suspected of engaging in activities that endanger China's national security, thereby violating Chinese law," said Lin.

"The Chinese judicial authorities are handling the case in accordance with the law," he added.

Min Zin is a founder of the Institute for Strategy and Policy Myanmar (ISP-M), which researches the political, resource and conflict dynamics of Myanmar, plunged into civil war by a 2021 coup.

The political analyst was taken into custody on June 3 in the southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan, which borders Myanmar, the US government said.

Some of the ISP-M's publications detail China's influence in the borderlands of Myanmar, where Beijing is accused of supporting armed factions which suit its national interests.

The State Department's designation raises the diplomatic stakes around the detention, coming a month before Chinese leader Xi Jinping visits President Donald Trump in Washington.

It makes Min Zin the second US citizen considered by Washington to be "wrongfully detained" in China, alongside seismologist Youlin Chen, who has been detained on espionage charges since 2024.

AFP



Photo: AFP

AID WORKERS FOUND DEAD IN MYANMAR MILITARY CUSTODY AS DETENTIONS SURGE, UN REPORTS

Myanmar's military and other parties to the conflict detained at least 27 humanitarian aid workers in ten separate incidents in July — one more incident than was recorded across the first six months of 2026 combined after four aid workers held in southern Tanintharyi Region saw three confirmed dead and a fourth still unaccounted for, according to a new access report from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Nearly five years after Myanmar's 2021 military coup, continued fighting between the military and resistance forces has repeatedly disrupted aid delivery to millions of people in need, with humanitarian workers themselves increasingly facing arrest, violence and death while trying to reach them.

The Tanintharyi case was the most severe of the ten detention incidents, OCHA said. Uniformed forces that local sources identified as Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) personnel detained the four workers; three were later found dead, while the fourth's whereabouts remained unconfirmed at the time of reporting.

By the end of July, five of the 27 detained workers nationwide had been released. The arrests were part of a wider deterioration in the operating environment

for humanitarian personnel, with 16 incidents targeting aid workers, assets or facilities across seven states and regions in July, double the number recorded in June, forcing the postponement of health, nutrition, water and sanitation programmes intended for large numbers of people for more than three weeks.

Overall, humanitarian organizations reported 76 access incidents across ten states and regions in July, hindering aid delivery to roughly 200,000 people. That figure represented a 27 per cent drop from June and a 24 per cent decrease against the 2026 monthly average, the lowest total since January; OCHA attributed part of the decline to reduced humanitarian movement during the monsoon season. Rakhine accounted for 42 per cent of all incidents, followed by Sagaing at 14 per cent and northern Shan at 9 per cent.

Conflict-related insecurity remained the leading obstacle to aid delivery, disrupting operations across seven states and regions, with Rakhine and Sagaing together accounting for 58 per cent of the 40 conflict-linked incidents logged in July. Nearly two-thirds involved airstrikes, drone attacks or heavy weapons fire, forcing the suspension of planned activities for more than ten days in Rakhine, Sagaing, Chin, Kayin and Magway. In Tanintharyi, a drone strike reportedly damaged a school building, while clashes and road blockades in Sagaing stranded humanitarian vehicles and delayed the movement of supplies.

Heavy monsoon rains and flooding compounded access constraints in Rakhine, while poor road and security conditions disrupted deliveries in Sagaing, Magway and Kayin. Administrative barriers also persisted in northern Shan, Rakhine and Magway. Despite this, Mandalay regional authorities approved the first official UN humanitarian access to Thabeikkyin since 2023, and humanitarians also reached Lashio in northern Shan. Landmine contamination and unsafe river crossings, however, delayed health and nutrition assistance to an estimated 10,000 people in northern Shan for more than ten days.



MYANMAR AIRSTRIKE ON MONASTERY MARKING BUDDHIST LENT IN SAGAING KILLS 14: WITNESSES

A Myanmar military airstrike on a monastery where civilians were gathered for a meditation retreat marking Buddhist Lent killed 14 people, two rebel fighters who witnessed the aftermath said.

The 21 August airstrike hit a monastery hall around 9:00 am (0230 GMT) in Myaung township of central Sagaing region, killing 11 men and three women, according to Nway Oo Myaung, a pro-democracy rebel who helped clear bodies.

"Older people had entered the meditation centre for three months" to mark the period of Buddhist Lent, which roughly coincides with Myanmar's rainy season, he said on Friday.

"Those who were killed, their ages were between 50 and 70," Nway Oo Myaung added. "It wasn't a mistaken target, they intentionally attacked a monastery."

It was not immediately possible to contact the Myanmar military for comment.

But a second local opposition fighter, speaking on condition of anonymity, said on Saturday: "Five dead people were from our village and the other nine were from other villages."

"While we were trying to rescue people, the aircraft came to bomb a second time," he said.

Strikes from above

Myanmar's military often relies on its Chinese- and Russian-supplied jets to keep rebels at bay, analysts say.

UN investigators from the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) last week published a report accusing the military of "indiscriminate and intentional aerial attacks against civilians".

Public buildings, most often monasteries and schools, are frequently the sites of reported airstrikes.

Myanmar's government called the IIMM publication "one-sided allegations against Myanmar's security forces based on unverifiable and inaccurate information".

Conflict monitoring group ACLED said in a report last month that "the military's ongoing terror strategy includes a focus on civilian infrastructure and social gatherings, such as weddings and religious festivals, to maximize psychological impact".

After five years of martial rule, Myanmar's military staged elections around the start of 2026 -- touting the exercise as a return to normality.

The IIMM report said it "observed a notable escalation in aerial attacks in the months preceding the elections".

Democracy watchdogs derided the vote as a charade to rebrand military rule while excluding the popular Suu Kyi, sidelining her party and punishing dissenters with prison time.

It resulted in coup-leader Min Aung Hlaing taking over as civilian president in April -- surrendering the office of armed forces chief to a key aide.

Min Aung Hlaing is currently spearheading a diplomatic blitz to shake off Myanmar's post-coup pariah status and gain diplomatic recognition abroad.

India, China, Laos and Thailand have all openly embraced him with visits to their capitals -- drawing criticism from campaigners who complain they have granted him undue legitimacy.

This week, Min Aung Hlaing visited Russia and Belarus, which have remained steadfast allies with Myanmar since the coup.

Myanmar's military has in recent months made gains on the battlefield after peeling off some of the most powerful armed factions with China-backed truces.

AFP



Photo: Supplied

LOCAL OFFICIALS IN MEIKTILA DISTRICT COLLECT EXORBITANT FEES FROM PEOPLE TO AVOID MILITARY CONSCRIPTION

Sources who have close connections with local people said that the village administrators in Meiktila, Thasi and Pywabwe Townships in Meiktila District, Mandalay Region, collected exorbitant fees from the families whose members were eligible for being recruited as new conscripts under the National Service Law.

They collected 120,000 Kyats from family with one male member eligible for a new recruit, 300,000 Kyats from family with eligible three male family members and 400,000 Kyats from a family with eligible four family members, a two-fold increase from previous rates, these sources said.

These fees have been raised since the second week of August this year, collected based on the number of

eligible family members, a local resident from Thasi said. Previously they collected only 50-100,000 Kyats from each household, he said to Mizzima.

“These village administration Chairmen are collecting money exorbitantly even from the widows who don’t have any eligible male members. These widows must pay 300-400,000 Kyats. They asked 120,000 Kyats from each family with one eligible male members, 300,000 Kyats from families with three eligible male members and they must pay once every four months,” he added.

The amount and methods of collections are varying from each township in Meiktila District but all in Meiktila, Thasi and Pyawbwe Townships must pay these fees to the village administrators and it was confirmed by over

10 villages in the district, these sources said.

The local residents from Buyone, Thamankan and Chauk villages in Thasi Township and Makyikan village in Meiktila Township had to pay a large amount of money for family members to avoid National Service, the local residents said.

The youths were frequently arrested for forced recruitment as new conscripts in crowded and busy places in these areas. But there are fewer cases of raiding the houses and arresting the youths for recruiting as new conscripts than other places, the local people said.

Meiktila, Thasi and Pyawbwe Townships are contiguous in Meiktila District. The collections of fees for National Service from the families are uniform in these areas and many local people had to pay these exorbitant fees even though they are facing hardships in their livelihood.

The local people also said that the local administrators fixed the amount to be paid to them in 2025 and these announcements were made in these villages by loudhailers and they threatened that the families would be arrested unless they paid that prescribed amount to them.

Furthermore, in some villages, these local authorities collected up to 30-50 million Kyats from each village to pay for substitute conscripts and for exemption from being recruited, a local people said.

Previously these fees were collected in these villages based on the number of households in the

villages. A source close to local administrators said that a village with about 600 households must pay 720 million kyats per annum at the rate of an average 100,000 Kyats per household.

There are negotiations and understanding between local administrators and junta troops regarding collecting fees for new conscripts and these villages were exempted from sending mandatory new conscripts to them.

But in some cases in some villages, they had to send new conscripts to military units though they had already paid these exemption fees to the local military units.

The fees for new conscripts have been collected twice a year since 2024 in Meiktila District but these fees have been increased and they must be paid once in every four months, it is learned.

The boot camp trainings under this National Service Law has reached 27th Intake so far.



AROUND 10,000 LOCAL RESIDENTS FLEE AS MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS LAUNCH OFFENSIVE IN KANI TOWNSHIP

Around 10,000 people from 10 villages have been forced to flee their homes as Myanmar military junta columns launched offensives in the southern part of Kani Township, Sagaing Region, according to Mizzima's ground sources.

The displacement began on the morning of 18 August at around 9:00 AM, as junta forces launched coordinated offensives using both riverine flat-bottom boats and ground columns.

"We all had to flee because the ground column advanced so suddenly. None of us could salvage our belongings properly. With the warships also firing from the river, we felt trapped in the middle and were terrified," said a displaced woman from Kani Township.

An estimated 800 junta troops have launched this offensive in an attempt to secure control over the Monywa-Kani-Yagyi road section, and are currently stationed in Chaung Ma and Mutaw villages.

"The military has been stationed in our villages for four months now. As families, we have no livelihood, and it is extremely difficult for our children to pursue their education. We have to constantly move from one place to another. In some host villages, as our displacement drags on, locals are starting to grow weary of us. But if we return to our village, we fear we will be accused of collaborating with the military," a local woman, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons, told Mizzima.

On the morning of 19 August, junta forces also launched airstrikes in the northwestern part of Kani Township using three gyrocopters.

Due to junta troops stationing themselves in and patrolling villages across southern Kani Township, approximately 10,000 residents from villages including Chaung Ma, Thint Win, Min Ma, Thamin Chan, Mutaw, and Aung Mingalar have been forced to flee their homes.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES HIT AA-CONTROLLED RATHEDAUNG FOR SECOND CONSECUTIVE DAY, RESIDENTS TERRIFIED

Myanmar junta jet fighters carried out airstrikes for a second consecutive day on Rathedaung Township in Arakan Army (AA)-controlled Rakhine State amid heavy rainfall, forcing residents to flee to safety, according to local sources.

On 18 August, between roughly 9:30 and 10:00 AM, during heavy rain, a group of jet fighters flew in and bombed the area around Kyauktan village in Rathedaung Township.

"While the rain was pouring heavily, we heard the sound of planes, then bombs falling one after another. Everyone ran for their lives in the rain. We still don't have a clear casualty count because it's hard to check with the rain and the danger from the planes," a Rathedaung resident told Mizzima.

The extent of casualties or damage among residents around Kyauktan village from this airstrike is not yet known.

On 17 August, at around noon, junta forces also carried out an airstrike on Auk Zeekaing village in Rathedaung Township.

The strike injured Than Nu Mel, 48, from Auk Zeekaing village, and destroyed three residents' homes.

"Yesterday they bombed Auk Zeekaing and a woman was injured, and houses were destroyed too. Today they've bombed Kyauktan again, so residents are living in fear, not knowing when the planes will come next," the resident said.

Having suffered military defeats in fighting across Rakhine State, junta forces have been carrying out continuous airstrikes targeting villages where residents live.

According to AA statements, junta airstrikes killed 31 local residents including children and women, and injured 36 others in Rakhine State between 1 and 17 August.



CDF-ASHO COMMANDER AMONG 3 KILLED IN MYANMAR JUNTA AMBUSH

Three members of the Chin Defence Force-Asho (CDF-Asho), including the group's Commander-in-Chief, were killed in a military junta ambush in Ngape Township, Magway Region, the group announced.

An official said Commander-in-Chief Salai Yoe Chin, Deputy Sergeant Salai Phyo Thiha Zaw, and fighter Aung Lin Zaw were killed by junta forces on 14 August while carrying out revolutionary duties.

"They were checking on a support outpost with fellow fighters when they ran into a military column and got surrounded," a CDF-Asho official told Mizzima.

The ambush occurred while the group was on a supply-gathering mission. The official said reports that junta forces had captured one of the fighters were false — three were killed, and some others managed to escape.

The bodies of the fallen fighters were retrieved the same day, and a funeral service was held.

CDF-Asho issued an order of the day 17 August for the Commander-in-Chief and fighters killed in the ambush.

The loss of Salai Yoe Chin and the other fighters was described in the order as "an irreplaceable loss for the organization and for the entire Asho Chin people." The order also said CDF-Asho "will continue to carry out its unfinished revolutionary duties."

CDF-Asho fights the junta alongside allied forces near the Defense Products Industries (Ka Pa Sa) facilities in Magway Region, within Ngape Township, and along the Ann-Padan road, in pursuit of freedom, justice, equal rights, and self-determination for the Chin national people.



Photo: Supplied

CHIN REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS RECONCILIATION MEETING HELD WITH SEPARATE SESSIONS

A meeting aimed at reconciliation among Chin revolutionary groups was held in Aizawl, Mizoram State, India, featuring separate discussions with the respective organizations, sources said.

Led by a Peace-making Committee formed by Mizoram Chief Minister Pu Laldhuma and the US-based Chin Peace and Reconciliation Committee, the three-day "Chin Peace Summit 2026" was held at the Aijal Club in Aizawl from 6 to 8 August.

"Due to the current political situation in Chin State, a tripartite meeting could not be held. However, we met with the inviting government and organizations, and we plan to continue meeting in the future," Salai Htet Ni, spokesperson for the Chin National Front (CNF), who attended the summit, told Mizzima.

Alongside the organizers, the meeting was attended by leaders from rival Chin revolutionary forces the Chinland Council (CC) and the Interim Chin National Consultative Council / Chin Brotherhood (ICNCC/CB) as well as representatives from local religious organizations and the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA).

Salai Htet Ni said that during the separate sessions, suggestions were made to cooperate on issues regarding internally displaced persons (IDPs) and humanitarian assistance, maintain communication

during the revolutionary period, and ensure the full participation of organizational leaders in future meetings.

Although the discussions were held separately, representatives from the various organizations informally attended a dinner reception together.

Clashes are currently occurring between junta forces and resistance groups in Mindat and Kanpetlet townships in Chin State. Reports also indicate junta military preparations and troop concentrations in Tedim and Falam townships to attack India-Myanmar border trade stations controlled by Chin forces.

The Chinland Council (CC) was formed in December 2023 by a coalition of the Chin National Front/Army (CNF/A), members of parliament elected in the 2020 general election, and township- and local-based defense and administration groups, after breaking away from the ICNCC.

The Interim Chin National Consultative Council / Chin Brotherhood (ICNCC/CB), established in April 2021, comprises defense forces based in Mindat, Matupi, Kanpetlet, Falam, Tedim, and Mara, along with 2020 MPs and Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) participants.



KNU: MILITARY MUST RELINQUISH POWER AND RETURN TO BARRACKS IF THEY WISH TO ENGAGE IN POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Padoh Saw Kalel Say, central spokesperson for the Karen National Union (KNU), said that if the Myanmar military junta wishes to participate in political dialogue, it must first relinquish power and return to its barracks.

He made the statement in response to a query from Mizzima regarding political dialogue during a press conference on 19 August, which addressed human rights violations against civilians in KNU-controlled areas during the first 100 days of the junta's "civilian" administration.

Padoh Saw Kalel Say said armed and political struggle will inevitably continue as long as the junta which he said treats the entire nation with patronizing dominance refuses to relinquish power. He said all-inclusive political dialogue can only happen once the military yields power and returns to its barracks.

"By 'all-inclusiveness' at this juncture, we primarily mean all relevant stakeholders," he said. "The military is an institution that has brought suffering to the entire nation, standing as a dictatorship that treats people with condescension in various ways. We have already made it clear to everyone that as long as they

do not relinquish this power, we must continue our struggle both armed and politically. In terms of this all-inclusiveness, the military must also participate at some point in the future if necessary. If they wish to cleanse themselves of all past behaviours and actions they have committed, show genuine remorse, and join the dialogue, they may do so. When we establish a federal democracy in the future, if they have a genuine desire and willingness for political reform, they have the right to participate in our discussions."

"The military must return to its barracks," he added. "Nevertheless, we have left the door open for military officers who genuinely wish for the betterment of the country, allowing them to participate and contribute constructive suggestions in the political dialogue."

During the junta's first 100 days in office from 20 April to 31 July, following Min Aung Hlaing's assumption of the presidency after a sham election the junta extended invitations to ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) for peace talks.

Responding to that invitation, KNU spokesperson Padoh Saw Taw Nee told Mizzima on 30 May that further consideration of peace negotiations would depend entirely on whether the military adheres to the KNU's political objectives.

Despite the junta's calls for peace talks during this 100-day period, it has continued to target civilians on the ground, committing human rights violations and war crimes, according to the KNU.

According to KNU data, junta forces launched 489 attacks targeting civilians in KNU territories during this period, including 228 airstrikes. These attacks killed 44 civilians and led to the arrest of 34 others. Additionally, 368 civilian homes, 16 religious buildings, eight schools, and six hospitals or clinics were destroyed.

The junta's escalating offensives in KNU-controlled areas also resulted in 536 clashes during the 100-day period, according to KNU. Intense fighting continues to date in KNU Brigades 6, 4, and 5 as a result of ongoing junta offensives.

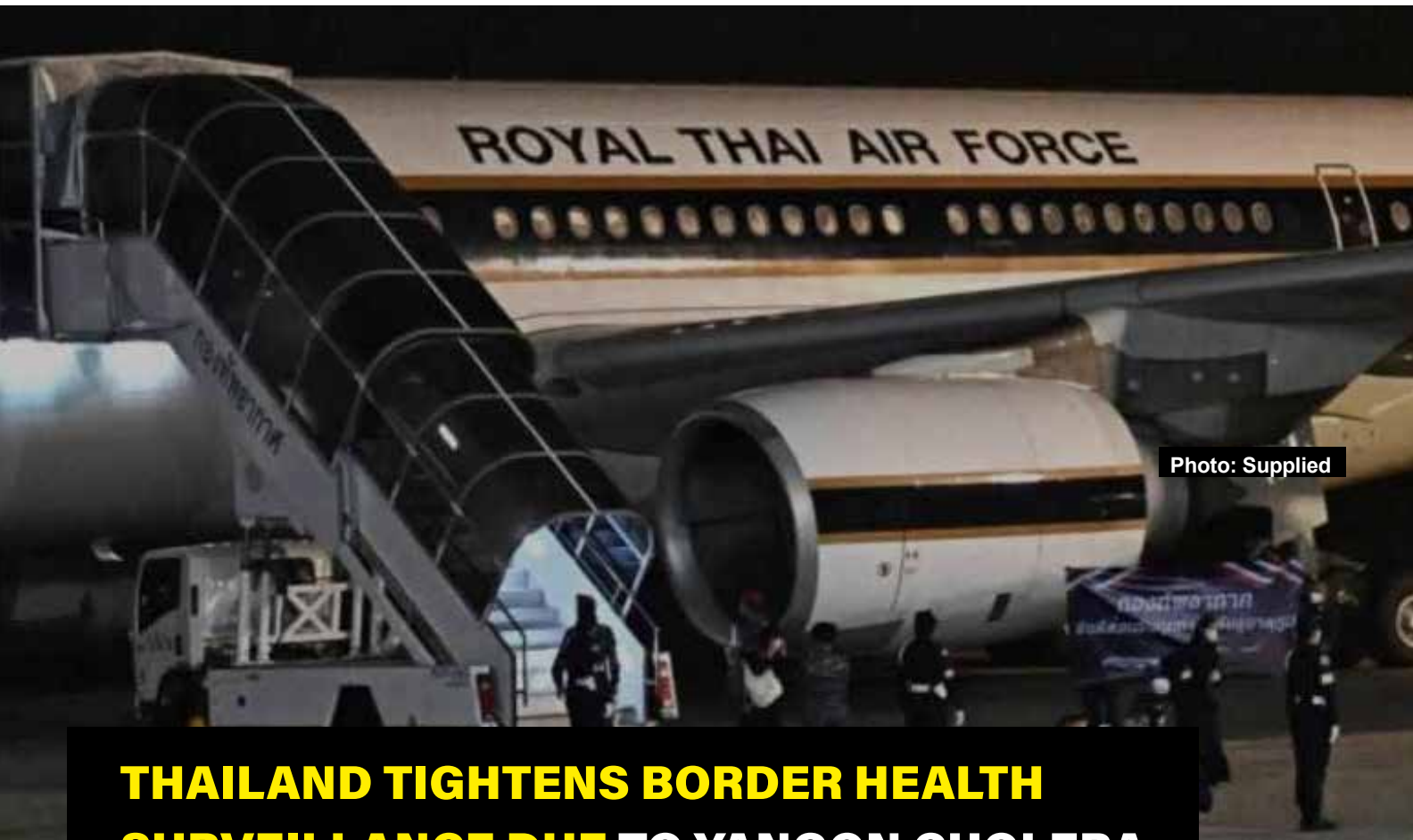


Photo: Supplied

THAILAND TIGHTENS BORDER HEALTH SURVEILLANCE DUE TO YANGON CHOLERA OUTBREAK

Following a cholera outbreak in Yangon, Thailand's Ministry of Public Health has ordered tightened disease surveillance at international entry-exit points, hospitals, and border regions, Department of Disease Control (DDC) Director-General Dr. Montien Kanasawat said.

Since 9 August, approximately 500 people in Yangon have been hospitalized with severe diarrhea, with 149 screening positive for cholera in rapid tests, according to Yangon Region Social Affairs Minister Bo Htay. Of these, nine cases have been confirmed by Myanmar's National Health Laboratory as infections of vibrio cholerae, and one elderly patient has died.

Although the DDC assesses the current risk of infection to the Thai public as low, surveillance in border areas has been increased due to cross-border travel between Myanmar and Thailand.

Thai authorities have instructed international entry points to conduct symptom screening, border hospitals to check travel histories, and laboratories to prepare for diagnostic testing. Health care teams have also been ordered to stand ready for an immediate response in the event of an outbreak.

Thai health authorities have advised individuals traveling to Myanmar to consume only clean water and thoroughly cooked food, and to avoid unsafe ice and raw foods.

Anyone returning from Myanmar who experiences symptoms such as severe diarrhea, vomiting, extreme thirst, or decreased urination is urged to seek immediate medical treatment and inform health care personnel of their travel history to Myanmar.



Photo: Supplied

SOUTH KOREA PROVIDES FUNDING TO WFP TO SUPPORT FOOD AND NUTRITION IN MYANMAR

The Republic of Korea on 20 August announced an additional US\$5 million in funding to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to support life-saving food and nutrition assistance in Myanmar.

The contribution comes at a critical time, as WFP analysis warns that up to 5 million people could be pushed into acute food insecurity if the ongoing elevated food and fuel prices persist.

The funding will support the second phase of REACH: Responding with Emergency Assistance for Conflict-affected Households, a joint initiative by Republic of Korea and WFP in Myanmar. Through REACH Phase 2, WFP will provide relief food assistance to 140,000 people, alongside nutrition support for 15,000 children under five and pregnant and breastfeeding women. Assistance will prioritize internally displaced people, and families affected by conflict and recent shocks, including the March 2025 earthquake.

"No family should have to face hunger alone, especially in times of conflict, displacement and hardship," said Mr. Bae Byeongsoo, Chargé d'Affaires of the Republic of Korea to Myanmar. "Korea remains committed to standing with the people of Myanmar through our partnership with WFP, helping ensure that life-saving food and nutrition assistance reaches those who need it most, especially children, mothers and displaced communities."

Myanmar is currently the world's sixth hungriest country, with 12.4 million people, nearly one in four, facing acute hunger. About 4 million people remain

internally displaced, while more than 360,000 children are acutely malnourished.

Food affordability is deteriorating rapidly. The national average cost of a basic food basket is now 20 percent higher today compared with late February, with Rakhine recording the steepest increase at 43 percent. Rising transport costs, conflict along key supply routes, and global fuel price volatility are placing further pressure on households already struggling to meet their basic needs.

"Korea's continued partnership is helping WFP keep life-saving assistance moving at a time when millions more people in Myanmar risk going hungry," said Michael Dunford, WFP Representative and Country Director in Myanmar. "For families affected by conflict, displacement, rising food prices and repeated shocks, this support means more than a meal. It's a lifeline in crisis, and the difference between despair and dignity."

As humanitarian needs continue to rise across Myanmar, sustained and predictable support remains critical. The REACH initiative demonstrates the impact of the Republic of Korea's partnership with WFP. In its first phase, WFP reached more than 420,000 people with life-saving food assistance across Myanmar, including 30,200 children under five and 16,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women who received vital nutrition assistance. The Republic of Korea and WFP are expanding this proven model of collaboration, so that more crisis-affected families can receive a lifeline before hunger tightens its grip even further.



Aung Kyi Nyunt

AUNG KYI NYUNT STEPS BACK FROM NLD-CWC DUTIES DUE TO CRPH AND SCEF RESPONSIBILITIES

Aung Kyi Nyunt, a Central Executive Committee (CEC) member serving on the National League for Democracy's Central Working Committee (NLD-CWC), has taken a leave of absence from his CWC duties, according to sources within the NLD community.

People close to him said he had already requested leave from his CWC role back in June, citing an increasing number of other political and revolutionary responsibilities.

NLD-CWC member Kyaw Htwe told Mizzima regarding the matter: "He has only requested a leave of absence from his CWC role."

CRPH spokesperson Sithu Maung also told Mizzima: "Since around June 2026, U Aung Kyi Nyunt has taken leave from his CWC role on his own accord. It's fair to say this is because, on the other hand, he needed to avoid a conflict of interest between his role as Chairman of the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) and his role as a member of the Leading Council in the formation of SCEF, and because he wasn't able to give the CWC role sufficient time."

A person close to an NLD-CWC member told Mizzima that Aung Kyi Nyunt formally submitted a letter to CWC members on 19 June requesting leave from his duties.

Mizzima reviewed the leave request letter, which read in part: "Dear CWC members, I have served as a CEC member cooperating with the formation and work of the CWC. Now that fellow CECs Tun Tun Hein and Dr. Daw May Win Myint are able to serve full-time, and given that I have taken on additional committee responsibilities, I am unable to devote sufficient time to the CWC and need to avoid role conflicts with my other areas of responsibility. I respectfully request leave from my CWC duties effective today."

Although Aung Kyi Nyunt has stepped back from the NLD-CWC, he will continue to serve as a Central Executive Committee (CEC) member of the party.

He also continues to serve as CRPH Chairman and as a member of the Leading Council in the formation of the Steering Committee for the Establishment of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF), formed by revolutionary forces.

On 14 July, he personally attended the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) forum held at UN Headquarters in New York as CRPH Chairman, where he urged the international community to continue supporting the people of Myanmar.

The NLD-CWC was formed on 30 October 2021, after party leaders were arrested following the military coup, to keep party operations running and coordinate with revolutionary organizations.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR EMBASSY IN BANGKOK SUSPENDS NEW PASSPORT BOOK EXCHANGES FOR PV PASSPORT HOLDERS

The Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand, has suspended new passport book exchanges and extensions for holders of visit-type (PV) passports, effective 19 August, according to sources in the passport brokerage community.

"It started today. They're not processing them anymore. A notice is coming. It's already all over Facebook," a Myanmar passport broker based near the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok told Mizzima.

According to emerging reports, PV passport holders in Thailand whose passports have expired and who wish to convert to a job-type (PJ) passport, or who want to exchange their passport for a new book, must now have their applications reviewed and approved by the quasi-civilian military administration in Naypyidaw via the embassy, and can only obtain a new passport once that approval comes through.

The sudden tightening of this Naypyidaw-administration review requirement has caused concern among Myanmar migrant workers and students who entered Thailand on PV passports and later converted to work visas (Non-B) or student visas (Non-ED) to legally reside, work, or study in the country.

As of this report, the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok has not issued any official statement regarding this process change.

The news of this tightening around PV passport renewals emerged 11 days after junta leader Min Aung Hlaing visited the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok during his Thailand trip on 7 August.

Photo: AFP



UNITED COUNCIL OF ROHINGYA REBUFFS MYANMAR JUNTA'S 'MISLEADING' PRESS STATEMENT

The United Council of Rohingya (UCR) strongly rejects and condemns the misleading press statement issued by Myanmar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on August 15, 2026.

The UCR urges the international community to carefully examine the facts, reject misinformation, and stand for truth, justice, and the rights of the Rohingya people.

The following is their statement issued 17 August:

PRESS STATEMENT BY THE UNITED COUNCIL OF ROHINGYA (UCR)

Elected Representative Body of the Rohingya Camps, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

SL. No. UCR 10/2026. Date: 16 August 2026

Rebuttal of the Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Press Statement on 15 August 2026

The United Council of Rohingya (UCR) categorically rejects and condemns the misleading press statement issued by the Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs on August 15, 2026. This statement is a calculated attempt to rewrite history, whitewash state-sponsored crimes, and evade the international community's calls for accountability.

We address the Government of Myanmar's fallacies point by point:

1. On Our Identity: We are Rohingya, not "Bengalis"

Myanmar's continued refusal to acknowledge our ethnic identity is the root cause of our persecution. The term "Bengali" is a weapon of erasure. We are the indigenous Rohingya people of Rakhine State, with a documented history and culture spanning centuries and Myanmar government recognizes the Rohingya as an indigenous ethnic minority of Myanmar. We demand the world to restore our identity as Rohingya, and we reject any nomenclature designed to deny our existence and our rights to citizenship.

2. On the Cause of Displacement: State-Sponsored Genocide, Not "Counter-Terrorism"

The Myanmar government cynically blames the ARSA group for their plight. This is a complete inversion of reality. The Tatmadaw's "clearance operations" in 2016 and 2017 were a systematic campaign of Genocide, ethnic cleansing, meticulously documented by the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission. These operations involved the mass rape of women, the torching over 300 villages, and the summary

execution of entire families. The isolated ARSA attacks were a desperate reaction to decades of apartheid, not the cause of our forced exodus. Myanmar's claim that its military acted in "defensive response" is an insult to the memory of the thousands massacred.

3. On the Numbers: A Deliberate Underestimation

We reject the figures cited by Myanmar. The statement claims 540,000 Bengalis fled to Bangladesh. In reality, over 700,000 Rohingya fled across the border in a matter of weeks during the 2017 genocide, joining over 200,000 who had fled earlier waves of persecution in 1991-1992. The claim that over 200,000 people still reside in Rakhine State is deeply misleading; these individuals are effectively interned in camps, denied freedom of movement, and stripped of all basic rights. The international community and the UN have unequivocally stated that over one million Rohingya are now displaced, and the Myanmar government cannot dispute verified UN statistics.

4. On the Verification Process: A Flawed and Discriminatory Gatekeeping

Myanmar's "verification" process is a sham. The regime requires Rohingya to register as "Bengalis" to be accepted, effectively forcing them to renounce our heritage. It is no surprise that out of the 828,824 names provided, Myanmar claims over 113,500 are "unverifiable." They are unverifiable because Myanmar technically refuses to take the Rohingya and the reality of our ethnicity. Furthermore, baselessly labeling 4,241 individuals as "terrorists" is a pretext to disqualify entire families and communities. We demand that the UNHCR lead the verification process independently.

5. On Past Repatriations: A History of False Promises

Myanmar points to repatriations in 1978 and 1992 as proof of good faith. The UCR reminds that those returns were made under extreme duress, and upon returning, the Rohingya were subjected to immediate and renewed persecution. We have no faith in a military regime that has repeatedly broken its promises. The three bilateral agreements signed with Bangladesh are merely paper exercises; Myanmar has consistently failed to create a conducive environment, providing citizenship, safety, and property restitution for any return to take place.

6. On the Bilateral vs. International Nature of the Crisis

Myanmar's assertion that repatriation is "a matter to be resolved between the two countries" is an affront to international justice. The persecution of the Rohingya is not a diplomatic dispute; it is a crime against humanity and Genocide, for which Myanmar has been brought before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for genocide. It is a matter of international law, and the global community has a moral duty to intervene. We deeply appreciate the efforts of friendly nations like Bangladesh, who have hosted us with immense generosity, but the solution must be multilateral and supervised by the faithful actors.

7. On the "Security Situation" Precondition

Myanmar states it will receive displaced persons "when the security situation becomes more stable." This is a stalling tactic. The security situation in Rakhine will never be stable so long as the Tatmadaw is the occupying force. The military is the perpetrator, not the protector. We refuse to return to a region where our people are systematically targeted by the state army. Any return must be voluntary, safe, and dignified, under the direct supervision of UN with a binding roadmap to full citizenship and the return of our ancestral lands.

Conclusion

The UCR calls upon the Government of Myanmar to end its propaganda campaign and face the truth. We demand full accountability for the atrocities committed against our people. We call upon the international community, the UN Security Council, and the ICJ to pressure Myanmar to cease its disinformation and fulfill its legal obligations.

We will not be erased. We will not be categorized as "Bengalis." We are Rohingya, and we will return to our homeland, when our safety, identity, and rights are unconditionally guaranteed.

United Council of Rohingya (UCR)

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

THAILAND: ETHNIC KAREN FACE DEPORTATION TO MYANMAR, SAYS HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH



Thai authorities should halt the imminent deportation of 26 ethnic Karen villagers from Phetchaburi province to Myanmar and release them from immigration detention, Human Rights Watch said on 18 August.

On 10 August 2026, district and forestry officials along with the Thai military raided the Karen community in Ban Pa Deng village in Phetchaburi province's Kaeng Krachan National Park, targeting those without proof of Thai citizenship. The authorities arrested twenty-eight villagers, including eight children and two pregnant women, and placed them in the custody of the Phetchaburi provincial immigration office.

Two villagers were later released after local officials verified their residence registration records. The immigration office then transferred the remaining 26 villagers to the Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Centre in Bangkok to prosecute them on immigration charges and deport them to Myanmar.

"Deporting ethnic Karen villagers to Myanmar would put them at risk of grave danger," said Elaine Pearson, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Thai authorities should work with the community to ensure access to their ancestral lands for their livelihood."

Since the February 2021 coup, Myanmar's military junta has carried out a nationwide campaign of mass killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, and unlawful attacks that amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes. More than two million people have been internally displaced and over 100,000 refugees have fled to neighboring countries.

In the face of recent escalating fighting in Myanmar, Thai authorities have summarily determined that undocumented Karen in the Kaeng Krachan National Park, including local villagers, are "illegal immigrants," community leaders told Human Rights Watch. Such classification means they are vulnerable to arrest and deportation to Myanmar. Residents of Ban

Pa Deng village said that at least 10 villagers remain unaccounted for after Thai authorities deported them to Myanmar about two months ago.

Deporting the 26 Karen villagers to Myanmar could violate Thailand's obligations as a party to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment as well as the customary international law principle prohibiting refoulement, the forcible return of anyone to a place where they would face a genuine risk of persecution, torture or other ill-treatment, or a threat to their life. In addition, Thailand's Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act prohibits deportation when there is a substantial risk of torture or ill-treatment.

Ethnic Karen people have lived in both Thailand and Myanmar for generations, including in the jungle in Phetchaburi and Prachuap Khiri Khan provinces, long before the establishment of the Kaeng Krachan National Park. Hundreds of thousands of Karen in Thailand have coloured identification cards, meaning they are a recognized hilltribe group in Thailand, but others who arrived in Thailand more recently have no legal status. Karen frequently travel between their communities across the Thailand-Myanmar border, Human Rights Watch said.

In 2021, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee placed the Kaeng Krachan Forest Complex on the World Heritage List, leading the Thai authorities to prohibit human settlement, including of Karen people, in the Kaeng Krachan National Park. This decision was made despite concerns raised by UN human rights experts, the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, and Indigenous groups about the ancestral land rights of ethnic Karen.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, a nonbinding international instrument, provides in article 26(2) that "Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use." The UN human rights experts raised the lack of "good faith consultations with the [Karen] community allowing them to participate in the UNESCO nomination process."

Over the past three decades, Thai authorities have pressured Karen villagers to leave their homes in the Kaeng Krachan National Park, at times violently, including by raiding their villages, burning their farms and properties, and forcibly relocating them. The relocation sites set up by Thai authorities for the Karen are inadequate and unsuitable for their traditional farming, Human Rights Watch said. In August 2022, Kaeng Krachan National Park officials were indicted in relation to the enforced disappearance of the Karen leader and human rights defender Ban Pa Deng Porlajee "Billy" Rakchongcharoen in April 2014. In September 2023, they were acquitted of murder based on lack of evidence.

"Ahead of the UN Human Rights Council's review of Thailand's human rights record in November, the Thai government should immediately end its abusive treatment of ethnic Karen in the Kaeng Krachan National Park," Pearson said. "Concerned governments and UN agencies should press the Thai government to ensure that the fundamental rights of Karen are respected and protected."



Phyo Zeyar Thaw

57 MONTHS SINCE FORMER NLD MP PHYO ZEYAR THAW WAS UNLAWFULLY ARRESTED AND DISAPPEARED, WIFE SAYS

It has been 57 months since former National League for Democracy (NLD) MP Phyo Zeyar Thaw was unlawfully arrested and disappeared by the Myanmar military junta, and those responsible for the unlawful arrest and disappearance must be held accountable, his wife, Daw Thazin Nyunt Aung, wrote on her Facebook page 18 August.

"57 months of unlawful arrest and disappearance. We have had no contact with him since the moment he was taken. Those who carried out this unlawful arrest and disappearance must be held accountable and face justice for what they did. Those who remain silent in the face of injustice are complicit in that injustice," she wrote.

Phyo Zeyar Thaw was arrested by the junta in Yangon on 18 November 2021 and charged under Sections 49(a), 50(j), and 50(y) of the Counter-Terrorism Law. A military tribunal sentenced him to death.

The junta subsequently announced on 24 July 2022 that Phyo Zeyar Thaw, U Jimmy (also known as Kyaw Min Yu), Hla Myo Aung, and Aung Thura Zaw had been executed according to standard procedure. The four were hanged by the junta at Yangon's Insein Prison, and the execution was reportedly personally

overseen by then-Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, Major General Soe Htut.

The executions drew condemnation from the international community, including the United Nations.

This past July also marked four years since the executions of Phyo Zeyar Thaw, U Jimmy, Hla Myo Aung, and Aung Thura Zaw.

"It has been four years since the Myanmar military unjustly executed Ko Phyo Zeyar Thaw, Ko Jimmy (Kyaw Min Yu), Ko Hla Myo Aung, and Ko Aung Thura Zaw. This was the first judicial execution carried out in Myanmar in over 30 years. Ko Zeyar Thaw and Ko Jimmy were well-known, prominent pro-democracy activists. The Myanmar military's imposition of such a brutal punishment is extremely disheartening, and Amnesty International unconditionally opposes the death penalty," Amnesty International said in a statement on 26 July.

Phyo Zeyar Thaw was also a hip-hop artist and a founder of Generation Wave, an organization formed by young student political activists who took part in the 2007 Saffron Revolution.



MYANMAR JUNTA DEEPENS DIGITAL CRACKDOWN AS OPPOSITION ADMINISTRATIONS START TAXING STARLINK TOO

Myanmar's military government cut cellular networks across several Yangon townships during Martyrs' Day commemorations on 19 July and continued blocking unregistered mobile phones nationwide, according to a new report tracking the junta's digital crackdown through the second quarter of 2026, even as opposition-aligned administrations began imposing their own restrictions on the connectivity many conflict-affected communities depend on.

Myanmar has been ruled by the military since the February 2021 coup, which ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, who declared himself "president" after a widely criticized election earlier this year, has overseen an expanding surveillance apparatus, according to the Myanmar Internet Project, which published the report.

Starlink terminals across Karenni, Rakhine and Sagaing were deactivated in July under the satellite provider's geofencing policy, while the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) began taxing

Starlink shops in Sagaing's Kani Township in June, more than doubling costs for users. The Arakan Army (AA), which controls much of western Myanmar's Rakhine State, meanwhile authorized a 30-70 profit-sharing scheme for the community internet centres it now licenses there.

Press freedom deteriorated further: the military revoked three outlets' publishing licenses in May, and a joint study by the Independent Press Council Myanmar and Human Rights Myanmar found public access to independent media had fallen 48 percent, citing shutdowns, monitoring and rising costs. Myanmar's military-backed Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) added a financial dimension on 28 July, passing the Anti-Online Scam Law alongside capital punishment for coercing scam labour; rights groups say provisions requiring banks and telecoms to integrate with a state-run network extend well beyond scam enforcement.

Myanmar ranked 166th out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' latest press freedom index.



NEW SPACEX RULE PUTS STARLINK ACCESS AT RISK FOR MILLIONS IN MYANMAR'S CONFLICT ZONES

A global SpaceX policy change that took effect on 17 August requires Starlink terminals used outside their registered home country for more than 30 days to be re-registered, relocated, or upgraded to a costlier "Global Priority" plan, conditions nearly every Myanmar-based terminal already meets, since the country has no licensed Starlink service of its own.

Since the Myanmar military seized power in the February 2021 coup, junta forces have repeatedly severed mobile phone and internet access in townships contested by resistance forces, with an estimated 131 townships nationwide experiencing full or partial blackouts, according to Amnesty International.

Starlink has since filled much of that gap, becoming one of the few remaining lifelines for civilians, humanitarian workers, schools and hospitals in areas including Rakhine, Karenni, Kachin, Sagaing, Mandalay and Magway. Because Starlink has never been authorized to operate inside Myanmar, terminals brought into the country are typically registered abroad, commonly in Thailand.

Nationwide disruptions began on 2 July, when users across resistance-held areas started receiving "Region Restricted" notices that rendered their terminals unusable even though the hardware remained powered on. More than 20 per cent of Starlink terminals operating inside Myanmar have since been deactivated, according to local resistance groups cited.

More than 200 Myanmar civil society organizations wrote to SpaceX, the United States government and international bodies on 17 July, warning that the shutdowns endanger the communications of more than 13 million people and threaten hundreds of thousands of students enrolled in virtual schools run by the opposition National Unity Government (NUG).

The pattern is not new: in January, a similar round of disruptions cut Spring Health Hospital in Kayah State, a free clinic serving displaced people, off from the Starlink connection it used to consult specialists on cancer treatment, according to Foreign Policy.

SpaceX has said its enforcement targets terminals near cyber-scam compounds along the Thailand-Myanmar border, where the company disabled more than 2,500 devices in October 2025. However, civil society groups and independent analysts say the 30-day Roam rule that took effect this week is a separate, global commercial policy applying regardless of any link to scam operations — meaning that even a full rollback of the scam-related bans would leave Myanmar's humanitarian and civilian users exposed.

SpaceX has not said publicly whether it will adjust the policy for users in active conflict zones.



Photo: Global Witness

CAN NEW RARE EARTH RULES REALLY REIN IN CHINESE MINERS IN KACHIN STATE?

The expansion of rare earth mining across Kachin State has brought growing environmental damage, land disputes, labour rights violations and harm to local residents' livelihoods.

The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), an ethnic armed organization whose military wing is the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), has managed rare earth mining more systematically since late 2025. But gaps remain in enforcement, environmental protection, labour rights and revenue transparency, according to Kachin researcher Seng Li.

Mizzima spoke exclusively with Seng Li about rare earth mining governance in Kachin State, KIO's regulations, local communities' role in decision-making, revenue from the mining sector, and the risk that extraction could expand into Shan State and other regions.

Mizzima — You have said KIO's rare earth mining regulations have gotten stricter since late 2025. What has actually changed on the ground?

Seng Li — There have been improvements, especially since the KIO issued its administrative regulations.

For example, drug use and gambling used to be widespread social problems around mining sites. Since KIO issued the regulations, its police and administrative bodies have enforced them more effectively, and the improvement is now clearly visible.

Tax collection linked to rare earth mining has also become more transparent than before.

KIO-KIA has also assigned immigration oversight in these areas, and now manages the entry and exit of foreigners, including Chinese nationals, more effectively than before.

Mizzima — Why have you focused your research on land and environmental issues?

Seng Li — Kachin State is extremely rich in natural resources. But when resources are extracted without proper management, a great many people in Kachin State suffer the resulting environmental damage.

I myself am from Hpakant, a jade-mining region. Growing up, I witnessed the environmental damage caused by resource extraction and its impact on families' lives. I also personally saw friends of mine lose their lives to drug use. That's why I later prioritized land and environmental damage issues among the many problems facing Kachin State.

Mizzima — You said that even though regulations now exist, implementation remains weak. Why do you think that is?

Seng Li — The fact that regulations have been established at all can be considered progress.

I conducted a study on rare earth mining management in 2024. At that time, the governance system lacked transparency, showed excessive favouritism toward mining operators, and disregarded local communities. There were also many land disputes and losses.

But by 2025, this management system had become more organized and structured. That's an improvement.

At the same time, some parts still aren't being fully implemented. One reason may simply be that only about a year has passed since the regulations began.

Another factor is that KIO is also fighting battles on the front lines. Insufficient staffing and technical gaps needed to properly regulate mining are also limiting factors.

Mizzima — Are there cases of mining companies violating the regulations, or being penalized for it?

Seng Li — As far as we've been able to monitor, companies have generally complied well with the rules on taxes and mining-site applications.

But on the ground, we're still seeing labour rights violations and breaches of environmental protection standards.

Looking at KIO's response, there are still shortfalls in fully protecting workers and effectively enforcing environmental measures.

For example, a dispute broke out between operators over a mining plot in Chipwe. Regulations require that applications for rare earth mining plots include an endorsement from the local village administration committee.

When the dispute arose, KIO went back and reviewed the village committee's position and how the operator had proceeded since first filing the application.

That can be described as progress in enforcement.

Mizzima — Regulations require mining operators to post a deposit of 500,000 yuan (approximately \$74,000). Have there been cases where this deposit was seized for violating the rules?

Seng Li — I don't yet have access to detailed information to study that closely. So how that's being managed is something we still need to look into further.

So far, I haven't heard of any case where the deposit was seized.

But under the mining management regulations, operators are required to post a 500,000-yuan (approximately \$74,000) deposit. The rules state that if operators fail to meet their obligation to rehabilitate the site after mining, the KIO is to seize that deposit.

Mizzima — Is it known how the KIO manages the tax revenue it collects from rare earth mining, and where that money is spent?

Seng Li — We don't know the details.

Looking at the mining regulations, we know that the KIO's economic department manages mining

permits and its tax department collects taxes in an organized way.

But there's no public disclosure of what proportion of that revenue is spent on infrastructure, public health services, its armed forces, or other sectors. That makes it difficult for us to obtain that information as well.

Mizzima — When new mining permits are granted, do local residents have a role in the decision-making process?

Seng Li — Looking at the entire application process, the KIO's central economic department is the body that grants final approval.

Under the regulations, three categories of operators can apply: first, foreign companies recognized by the KIO; second, local business owners; and third, local residents themselves, who can also apply for mining permits.

Applications must include an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as well as the consent and endorsement of the local village administration committee.

But the final decision on whether to grant approval rests with the KIO's central economic department.

Mizzima — India also appears to be showing more interest in Kachin State's rare earth sector than before. What activity are you actually seeing on the ground?

Seng Li — I've seen more instances of the Indian side reaching out to Kachin civil society organizations.

But since authority over rare earth mining rests with the KIO, any cooperation or discussions between KIO and the Indian government are beyond our reach to observe. So that's something I can't speak to.

But my understanding is that India has increased its dialogue and research engagement with Kachin civil society organizations (CSOs).

Mizzima — If rare earth mining expands from Kachin State into Shan State and other regions, could the problems seen in Kachin happen there too?

Seng Li — The main problems we're seeing in rare earth mining areas are damage to livelihoods, landslides, health problems and other social issues.

As for whether these same problems, already occurring in Kachin State, could happen in other regions too — I believe they will keep happening without proper, systematic advance planning.



THAI RESEARCHER LINKS KOK AND SAI RIVER POLLUTION TO MINING IN MYANMAR

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn is a lecturer at the School of Social Innovation, Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Rai, and a co-founder of the People's Network for the Protection of the Kok, Sai, Ruak and Mekong Rivers.

In this exclusive interview with Mizzima, Dr. Suebsakun discusses heavy-metal contamination in the Kok River, why he believes mining in Myanmar is the source of the pollution, the impacts on water supply, agriculture and fisheries in northern Thailand, and Thailand's role in the regional trade in critical minerals.

Mizzima - Can you start by describing the current situation on the Kok River?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - The Kok River situation now is, how can I describe it, the same as two years ago. It means that it is polluted.

The Pollution Control Department conducts water-quality testing monthly, and it found that the arsenic level is very high, exceeding the standard line, especially at the water station close to the Myanmar border. It shows very clearly that the arsenic is very high.

Mizzima - Why do you think the pollution comes from mining in Myanmar?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - For the Kok River, the

Pollution Control Department conducted water-quality testing in the Kok River as well as in the tributaries of the Kok River. It found that the Kok River has heavy metals, while, compared with the tributaries of the Kok River, there are no heavy metals.

Another thing is the turbidity. We can see year-round turbidity that comes from the mining.

Of course, some people have noted that there is a rubber plantation in Shan State, and it can be a point source of heavy metals as well. But the turbidity and the sediment are very high. It is very clear that it comes from the open area from the mining.

So, we believe that mining is the point source of the heavy metals.

Mizzima - What prompted you to push the Thai government to act on this issue?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - Back in March last year, people in Tha Ton sub-district, in Mae Ai district in Chiang Mai — the community located nearest to the Myanmar border, noticed the colour of the Kok River changing.

They also have a community network in Shan State, and they communicate with each other. They raised concerns that the sediment and pollution might

be coming from the mining.

So, people in Tha Ton held a demonstration and demanded that the government test the water quality. The Pollution Control Department tested the water and found many heavy metals.

So, it is very clear that it comes from the mining. That is for the Kok River.

And for the Sai River, it's very clear, right? There are huge mining areas in the headwaters of the Sai River, and they are affecting the river. So, when we compare the Kok River and the Sai River, the Sai River is more polluted than the Kok River.

Mizzima - How is this contamination affecting people on the ground?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - The contaminated river has already affected tap-water production. Now, there are 40,000 households that use tap water produced from the Kok River. The Waterworks Authority has proposed a plan to use a new water supply to replace the Kok River because the Waterworks Authority suggested that it is not safe anymore to use the Kok River.

So, it is better to change to another water supply. This is the first impact that we see. It is very clear.

Mizzima - What other impacts are you seeing, particularly on food and agriculture?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - Another impact that we see is on the food chain, especially rice production.

Along the Kok River and the Sai River, 10,000 farming families use contaminated water to produce two crops of rice per year, which means it is already polluted.

The government agency also found arsenic and cadmium in rice products, as well as in other vegetables.

Last week, the government agency also found arsenic and cadmium in agricultural products. Farmers use soil contaminated from the Kok River and use contaminated water to produce food crops.

So, this is another impact, and it is going to become a bigger and bigger impact.

Mizzima - What about fish and other food from the river?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - Another thing is about fish.

The Department of Health, under the Ministry of Public Health, has made recommendations to local people along the Kok River and Mekong River to avoid eating the internal organs of fish.

Actually, Thai people really love to eat the internal organs. The Department of Health said to stop eating them because heavy metals accumulate there.

People should also not eat crab, shrimp and small animals in the river because they also accumulate heavy metals.

So, this is the impact.

Mizzima - How do you know that mining is specifically the point source?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - Yes, it is very clear. As I said, the Pollution Control Department tested not only the contaminated river. They also tested another river that runs to the Kok River as well.

It is clear that there is no contamination in the other river compared with the Kok River.

And it is very clear that the sediment comes from mining. I think it is not from the rubber plantation.

Mizzima - Let's talk about Thailand's role. Is Thailand also involved in the rare-earth business?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - I would like to say it like this: Thailand is actually a transit hub for critical minerals.

There is mining in Myanmar operated by private Chinese enterprises, Wa ethnic groups and many groups.

Thai companies, Thai-Myanmar companies and Thai-Chinese companies import minerals along the Thai-Myanmar border.

Thai companies import antimony, tin, tungsten, wolfram, manganese, copper and lead from the border area and then transport them to Laem Chabang port and send them to China.

This means that Thai private companies play a very important role in importing critical minerals and exporting critical minerals.

On the other hand, Thailand also exports machines and chemicals for use in mining to Myanmar as well.

So that is why Thailand is a transit hub for minerals, and also a transit hub for machines and chemicals used in mining.

Mizzima - Do you mean Thailand is transporting rare earths specifically? Have you traced whether rare earth from Myanmar is going through Thailand to China?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - I think, for rare earth, it is not clear.

It is very interesting. It is not clear whether Thailand imports rare earth from Myanmar and then processes it and sends it to China or not.

Many people question about this. Why? Because, as I mentioned, Thai companies import critical minerals as transit products, and there is no strict investigation.

If a company declares, "Okay, I import antimony," the officials just approve it as antimony. But some people say that it might be rare earth. Who knows?

So, this is something we need more investigation into.

Mizzima - Is it possible to identify exactly which companies are involved, or where these minerals are going?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - It is really difficult. It is really difficult to see.

But in terms of critical minerals, not including rare earth, tin is very clear.

They import it at Ranong province and then transport it to Laem Chabang port and Chiang Saen port as well, and then export it to China.

We got this information from the Ranong Customs Office.

Mizzima - What do you think will happen over the next five years if this problem is not addressed?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - If we cannot stop the mining or the contamination in the river, we will have

people who get sick.

And we will lose our food security because our farmland will be contaminated and we cannot grow food crops anymore.

This is the impact of the contaminated river.

Mizzima - Is there anything else you would like to add? What do you think the Thai government should do?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - I think now I demand that the Thai government stop importing all minerals from Myanmar and stop exporting all minerals to China.

Stop exporting machines and chemicals to Myanmar for mining, and use that as leverage to have more power to negotiate with China and Myanmar.

If you look at (Myanmar junta leader) Min Aung Hlaing's visit, they signed Terms of Reference setting up working groups to monitor water quality.

Just monitoring. There is no action to solve the point source of the contamination in the river.

Mizzima - What is your message to Min Aung Hlaing and to the ethnic armed organisations that control these mining areas?

Dr. Suebsakun Kidnukorn - I think Min Aung Hlaing needs to show sincerity not only to Thai people, but to Myanmar people as well, because we know that mining also affects people in Myanmar as well as in Thailand.

Because of freedom of expression in Thailand, we can raise our concerns.

So, I think Min Aung Hlaing needs to accept that mining affects many, many people in Myanmar.

And for the EAOs (Ethnic Armed Organizations), I think it is good timing to show their commitment to solving the problem.

I think IEC (International Engineering Company) is a good example because it issued a statement expressing concern. But we need to work more to show that EAOs want to resolve this issue as well.



CHINA'S ECONOMISTS ARE SOUNDING THE ALARM — SO WHY WON'T BEIJING LISTEN?

SUN LEE

China's economy is showing signs of deep strain, with deflation casting a shadow over everyday life and consumer confidence collapsing. Retail sales are shrinking, property values continue to fall, and households are cutting back on major purchases, signalling fear about future income. Even Beijing's own advisers now openly warn that weak demand is eroding growth potential and innovation. Yet, despite global precedents for direct relief, the leadership resists expanding social spending, citing ideological concerns. This reluctance leaves ordinary families burdened by low pensions, rising costs, and dwindling opportunities, while the state prioritizes control over redistribution, prolonging the economic malaise.

Walk into a supermarket in almost any Chinese city this year and you'll notice something unnerving: the aisles are stocked, the lights are on, and almost nobody is buying. That eerie quiet isn't a local anomaly it's the visible symptom of an economy sliding deeper into deflation, even as the Chinese Communist Party's own economists sound alarms that the state's official statistics can no longer fully paper over.

The numbers tell a story Beijing would rather not headline. China's retail sales fell 0.6% year-on-year in May 2026, the first outright decline since December 2022 with auto sales plunging 16.1%, home appliances and electronics down 15.6%, building materials off 13.6%, jewellery down 8.9%, and furniture sales sliding 8.7%. These aren't marginal categories they're the big-ticket, confidence-dependent purchases that signal whether households believe their future income is secure. When people stop buying refrigerators and cars in double-digit numbers, they aren't tightening belts; they're bracing for something worse. Fixed-asset investment shrank a deeper-than-expected 4.1% in the first five months of the year, while home prices fell at a faster pace in May, confirming that the property collapse dragging down household wealth shows no sign of bottoming out.

What makes this moment remarkable isn't just the data it's who's saying it out loud. At the China Macroeconomic Forum's mid-year session in Beijing on June 27, current and former central bank advisers broke from the usual script of praising the leadership's

stewardship. Instead, they openly identified the core contradiction plaguing the world's second-largest economy: supply is strong, but demand is collapsing, feeding a loop where weak spending drags down prices, which drags down incomes, which drags down spending further. One adviser bluntly stated that a country stuck in deflation cannot sustain technological innovation. Another argued that Chinese households' savings rate needs to fall and that pension payments for rural and unemployed urban residents currently a paltry 200-plus yuan a month, or roughly \$30 should quadruple to around \$150. That such proposals are being floated publicly by insiders, rather than dissidents, tells you how serious Beijing's own technocrats believe the problem has become.

Yet here's the paradox critics of the CCP keep returning to: the playbook for fixing this isn't a mystery. Japan handed out regional revitalization vouchers in 1999 and cash subsidies during the 2009 financial crisis and again in 2020. The United States and Canada wired direct relief checks to households during the pandemic. These aren't radical experiments - they're standard macroeconomic triage when consumer confidence craters and interest-rate cuts alone can't move the needle. So why won't Beijing do the obvious thing?

The answer lies less in economics than in ideology. In a 2022 party journal article, Xi Jinping explicitly warned against adopting a Western-style welfarism, arguing that generous social spending breeds laziness, strains public finances, and risks trapping China in the "middle-income trap." That framing has since been echoed repeatedly in Politburo and State Council meetings. The result is a social security budget that consumes only about 8% of GDP far below the 20-25% typical of developed economies and even below the 15%-plus seen in developing peers like Brazil, South Africa, and Thailand. Meanwhile, wealth concentration compounds the problem: banking data shows a small sliver of China's wealthiest depositors roughly 2.5% of

customers control over 80% of total savings assets, leaving hundreds of millions of ordinary households with too little cash cushion to spend freely even if they wanted to.

Critics argue the CCP's reluctance isn't really about fiscal discipline or discouraging idleness Chinese employees already average around 48 hours of work per week, hardly the profile of a "lazy" population. The real obstacle, they contend, is political. State-owned enterprises function as both an economic engine and a tool of party control; the revenue they generate props up the bureaucratic and political apparatus. Redirecting a meaningful share of that wealth directly into citizens' pockets would mean redistributing not just money, but the leverage attached to it a transfer of power the party has shown no appetite for, regardless of the human cost playing out in shuttered shops, empty hotel rooms, and companies that dissolve overnight without warning to employees.

The tragedy is that ordinary families are absorbing the consequences of a policy choice, not an unavoidable economic law. As migrant workers retire on pensions under \$15 a month, as young parents describe crushing pediatric medical bills, and as small business owners describe streets scrubbed clean of foot traffic, the gap between what the data shows and what leadership is willing to do keeps widening. Until Beijing treats household income as a policy lever rather than a political threat, China's consumers may keep doing exactly what the numbers show: saving harder, spending less, and waiting for a recovery that official ideology won't allow.

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



Photo: Thai PBS

SCORES OF ATTACKS ROCK THAILAND'S SOUTHERNMOST PROVINCES, YALA HARDEST HIT

Security authorities reported at least 32 incidents of unrest across Thailand's three southern border provinces on 22 August night, prompting the military to impose a curfew and increase patrols and security measures.

The Forward Coordination Centre 4 said the incidents were reported as of 9.42pm on 22 August and involved explosions, gunfire, arson and damage to property.

Initial reports put the number of incidents at 14 in Yala, 13 in Narathiwat and five in Pattani, with Yala recording the highest number.

In Yala, incidents were reported in Raman, Bannang Sata, Than To and Lam Mai districts.

In Raman, tyres were set on fire at two locations. In Bannang Sata, motorcycle tyres were burned at five locations, while a CCTV camera and a telecommunications signal tower were also set alight.

In Than To, an administrative organisation vehicle and telecommunications signal towers were burned at several locations.

Another vehicle belonging to a sub-district administrative organisation was also set on fire.

In Lam Mai, tyres were burned and road spikes were scattered in front of a Bangchak petrol station.

Initial reports said that two female civilians were injured by bomb shrapnel. They are being treated in hospital and are safe.

Narathiwat recorded 13 incidents in Rangae, Cho Airong, Yi-ngo, Waeng, Tak Bai and Bacho districts, including an explosion and gunfire targeting a child development centre in Rangae district, the burning of a sub-district administrative organisation office and the theft of a Mitsubishi Triton pickup truck.

A curfew was imposed last night and will remain in effect until 6am this morning.

Tyres, a backhoe and other property were also set on fire at several locations. In Cho Airong, tyres were burned at two locations and a DTAC utility pole was blown up.

Arson was reported along Highway 42 in Yi-ngo district, while tyres were burned and gunshots were fired in Waeng district.

Two attacks involving improvised explosive devices were reported in Tak Bai district, while a car tyre was burned in Bacho district.

Pattani recorded five incidents in Yarang, Yaring and Nong Chik districts.

A garbage truck belonging to a sub-district administrative organisation was set on fire in Yarang, while tyres were burned along Highway 410.

In Yaring, gunfire was reported and a suspicious object was placed along Highway 42 near the Bang Pu intersection.

A convenience store in Bang Pu was also hit by an explosion.

In Nong Chik, a fire engine belonging to Bang Khao Sub-district Administrative Organisation was set on fire.

Following the incidents, security units in the affected areas have stepped up surveillance and patrols, with a focus on checking roads and high-risk locations. Authorities say they are closely monitoring the situation, working to reassure residents and ensure their safety.

Members of the public are advised to stay home and cooperate with authorities in the performance of their duties. They are also advised to report any suspicious people or objects to the authorities by calling hotlines 1341 or 191 and to refrain from sharing images, video clips or information about the positions of security forces on social media.

Courtesy of Thai PBS



TERMS OF EXTRACTION

Lindsey Kennedy is an investigative journalist and documentary filmmaker whose work sits at the intersection of organized crime, corruption, and conflict. Drawing on years of reporting across Southeast Asia and beyond, she argues that the scam-compound economy now operating across Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos is not a fringe criminal phenomenon but a central force reshaping states, borderlands, and entire national economies. What is often described in narrow terms as online fraud or human trafficking, in her account, is something much larger and harder to isolate from formal power. It is a system that recruits through deception and coercion, profits through torture and fraud, depends on state protection, and increasingly reaches into everything from real estate and infrastructure to weapons flows, border control, and war itself.

Early on, Kennedy makes clear just how badly the usual framing fails. "They are not a separate organized crime phenomenon. They are a core part of the economic activity of a country." The point is not rhetorical exaggeration. It is the premise of everything that follows: these compounds are no longer a criminal sideshow but part of the structure through which power, money, and development are now being organized.

Kennedy did not enter this work through a conventional route. After studying literature and spending time in video production, she moved toward journalism through questions of technology, ethics, and social justice, then found herself pulled deeper into broader investigations of human rights abuses, organized crime, and corruption. In Southeast Asia, she suggests, those subjects are difficult to separate. What began as work on issues such as illegal land clearance, forest crime, and illegal logging eventually opened onto the expanding world of scam compounds, where criminal enterprise, state complicity, and conflict economies overlap so thoroughly that none can be understood on its own.

Kennedy prefers the term "forced online criminality" because the industry contains a wide range of abusive labor beyond the usual shorthand of "online scams." Gambling operations, romance fraud, coerced online sex work, and other forms of exploitation can all exist within the same compounds. So can a wide spectrum of victimhood and complicity. Some people knowingly take jobs they suspect are dubious, others believe they are heading into ordinary customer service work, and many discover the reality only after crossing a border they did not know they had crossed. By then, escape may be impossible. As Kennedy puts it, "People are completely tricked into working somewhere they have no idea what's happening." This framing captures the basic architecture of the system: people are absorbed before they can even name where they are.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here: <https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/7/21/episode-575-terms-of-extraction>



UNOPS REPRESENTATIVE MEETS WITH MYANMAR JUNTA OFFICIALS

Myanmar Deputy Minister for National Planning, Investment and Foreign Economic Relations Thant Sin Lwin received Mr Peter John Cross, Country Director and Representative ad interim of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and UNOPS team at the Ministry of National Planning, Investment and Foreign Economic Relations, Naypyidaw on 24 August.

Both sides exchanged views on the projects being implemented by UNOPS in Myanmar and future cooperation plans. Senior officials from the Ministry

and representatives of UNOPS were also present at the meeting.

In a separate meeting, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Ko Ko Kyaw received Mr Cross, Country Director and Representative ad interim of UNOPS Myanmar, on 24 August at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Naypyidaw. They exchanged views on matters related to the existing and further cooperation between the Government of Myanmar and UNOPS, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



MYANMAR FACEBOOK USERS ANGRY OVER BANGKOK PASSPORT FREEZE

Myanmar Facebook users are criticizing the junta this week after the Myanmar Embassy in Bangkok and the Chiang Mai consulate halted passport category conversions for Passport for Visit (PV) holders on August 19, requiring central vetting from Naypyidaw before approval.

Since the 2021 coup, many young Myanmar nationals have used PV passports, which require fewer documents, as a fast route out of the country, later converting to work (PJ) or education (PE) passports to secure legal status abroad. Thailand hosts an estimated 4.6 million Myanmar nationals, more than a third undocumented, according to International Organization for Migration estimates.

On Facebook, comments beneath posts about the policy voiced frustration. "The people are being oppressed in every way possible," one widely shared

comment read. Another user wrote that authorities had "restricted PJ holders through various means, and now they're turning to PV holders too." A third post summed up life since the coup as "hunger, bullets, every kind of hardship."

The policy shift follows junta chief Min Aung Hlaing's visit to the Bangkok embassy during his early-August Thailand trip. Same-category renewals remain unaffected, but applicants converting categories now face waits of at least two months.

The new vetting process risks exposing draft-eligible youth and dissidents in Thailand to greater scrutiny from military authorities, part of a wider pattern of tightening control over Myanmar nationals abroad since 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.