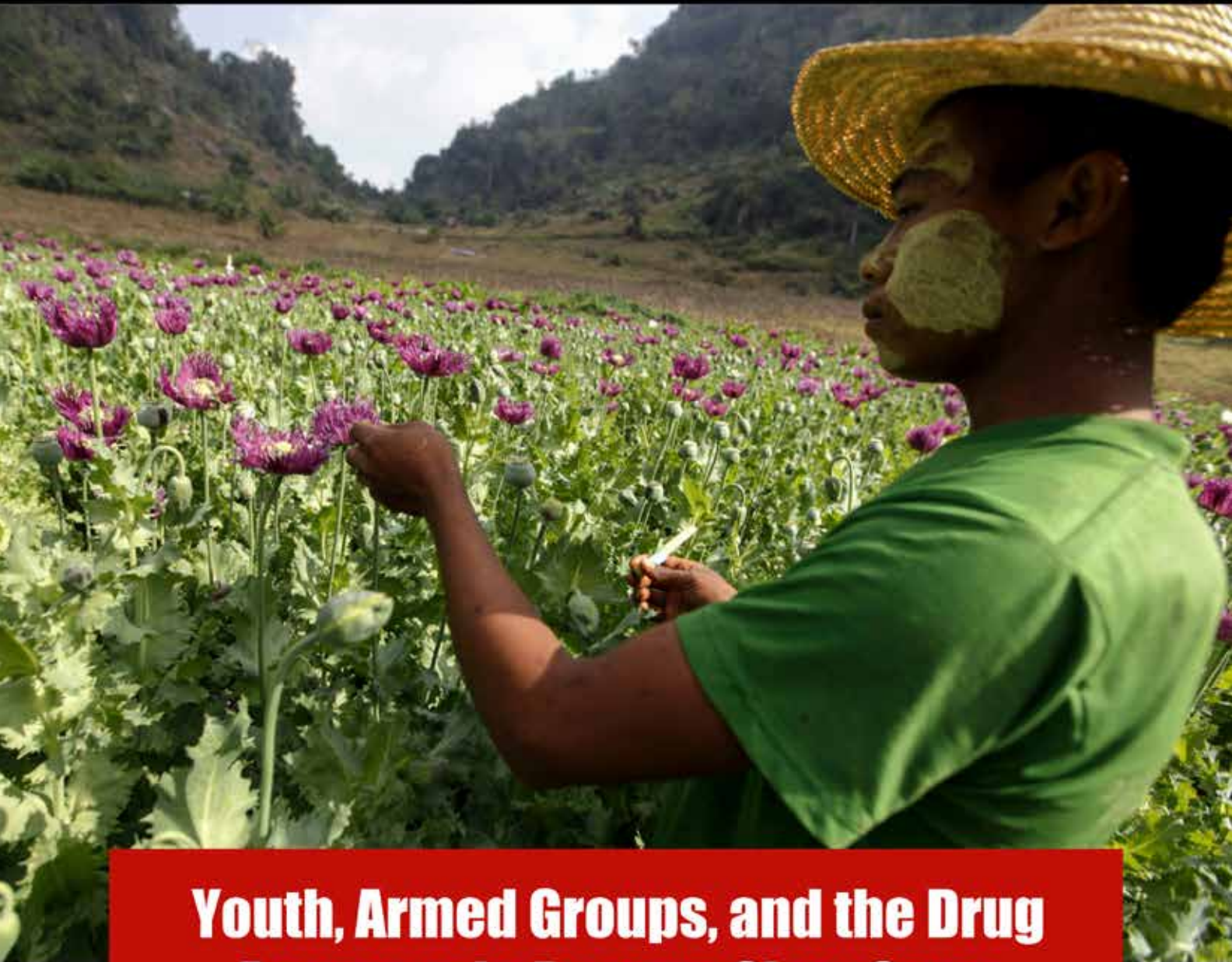


ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



Youth, Armed Groups, and the Drug Economy in Eastern Shan State

THE SOVEREIGN CHOICE: From Stalemate to Federal Renewal in Myanmar

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.

MIN AUNG HLAING CONTINUES TO PLAY GAMES

Min Aung Hlaing wants the world to believe that Myanmar is entering a new era. In a speech marking 100 days since assuming the "presidency" following the military-organized election, he presented himself as a statesman determined to rebuild the country, restore stability and lay the foundations for what he called a "new nation." Yet beneath the promises lies a familiar narrative that ignores the central cause of Myanmar's continuing crisis: the military's seizure of power in 2021 and its ongoing violent suppression of opposition.

The junta leader accused ASEAN of discriminating against Myanmar by adhering to the bloc's Five-Point Consensus - which he signed in April 2021 - and warned that his government would respond to what he described as "non-constructive actions." He portrayed the regional organization as unfair while insisting that his administration has shown patience.

This argument turns reality on its head. ASEAN did not isolate Myanmar without reason. The Five-Point Consensus was adopted after the military takeover and called for an immediate end to violence, dialogue among all parties, humanitarian assistance and mediation by a special envoy. The junta's repeated failure to implement those commitments - not ASEAN's alleged discrimination - is why Myanmar remains diplomatically isolated.

Min Aung Hlaing also highlighted plans to strengthen the military and police, continue military conscription, hold by-elections, expand infrastructure, increase education spending, develop power projects, boost agriculture and encourage economic growth. He argued that his government is combating money

laundering, drug trafficking and online scam centres while engaging in talks with ethnic armed organizations.

Many of these objectives would be welcomed in any peaceful country. Better infrastructure, stronger education and economic development are worthwhile goals. However, such ambitions are difficult to achieve while conflict continues across much of Myanmar. Development cannot substitute for political legitimacy. Roads, railways and power stations are unlikely to attract sustained investment when armed conflict, displacement and insecurity dominate daily life. And who is responsible for that insecurity?

Perhaps the greatest omission from the speech was any meaningful acknowledgement of the human cost of the conflict. Rather than addressing the widespread suffering, displacement and deep political divisions that have emerged since the coup, the speech framed the crisis largely as a security problem to be solved through stronger state institutions.

Declaring that Myanmar will spend five years building a "new nation" may sound ambitious, but genuine national reconstruction cannot be achieved through rhetoric alone. A lasting future requires political inclusion, accountability and public trust - qualities that cannot be imposed by military authority.

The majority of the Myanmar people view the junta and Min Aung Hlaing as illegitimate. There can be no meaningful "new nation" with his regime still in power.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of opium grower in Burma by EPA



Many farmers in Shan State rely on opium poppy farming to make a living. Photo: AFP

YOUTH, ARMED GROUPS, AND THE DRUG ECONOMY IN EASTERN SHAN STATE

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Opium cultivation across Burma (Myanmar) rose 17 percent this year. In Eastern Shan State it rose 32 percent, the sharpest increase of any growing region in the country, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. South Shan still holds the largest share of the crop, accounting for 44 percent of the country's opium fields, up 13 percent year on year. Total production rose only marginally, reaching roughly 1,010 metric tons. Opium yields fell from 22 to 19 kilograms per hectare, amid disrupted farming conditions tied to the wider conflict.

Burma's drug economy extends beyond opium into synthetic drugs. UNODC recorded a record 236 tons of methamphetamine seized across East and Southeast Asia in 2024, a 24 percent jump from 2023, with Shan State named as the source region. That total covers two different products. One is high-purity crystal meth. The other is a low-purity methamphetamine tablet cut with caffeine, known regionally as yaba, or yama. Thailand alone seized one billion yaba tablets trafficked from Myanmar in 2024. Wholesale meth prices in production areas have fallen to as low as \$400 per kilogram, a sign of oversupply.

The growth of the illegal drug trade is closely tied to the region's armed groups, which need cash to survive. They generate some revenue by taxing local families, forcing them to surrender a portion of their income or agricultural production. Because the civilian population is already impoverished, these taxes are financially devastating. Even so, they provide only a fraction of the funds needed to buy weapons and ammunition and feed their soldiers. As a result, the armed groups rely on a range of illicit enterprises, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, illegal logging, and illegal mineral extraction.

For young people, the war-decimated economy offers few legitimate opportunities. High unemployment, irregular income, and the lack of stable livelihoods make it difficult for many families to meet their basic needs. According to a local reporter, some young people, particularly those between the ages of 15 and 35, turn to the drug trade because it pays far better than legal work, where wages can be less than \$3 per day. However, the trade also exposes them to violence, arrest, exploitation, and long-term social harm. For many,



participation is driven by necessity in the face of limited economic alternatives or by intimidation and coercion.

A World Bank study tracked employment in townships suited to poppy cultivation, mainly the high-altitude areas of Shan, Kayah, Kayin, and Chin states, between 2017 and 2022. In those townships, agricultural employment rose by 22 percentage points, while mining and construction employment fell by 13 points. Nationally, the opposite occurred: agricultural employment declined, while mining, construction, and retail jobs increased. Self-employment in the poppy-growing townships fell by 26 percentage points, while casual wage labor rose by 27 points, reflecting a shift toward hired agricultural work tied to the poppy harvest cycle. Average agricultural wages also increased considerably during the same period. Households in Chin State told researchers that clearing, planting, and harvesting poppy fields paid roughly three times the standard daily wage for farm work, although the work lasted only one to two weeks each season.

Another factor driving young people into the drug trade is forced conscription. The junta's People's Military Service Law was reactivated in February 2024. It requires men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 to serve. By mid-December 2025, the regime had opened 20 training batches. It had recruited an estimated 100,000 new soldiers, largely through methods residents describe as coercive. Opposition ranks have drawn from the same pool. The People's Defense Force grew from a claimed 65,000 fighters in 2022 to 85,000 by 2024. Both sides are absorbing young men. The drug trade remains one of the few income paths left outside of the military.

The interaction between armed conflict, illicit economic activity, weak state institutions, and youth unemployment has created a cycle that is difficult to break. Addressing these challenges would require not only stronger law enforcement and regional cooperation but also expanded education, vocational training, legitimate employment opportunities, and sustainable economic development for communities affected by

conflict. Reducing the economic incentives for participation in illicit activities is essential to improving long-term stability and protecting young people from exploitation. However, because many of the armed groups benefit financially from the illegal trade, they have little incentive to end it.

Nang Lurn Kham, a 42-year-old Shan widow from a township near the border with Thailand's Chiang Mai Province, described how her family's life changed after her husband became involved in cross-border drug trafficking. She said her husband was arrested by the Thai military three years ago while carrying drugs across the border. Before he left, he told her he had friends involved in a business that paid well, and that he would be gone only a week.

She said, "I did not know that the work involved transporting drugs. If I had known, I would never have allowed him to go." About two weeks later, some of his friends came to her house and explained what had happened. They told her that Thai soldiers had spotted the group crossing the border and ordered them to stop. Some of the men threw away their backpacks and escaped back into Myanmar, but her husband and several others were captured. A few months later, her husband's boss visited her and promised they would try to help get him out of prison. But she said, "My husband became increasingly stressed and ill while in detention," according to what she was told, prison conditions were difficult. After several months, he died in custody. Left to raise their two children alone, she opened a small kindergarten in her home, caring for children between the ages of six and ten and charging 400 Thai baht (about \$13 USD) per student each month.

A 25-year-old Christian Lahu man, whose identity has been withheld for security reasons, lives in Ban Huay Aw, Pong Pha Khaem Sub-township, Mong Ton Township, near the border with Thailand's Chiang Mai Province. He is unmarried and is the primary income earner for his family, which includes his younger brother and sister.

He described how economic hardship has pushed young people in his village into cross-border drug trafficking. Over the past five years, he said, many young people, most between the ages of 14 and 18, have disappeared from the village after leaving to work as drug couriers transporting narcotics across the border.

He said, "For many of them, this seemed like the only way to earn money." After completing a single trip, they could earn enough to live on for several months, a reality that has drawn growing numbers of young people into the trade.

His own role is to recruit couriers when the bosses need people to carry drugs across the border. He receives 300 baht for each person he recruits. Because bosses sometimes need 10 to 15 couriers for a single operation, he can earn up to 4,500 baht per job.

He said, "My work is not as dangerous as carrying the drugs myself, but I feel guilty and unhappy whe-

never I hear that my friends or other people from my village have been arrested."

The civilian population of Shan State, particularly its youth, faces a choice between unemployment, low-paying work, military recruitment, or participation in the narcotics trade, none of which offers a brighter future. Another option is to flee to Thailand in search of a better life. A small percentage of those who leave manage to enroll in university, while the majority become migrant laborers.

This situation is destroying lives in Burma while also crippling the country's chances of rebuilding after the war.

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



Thousands of civilians have been negatively affected by war and criminality. Photo: AFP

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



MYANMAR JUNTA MILITARY CONSCRIPTION 'CORNERSTONE' OF REGIME SECURITY

Myanmar's military junta is steadily expanding its compulsory military service programme, with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing reaffirming that the conscription law will remain a cornerstone of the regime's security strategy. Speaking to the junta-controlled parliament on July 31, he said the administration would continue enforcing mandatory military service to build a "formidable defence force" and strengthen national security. He also cited the 2008 Constitution, which promotes a "people's militia" concept allowing civilians to participate in state security and defence.

The junta has now opened the 27th batch of military conscription. While the 24th batch completed training in early July, the 25th, 26th and 27th batches are being processed simultaneously, with the 25th batch expected to finish training in early August. With an estimated 5,000 recruits per intake, the programme has produced roughly 120,000 new conscripts since it began, providing a significant source of manpower as the military struggles to replenish losses on multiple fronts.

Alongside the expansion of the programme, local authorities have adopted increasingly systematic methods to secure recruits. In Wundwin Township, Mandalay Region, residents say conscription procedures changed under the junta's recent "100-day project." Instead of relying solely on a village rotation system, villages are now reportedly required to provide both one conscript every four months and regular cash payments to fund substitute recruits. A resident told local media that each village takes turns supplying a recruit while also contributing money for replacements, creating a cycle that places both financial and social pressure on communities.

In urban centres, forced recruitment has become increasingly visible. On the night of August 2 alone, junta troops reportedly detained 13 young men in Monywa. Those arrested included workers from the industrial zone, men returning home from work and one individual who had just finished queuing for fuel. Local monitoring groups say more than 100 youths and middle-aged men were detained for conscription in Monywa during July, suggesting that random arrests have become a regular recruitment method where voluntary enlistment falls short.

The conscription programme has also generated widespread allegations of corruption. Payments made to exempt individuals or hire substitute recruits have reportedly become a lucrative source of income for local administrators, militia members and other junta-affiliated groups. The issue has become sufficiently widespread that a military-appointed representative in the Mandalay Region parliament questioned whether the recruitment system now resembles a human trafficking network, citing bribery, profiteering and irregularities in collecting replacement fees. The

growing practice has left many young people feeling unsafe when travelling or seeking work in urban areas, as arbitrary arrests increasingly replace transparent recruitment procedures.

Junta operations in central dry zone ratchet up

A major junta offensive in Myanmar's central dry zone continues to fuel displacement and destruction, as military columns advance towards oil fields in Magway Region while separate operations have reopened a strategic trade route linking Sagaing Region to the Indian border.

A junta column of around 700 troops, deployed from the No. 101 Light Infantry Division in Pakokku in late June, is advancing towards the oil-producing areas of Myaing Township. Since leaving its base, the column has systematically burned villages along its route, with the latest attacks targeting Yargyi, Kyauk Khwat and villages near the Well-2 oil field.



According to local residents and resistance groups, the column has torched at least 200 homes across more than ten villages over the past month. Thinma Village suffered the worst damage, with over 100 houses burned during the ten days the troops were stationed there. The military column is currently based in Yargyi Village, where arson attacks have continued.

The operation has faced repeated resistance from local People's Defence Forces (PDFs). The most intense clashes occurred around Thinma Village in the third week of July, when resistance fighters reportedly surrounded and launched coordinated attacks against the junta troops. The military responded with sustained air support, conducting airstrikes for three consecutive days using multiple aircraft. Local sources believe the deployment of extensive air power reflected significant casualties suffered by the advancing column.

The offensive has triggered a humanitarian crisis across western Myaing Township. Thousands of civilians have fled their homes as fighting spread from village to village. Local monitoring groups estimate that around 30 civilians, including women and elderly residents, have been killed by junta troops during the operation. Residents and revolutionary forces believe the column's next objective is the Well-2 oil field, prompting oil workers, traders and nearby villagers to evacuate in anticipation of further fighting.

Elsewhere in the central region, resistance forces launched attacks against four junta checkpoints in Taungtha Township, Mandalay Region, on July 28. Fighters from Myingyan District PDF said they temporarily overran one checkpoint and seized two firearms abandoned by junta personnel during the fighting. Although they could not confirm military casualties, they reported seeing bloodstains inside the school compound that had served as the troops' base.

Meanwhile, the junta has regained control of most of the Kalay-Tamu section of the India-Myanmar trade corridor in Sagaing Region after a two-month offensive. Since May, three military columns advancing from Kalay, Tamu and Mawlaik have fought to reopen the approximately 83-mile route, which forms part of the Asian Highway connecting Myanmar with India. By July 29, the military had recaptured nearly the entire road, with the exception of the area around Witode Village.

The operation relied heavily on airstrikes and appears closely linked to the junta's efforts to restore cross-border trade with India. Just two days before the road was declared reopened, India's ambassador visited Kalay to discuss the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project with Sagaing Region authorities, highlighting the route's strategic and economic importance.

Conflict 'far from settled' in Karenni State

Myanmar's military continues its campaign to re-establish control over Karenni State, but despite recapturing key urban centres earlier this year, resistance forces remain active in surrounding rural areas, ensuring that the conflict remains far from settled.

Since early 2026, junta troops have retaken all or parts of strategically important townships, including Loikaw and Hpasawng, reversing some of the territorial gains made by revolutionary forces. However, resistance groups continue to operate in the countryside surrounding these towns, launching attacks on military positions and attempting to disrupt the junta's supply routes into reclaimed areas.

Fighting persisted throughout July, with civilians continuing to bear the brunt of the conflict. Between July 14 and 16, at least three civilians were killed in separate junta air and drone strikes. A woman died in an airstrike in Loikaw Township, a man was killed in a drone attack in Hpruso Township, and a young man lost his life in an airstrike in Hpasawng Township, according to local reports.

The heaviest clashes during the month took place near Demoso in the third week of July. Both sides reportedly suffered casualties, with the Karenni resistance confirming the deaths of five fighters - two from the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) and three from the Karenni Army (KA). The continued fighting highlights the resistance's ability to challenge junta forces despite losing control of several urban areas.

Amid the conflict, the KNDF announced a major organisational restructuring aimed at strengthening its military command. After establishing Military Region No. 1, known as "Alpha," the force has now reorganised its remaining units into three additional military regions. Military Region No. 2 comprises eight battalions, Region No. 3 includes seven battalions, and Region No. 4 consists of three battalions. The restructuring appears designed to improve coordination and command efficiency as the resistance adapts to a more prolonged conflict.

The ongoing fighting is also taking a heavy toll on livelihoods. In Moby, along the Shan-Karenni border, frequent artillery shelling and drone strikes have forced farmers to abandon their fields during the critical

growing season. Many rice paddies have already been transplanted, but farmers are unable to carry out essential work such as weeding, fertilising and applying pesticides because of continuing insecurity.

Residents told local media that villages such as Loi Waing have been particularly affected, with cultivated fields left overgrown as displaced farmers remain unable to return. Others said they continue planting despite the risks, fearing that abandoning this year's crop would leave their families without food or income next year. Their situation underscores how prolonged conflict is threatening not only civilian safety but also future food security across Karenni State.



Fighters in Karenni State. Photo: Supplied



Photo: SCEF

THE SOVEREIGN CHOICE: FROM STALEMATE TO FEDERAL RENEWAL IN MYANMAR

SAI WANSAI

A highly anticipated meeting between the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA) and the Steering Committee for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) finally took place, sparking excitement among the Myanmar public. In the days leading up to the July 23, 2026 meeting, the SCEF had also held separate talks with the Pa-O and Mon resistance forces, the Spring Revolution Alliance (SRA)—an alliance of armed groups formed during the Spring Revolution—and the federal unit parliaments and governments of Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay regions. In total, the SCEF reportedly met with eleven organizations in just eight days.

The Fracture of Two Myanmars

As the sun sets on July 2026, the landscape of Myanmar is defined not by a clear victor, but by a profound and dangerous fracture. The nation exists in a state of suspended animation, locked in a high-stakes stalemate where the military junta controls the capital and the major urban centers, while the resistance holds the vast rural hinterlands and border regions. This is not merely a military deadlock; it is a collision of two irreconcilable political visions. On one side stands the

regime of Min Aung Hlaing, desperate to manufacture a facade of legitimacy through a co-opted coalition. On the other stands the people's movement, embodied by the Steering Committee for the SCEF, which is rapidly consolidating a genuine alternative government rooted in the will of the citizenry. The coming months will determine whether Myanmar descends further into a permanent dictatorship or emerges as a federal democratic union.

The Junta's Illusion of Unity

The military junta's strategy has evolved from brute force to a sophisticated diplomatic gambit known as the 100-Day Peace Initiative. This initiative is designed to create an illusion of national reconciliation by assembling a broad coalition of some twelve armed groups. This list is carefully curated to include the seven Ethnic Armed Organizations, known as "7 EAO Alliance", that historically signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, alongside the China-backed militias of the northern borderlands such as the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA) or Kokang, National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) or Mongla, Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA),

Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) and United Wa State Army (UWSA), and various junta-proxy forces like the Shanni Nationalities Army (SNA) and Border Guard Force (BGF). By bringing these disparate groups to the table, the junta aims to present itself to the international community as the only viable architect of peace.

The logic behind this maneuver is transparent. The junta seeks to leverage the inclusion of traditional ethnic armies to claim that it has achieved a “National Reconciliation,” thereby neutralizing the National Unity Government and the SCEF as political actors. With the diplomatic shield provided by China and Russia, who continue to block decisive action at the United Nations Security Council, the regime believes it can parlay this domestic coalition into international recognition. They are banking on the hope that the world, weary of the conflict, will accept this manufactured “peace” as the new status quo, effectively legitimizing the 2021 coup and the 2008 Constitution that enshrines military dominance.

The People’s Counter-Offensive

In stark contrast to the junta’s top-down co-option, the SCEF is executing a bottom-up political revolution. Unlike the junta, which relies on the patronage of external powers, the SCEF draws its strength solely from the people. It is a movement without a state sponsor, fueled by the aspirations of millions who have taken to the streets and the fields to demand the restoration of their democracy. The recent diplomatic surge by the SCEF has been nothing short of remarkable. In a span of just eight days, the committee has engaged with eleven different armed groups, signaling a determined effort to broaden its coalition beyond its current core of the National Unity Government (NUG), the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Karen National Union (KNU), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and Chin National Front (CNF).

The most significant development in this political consolidation is the public virtual meeting between the SCEF and the Arakan Army. This engagement marks a strategic pivot, as the Arakan Army (AA), a powerful force that had previously operated with a degree of autonomy, is now aligning itself with the SCEF. This move effectively strips the junta of its ability to claim that all major armed groups support its peace initiative. By actively soliciting the support of groups that have not yet joined the alliance, the SCEF is building a formidable political and military entity capable of replacing the junta in Naypyitaw. The momentum is shifting, not through a single decisive battle, but through the steady, relentless work of uniting the fragmented opposition into a coherent, legitimate government-in-waiting.

The Crisis of Regional Diplomacy

The geopolitical implications of this fracture are playing out acutely within ASEAN. The regional bloc, once the primary forum for resolving the Myanmar crisis, is now the battleground for the junta’s survival strategy. The military regime is actively exploiting divisions within ASEAN, rejecting the Five-Point Consensus while simultaneously courting members who prioritize stability or economic ties over democratic principles. This has led to a dangerous disunity, with some nations seemingly willing to recognize the junta’s new regime, while others cling to the fading principles of the consensus.

This internal schism is exactly what the junta needs to survive. If ASEAN were to recognize the junta’s some twelve-group alliance as the legitimate representative of Myanmar, it would validate the coup and render the resistance’s political struggle moot. The junta is betting that ASEAN’s desire for a quick resolution will override its commitment to democratic norms. However, this gamble ignores the reality that the junta’s “peace” is a sham, designed only to preserve military power. The failure of ASEAN to present a united front has allowed

the junta to manipulate the diplomatic landscape, turning the Five-Point Consensus into a hollow shell that no longer serves the interests of the Myanmar people.

The Imperative for a New Diplomatic Paradigm

The current trajectory is unsustainable. The stalemate allows the junta to continue its atrocities while the resistance, despite its moral and political strength, lacks the international legal framework to force a transition. The solution lies in a bold departure from the status quo. The international community must move beyond the failed strategy of neutrality and adopt an innovative diplomatic framework inspired by the successful United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) model. This approach requires the UN and ASEAN to work in tandem to create a Joint Transitional Council that recognizes the SCEF as the sole legitimate political interlocutor.

This framework would not merely observe the conflict but actively facilitate the political transition. It would mandate the exclusion of the military junta from the core decision-making process until it agrees to a full withdrawal from power, thereby removing the primary obstacle to peace. By channeling humanitarian aid directly through the de facto administrative structures of the resistance, such as the federal councils in Karenni, Magway, and Mandalay, the international community would sever the junta's ability to weaponize aid. Simultaneously, a unified declaration recognizing the SCEF as the legitimate government-in-waiting would strip the military's peace initiative of any diplomatic weight.

The Path to Federal Renewal

For this model to succeed, ASEAN and the UN must present a united front, leveraging their combined influence to pressure the junta's external backers to

support a genuine transition. The goal is to create a clear, time-bound pathway to a federal democratic union that respects the rights of all ethnic groups and upholds the results of the 2020 election. This is not merely a diplomatic exercise; it is a moral imperative. The future of Myanmar hinges on the international community's willingness to embrace this innovative approach and place the aspirations of the Myanmar people at the center of the solution.

The momentum is already building within the resistance. The SCEF's rapid expansion, the strategic alignment with the Arakan Army, and the growing international recognition of its legitimacy suggest that the resistance is gaining the upper hand. The junta's attempts to buy time through sham negotiations are increasingly seen as a desperate measure. By adapting the lessons of Cambodia to the unique complexities of the Myanmar conflict, the UN and ASEAN can facilitate the emergence of a federal democratic union that uproots the dictatorship and restores dignity to a nation long denied its sovereign voice. The transition from a fractured stalemate to a unified democracy is not only possible; it is the only path that leads to a lasting peace. The choice is now clear: continue to legitimize a military dictatorship that has plunged Myanmar into chaos, or embrace the people's aspiration for a federal democracy. The world must choose the latter, for the sake of the Myanmar people and the stability of the entire region.

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Photo: AFP

SAC-M CALLS ON ASEAN TO STOP MINCING WORDS AND ENFORCE THE FIVE-POINT CONSENSUS ON MYANMAR

The Special Advisory Council – Myanmar (SAC-M) has called on the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to get serious over the Myanmar crisis.

This statement, issued 29 July, is issued by Dato' Sri Saifuddin Abdullah, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia and current member of the House of Representatives of Malaysia; Khun Kasit Piromya, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand; and three former UN experts on Myanmar who are founding members of the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M)

ASEAN has reaffirmed its “united position” on its Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar (5PC) after a humiliating fortnight. Now, five long years after its adoption, ASEAN must finally require the Myanmar military junta’s full compliance.

At the 59th ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Manila last week, ASEAN Foreign Ministers discussed “possible elements for assessing progress in Myanmar, in line with the 5PC” and to inform “further steps” that the bloc should take. Philippines Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Special Envoy of the ASEAN

Chair on Myanmar, Ma. Theresa Lazaro, added that ASEAN would develop formal benchmarks ahead of its November Leaders’ Summit to assess the military junta’s progress in implementing the agreement. The Foreign Ministers failed to propose a single action to implement their commitments.

ASEAN posturing on concrete benchmarks in the face of junta recalcitrance is not new. But it’s now up against the arrogance of the inflated junta leader and accused war criminal Min Aung Hlaing. And Min Aung Hlaing quickly showed his total contempt for his would-be ASEAN friends.

Just days after ASEAN Foreign Ministers made the ill-conceived step of meeting with the junta’s “foreign minister” in Thailand, the junta’s propaganda machine publicly posted an AI-generated cartoon addressed to SAC-M that celebrated the junta’s “diplomatic masterstroke” in fooling ASEAN. The cartoon claimed that the junta had “outmanoeuvred all pressure unlocking ASEAN’s high-level doors on its own terms with zero compromises”.

This was swiftly followed by a statement from the junta’s “foreign ministry” boasting that the junta’s new

phoney “parliament” had rejected the 5PC, and that Min Aung Hlaing’s make-believe government was “bound to respect the decision” in order to uphold “national interests and sovereignty”.

This is a steroid-driven carbon copy of 2021, when ASEAN’s political engagement with the junta fast ended in public humiliation. In 2021, Min Aung Hlaing agreed to the 5PC and then repudiated it 24 hours later. ASEAN has been fooled countless times since then and it continues.

More egregious, ASEAN’s repeated failure to take the junta to task continues to have devastating, real-world consequences for civilians. As ASEAN Foreign Ministers met in Manila last Monday, the disfigured bodies of four people, including three young humanitarian aid workers, were found dumped in Myanmar’s southern Dawei District. The junta has reportedly abducted and used them as human shields.

ASEAN must judge the junta on its words and deeds and assume the junta’s continued 5PC non-compliance. On this basis, it must immediately:

Finalise and make public its 5PC compliance benchmarks, setting an implementation deadline.

Concrete benchmarks must include an end to the junta’s violence, the full, immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, including President U Win Myint and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to all persons in need.

Adopt a series of escalating punitive steps that will be triggered by the junta’s non-compliance with the benchmarks.

Reinstate its ban on high-level engagement with all senior junta officials.

Decouple the role of Special Envoy on Myanmar from the rotating ASEAN Chair. The next Special Envoy should be a full-time, multi-year and well-resourced

appointee selected after broad consultation with legitimate Myanmar actors and communities.

ASEAN should also be pragmatic and look beyond the 5PC given the junta’s repeated rejection of the agreement. In anticipation of non-compliance, it must start developing a new operating framework to supplement and ultimately replace the 5PC, with a clear end game in mind.

Finally, ASEAN must intensify its formal engagement with Myanmar’s legitimate political and civil society actors. This should include the full membership of the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union, including the National Unity Government, ethnic organisations, Myanmar civil society and representatives of minority communities, including those who have been forced to leave Myanmar.

While the junta torches Myanmar and destabilises the region, these legitimate actors are shaping the foundations of a genuine, inclusive and sustainable federal democratic Union.

ASEAN must support them not only to meet its professed commitment to the genuine will and aspirations of the Myanmar people, but also out of self-interest. With the world watching, ASEAN has more than pride on the line.

The statement is signed by the following:

Dato’ Sri Saifuddin Abdullah

Khun Kasit Piromya

Marzuki Darusman

Yanghee Lee

Chris Sidoti



WAR CRIMES CASE AGAINST MYANMAR DICTATORSHIP MOVES TO NEXT PHASE IN THE PHILIPPINES

As part of the ongoing global initiative to bring the Myanmar dictatorship to justice, war crimes survivors from north-western Chin State have filed their second “motion to resolve” at the Philippines Department of Justice, the next step in a case initiated in 2023, according to the Myanmar Accountability Project (MAP) and the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) 31 July.

The motion brings further pressure on the authorities in Manila to open an investigation into the massive arson attack in 2021 by junta forces on the Chin town of Thantlang. In the junta assault, some fifteen hundred houses, churches, schools, medical facilities and other civilian structures were destroyed, and thousands of civilians were forcibly displaced, many into India.

A Christian Pastor, Cung Biak Hum, was deliberately targeted and his body mutilated, while Pa Ral Tu, an unarmed church official, was also deliberately shot and killed. Both men were attempting to bring medical aid to survivors.

“To mark this milestone in our case in the Philippines, we are publishing a new report into attacks on religion in Chin State,” said Salai Za Uk, Executive Director of the CHRO, one of the complainants in the case, who was born in Thantlang. “The facts bear witness to dictator, Min Aung Hlaing’s unrelenting annihilation campaign against Myanmar’s Christian minority. In Chin state between January and July this year, 83 civilians were killed, of which 21 were children, while 102 civilians were injured, including 15 children and 4 religious leaders. In the same period, CHRO has documented 1,543 indiscriminate and disproportionate airstrikes by the junta, which have destroyed 353 civilian structures, including 319 homes, 4 schools, 5 hospitals or clinics, 9 churches and 16 public facilities. We pray that the Philippines Government, one of the most fervently-Christian in South East Asia, will show solidarity with

Myanmar’s persecuted religious communities and open an investigation into these crimes.”

One of the lawyers for the Chin complainants is Atty. Gilbert Andres, who is also a common legal representative of the victims of the “war on drugs” in the International Criminal Court (ICC) case in the Hague, against former President Rodrigo Duterte said there was “an undeniable legal basis for the Department of Justice to open an investigation for war crimes, even if they were committed in Myanmar. Section 17 of Republic Act No. 9851 or the Philippine International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Act makes clear that the war crimes committed against my clients are criminal offences under Philippine criminal law.”

He continued “interestingly, this same Section 17 of the IHL Act was invoked by the Philippine Government as the legal basis for surrendering Mr Duterte over to the ICC for his so-called “war on drugs” and it is also being used by the government to legally justify the implementation of an ICC arrest warrant against Senator Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa, Duterte’s former police chief. If Section 17 of the IHL Act can be used in these two instances, then it must also be used for my clients. And if the government does not act on our motion to resolve, we will go the Court of Appeals in the coming months.”

The other lead lawyer on the case, Atty. Romel Bagares, also urged action from the Philippines, which holds the current chair of ASEAN, the Association of South East Asian Nations. “We fully support the Manila Government’s proposal for a permanent Myanmar envoy as part of efforts to see the full implementation of ASEAN’s Myanmar plan, the Five Point Consensus (5PC). All ASEAN members accept the 5PC while Min Aung Hlaing is alone in rejecting it. Moreover, I urge ASEAN to include accountability as one of its benchmarks of success in implementing the 5PC, along with efforts to protect civilians, such as the cessation of airstrikes and the delivery of humanitarian aid, which the junta is blocking.”

The case in the Philippines is one of three in South East Asia against the Myanmar junta. The others are a Rohingya genocide litigation which was opened in Indonesia in April, and a war crimes and crimes against humanity case in Timor-Leste initiated in January and which led the Myanmar junta to expel the top Timorese diplomat. All three cases are supported by MAP, whose Director, Chris Gunness argued that the “tide is turning in ASEAN towards accountability. To quote Martin Luther King, ‘the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.’ Min Aung Hlaing is a wanted war criminal on the run from justice. Like Duterte, he should be turned over to face the consequences of his criminal acts.”



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

FORTIFY RIGHTS URGES THAILAND NOT TO LEGITIMIZE MYANMAR'S JUNTA CHIEF AHEAD OF AUGUST VISIT

The Thai government should press Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing for concrete progress on civilian protection and accountability during his planned visit to Thailand next month, rather than treat the trip as an opportunity to confer legitimacy on his rule, Fortify Rights said in a statement on 31 July.

Min Aung Hlaing is expected to visit Thailand in the first week of August at the invitation of the Thai government. The trip follows a series of high-level engagements between Thailand and Myanmar's junta since Min Aung Hlaing declared himself "president" following elections in December 2025 and January 2026 that the United Kingdom, the European Union, Canada and Australia rejected as illegitimate, and that ASEAN declined to recognize.

Thailand's deputy prime minister and foreign minister, Sihasak Phuangketkeow, previously visited Naypyitaw and met Min Aung Hlaing, where the two governments agreed to strengthen cooperation on cross-border issues including narcotics, online scam operations and mining-related river pollution. Junta-appointed Foreign Minister Tin Maung Swe visited Bangkok in July and met Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, who then invited Min Aung Hlaing to visit. Anutin told reporters on 22 July that the visit would be

an opportunity to discuss bilateral issues including river pollution, agricultural burning and the source of the drug trade, saying "we need to discuss matters that are in the interests of both countries."

The visit comes as Myanmar's military continues what Fortify Rights described as widespread and systematic attacks on civilians, including airstrikes, arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings and attacks on civilian infrastructure. The United Nations says the conflict has displaced nearly 3.8 million people, with more than 16 million in need of humanitarian assistance. Min Aung Hlaing is the subject of a request for an arrest warrant filed by the International Criminal Court's prosecutor in November 2024 over crimes against humanity linked to the deportation and persecution of Rohingya people. An Argentine federal court separately issued an arrest warrant against him in February 2025 citing universal jurisdiction over genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya.

Thanida Piyachot, a human rights specialist at Fortify Rights, said the visit risked conferring legitimacy on a junta leader responsible for grave rights violations, and that Thailand and ASEAN "must stop hiding behind the non-interference policy."



MYANMAR APPROVES DEATH SENTENCE FOR CYBERSCAM OFFENCES

Myanmar's military-backed parliament approved a law on 28 July authorising capital punishment for those who detain or violently coerce victims into working in online scam centres.

Internet fraud factories have flourished in war-torn Myanmar, part of Southeast Asia's thriving scam economy, targeting web users worldwide with romance and cryptocurrency investment cons.

The multibillion-dollar black market attracts many willing employees, but repatriated foreigners have also reported being trafficked to sites in Myanmar and tortured by scam centre operators.

Under pressure from other nations, including the United States and China, the Myanmar government of putschist-turned-president Min Aung Hlaing has pledged to crack down on the illicit industry.

But monitors say law enforcement raids and arrests have resulted in scam outfits relocating in the region rather than ceasing operations.

Myanmar lawmakers passed the "Anti-Online Scam Bill" at a joint session of parliament in the capital Naypyidaw on Tuesday, parliament speaker Aung Lin Dwe said during a live television broadcast.

Lower house MP Aye Chan told AFP the death sentence was included in the final version of the law.

"There were not many significant changes to the proposed draft bill... the important parts of the bill remained the same," Aye Chan said.

A draft text published in May included sentences of 10 years to life in prison, as well as capital punishment, for "violence, torture, unlawful arrest and detention, or cruel treatment against another person for the purpose of forcing them to commit online scams".

For scam offences causing death, it said, "the death penalty shall be imposed".

The draft bill also featured a maximum sentence of life in prison for those who "run an online scam centre" or convicted of cryptocurrency scams.

Scammers executed

The anti-scam law is the first legislation passed by Myanmar's new government, headed by former junta chief Min Aung Hlaing.

He led a 2021 military coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and triggered an ongoing civil war.

In April, Min Aung Hlaing assumed the role of civilian president after heavily restricted elections that did not include the detained Nobel laureate, Suu Kyi, or her party.

Analysts describe the military-backed parliament as a rubber-stamp legislature, with pro-military lawmakers sweeping the vote which was widely criticised by Western nations and democracy watchdogs as a sham meant to launder the junta's image.

As one of his first official acts since becoming civilian leader, Min Aung Hlaing commuted all death sentences in a blanket order in April -- a turnaround after his junta had resumed executions following the coup.

The return to executions after decades targeted anti-coup dissidents, rights groups said.

By 2022, more than 130 people had been sentenced to death, according to the United Nations.

This year China -- which reported more than \$5 billion in scam losses in the past two years -- has executed at least 15 people convicted of fraud offences linked to Myanmar scam compounds.

'Many challenges'

Myanmar's civil war has killed more than 100,000 people and seeded instability across the country, creating fertile ground for scammers to set up shop inside fortified compounds, according to monitors.

Chinese-origin syndicates "constitute the major organisational force" behind the region's cyberscam economy, running industrial-scale scam compounds in border areas and special economic zones in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, a report from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said this month.

In Myanmar's conflict zones, non-state armed groups are also involved in the criminal ecosystem, it added.

Myanmar's government has vowed to combat internet fraud alongside neighbouring nations. But law enforcement actions in the region have "displaced and dispersed" scam networks rather than dismantled them, the UNODC said.

Crackdowns on established scam hubs, including KK Park and Shwe Kokko in Myanmar near the Thai border, have pushed operators to facilities in Cambodia, it noted.

Upper house MP Naw Yuzana Wah told AFP that international pressure was spurring Myanmar officials to tackle the scam scourge.

"As many armed groups and organisations are involved" in the industry, "we have many challenges to address", she said.

AFP



IOM WARNS MYANMAR AMONG ASIA'S EXPANDING SCAM-TRAFFICKING HUBS

Workers trafficked into online scam operations across South-East Asia, including in Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, risk being treated as criminals rather than victims even after they are rescued, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) warned on 28 July, as trafficking into the region's scam-compound industry continues to draw victims from more than 80 countries.

Scam compounds across the region are believed to hold as many as 300,000 workers in total, with the number of trafficking victims among them estimated in the tens of thousands, IOM Director General Amy Pope told reporters in Geneva. Recruiters increasingly target English speakers and university graduates, luring them through fake job advertisements circulated on social media, she said.

Once recruited, victims are locked inside the compounds, stripped of their passports and phones, and placed under constant watch, according to the IOM. Many are beaten, threatened or held through debt bondage to keep the scam operations running, and survivors have reported torture, sexual abuse and solitary confinement. One of the clearest warning signs, Pope said, is a job offer that seems "too good to

be true," along with recruitment on a tourist visa rather than a proper work permit.

Survivors are sometimes identified as offenders instead of victims even after rescue, she added, leaving many to face prosecution, debt, trauma and the loss of identity documents on top of the abuse already suffered. Pope credited governments including Thailand for stepping up efforts to identify scam compounds, though she said more action is needed in remote areas where law enforcement remains weak.

New data from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates scam-related losses across East and South-East Asia, Australia and New Zealand reached between US\$88.3 billion and US\$114.1 billion in 2025 alone.

IOM has assisted more than 3,500 victims of forced criminality in South-East Asia between 2022 and 2025, drawn from 39 countries, most often Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Kenya and Bangladesh. The agency has now launched a new regional strategy for 2026 to 2030 aimed at strengthening victim protection and cross-border cooperation against the networks driving the trade.



EU SANCTIONS KINGPIN, MYANMAR ARMED GROUP OVER CYBERSCAMS

The EU on Thursday imposed sanctions on an alleged head of a crime syndicate that operated in Cambodia and an armed Myanmar group over cyberscams targeting victims worldwide.

Brussels said it was placing "multi-billion-dollar conglomerate" Prince Holding Group and its chairman Chen Zhi on an assets freeze and visa ban blacklist for allegedly building "scam centre compounds in Cambodia and Myanmar through different front companies".

"These scam centres perpetrate cryptocurrency investment scams and other fraudulent schemes," the EU said.

"Furthermore, inside these centres, many victims from different countries are trafficked or lured under false pretences, held against their will, and forced to carry out online scams targeting victims around the world."

Prince Group's China-born founder Chen Zhi was extradited by Phnom Penh to China in January, after his Cambodian conglomerate was sanctioned by the US and UK governments months earlier over its alleged involvement in cyberscams.

Cambodia has emerged as a hub for crime syndicates running fake romantic relationship and cryptocurrency investment schemes in which scammers -- some willing, others trafficked -- defraud internet users around the world.

But, under pressure from several countries including the United States, Britain and China, Cambodian authorities say they are cracking down on the industry.

The EU also said it was blacklisting Myanmar armed group Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) for "facilitating large-scale scam centres, by allowing these illegal compounds to operate under its protection".

"Soldiers of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army have been reported to participate in violence against victims of human trafficking trapped inside the compound," the EU said.

The DKBA, which controls territory on the Myanmar-Thailand border, was sanctioned by Washington in November.

AFP



MYANMAR JUNTA'S DIALOGUE INVITATION FAILS TO SHOW GENUINE POLITICAL WILL, SAYS CHINLAND COUNCIL SECRETARY

The Myanmar military junta's invitation to political dialogue does not yet demonstrate a genuine desire to resolve political issues through political means, Chinland Council (CC) Secretary Salai Kep Chin Thang told Mizzima.

A statement issued after the CC's third council meeting of its second term, held from 23 to 25 July, said that if the junta genuinely seeks a political solution, it must first take four initial actions: immediately halting airstrikes on civilians as well as healthcare, educational, and religious buildings; allowing unimpeded humanitarian aid access to internally displaced persons (IDPs); ending forced military conscription; and immediately and unconditionally releasing all political prisoners. The Secretary elaborated on this stance in the interview.

"Our four initial points are not pre-conditions for talks. They are mandatory actions the military regime must take if they genuinely want a political solution. Inviting dialogue without implementing these shows they have no real desire for a political resolution," the CC Secretary told Mizzima.

He said the junta's invitation for revolutionary groups to engage in unconditional political talks under the 2008 Constitution, as part of a "100-day plan," is an offer lacking any real guarantees.

The Secretary said that while the junta is orchestrating political dialogue to gain legitimacy, it must first build trust through practical actions, starting with the four initial steps, including stopping attacks on civilians.

The CC statement warned revolutionary forces to remain highly vigilant, noting that the junta may escalate military operations, target civilians, and exploit pressure from neighbouring and foreign nations to force separate meetings with individual revolutionary groups in order to secure its own legitimacy.

The council meeting, held 23-25 July, was attended by representatives from the parliamentary bloc, township and regional administration groups, and the Chin National Front (CNF), who collectively analyzed the current military and political landscape.

According to the statement, discussions also focused on strengthening cooperation between the three main pillars — the CNF, the parliamentary/MP bloc, and township and regional administrations — the Chinland Government (the executive body the Council appointed in 2024), and local administrations, as well as reinforcing the Chinland defense forces.

The Secretary said some ongoing processes cannot yet be disclosed but will be announced soon, and that efforts toward Chin national unity will continue through multiple channels. "Some matters are still in progress and cannot be released. For Chin national unity, we will continue through informal processes and various other methods to keep the doors of dialogue wide open," he said.

The statement concluded by urging revolutionary forces to honor the public's will and the goals of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), avoid any pathways that legitimize the junta, and continue fulfilling their revolutionary duties toward systemic change.

The Chinland Council was established on 6 December 2023 — the date its constitution was adopted — with the goals of fostering Chin national unity and strengthening local governance. It currently comprises 20 member organizations.



Aung Kyaw Moe

NUG DEPUTY HUMAN RIGHTS MINISTER AUNG KYAW MOE RESIGNS

Aung Kyaw Moe, the Deputy Minister of Human Rights for the National Unity Government (NUG), announced on social media on 31 July that he has resigned from his post, effective 31 July.

NUG Prime Minister's Office spokesperson Nay Phone Latt confirmed the resignation to Mizzima, saying via message this afternoon: "It is true that he has submitted his resignation."

Aung Kyaw Moe is the first Rohingya national to hold a ministerial-level position in a Myanmar government since 1962. Following the 2021 coup, he served as an advisor and subsequently as Deputy Minister of Human Rights, appointed in June 2023.

His social media statement said his resignation does not stem from policy disagreements, conflicts, or friction with NUG leadership. "This decision is not a departure from our shared goals. It is merely a transition to a new role where I can more effectively contribute to the vision of a democratic Myanmar built on rights,

human rights, and a federal democratic system," he said.

He said the decision was a strategic one, allowing him to focus more effectively on the national rights, political representation, dignity, and long-term interests of the Rohingya people at this juncture.

Going forward, he said he will continue working with regional and international partners to strengthen Rohingya political leadership, foster community unity, and secure aid and justice for the Rohingya cause.

He said Myanmar's future can only be guaranteed by building a genuine federal democratic union based on equality, justice, the rule of law, and respect for the rights of all ethnic nationalities, and said he remains ready to collaborate closely with the NUG, Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs), democratic forces, and civil society organizations wherever their shared goals align.



MYANMAR ENVOY TELLS UN COUP QUADRUPLLED YANGON POVERTY, DISPLACED 3.7 MILLION NATIONWIDE

Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, told a UN high-level meeting in New York on 28 July that the 2021 military coup has stalled the country's urban development, pointing to a quadrupling of poverty in Yangon and the displacement of more than 3.7 million people nationwide.

Speaking at the midterm review of the New Urban Agenda, the ambassador said the military, led by junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, halted a National Urban Policy that the elected civilian government had been developing before the coup.

Kyaw Moe Tun has continued to represent Myanmar's UN seat since 2021 under the authority of the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), rejecting the junta's legitimacy.

According to the ambassador, urban poverty in Yangon rose from 10% in 2017 to 43% in 2023, while more than 120,000 homes have been destroyed or

burned by the military since the coup. He cited UN-HABITAT data showing the IDP surge has pushed more people into informal settlements, straining basic services, and UNDP findings that junta-linked crime and extortion in Yangon's peri-urban areas have restricted residents' mobility and access to work.

Beyond the immediate housing figures, Kyaw Moe Tun said Myanmar's broader urbanization trend, now at 32% of the population as of 2025, has been reshaped by conflict rather than planned growth. He described a population forced to choose "survival over prosperity" amid junta airstrikes, food weaponization and the destruction of residential areas.

The ambassador called on the international community to support ending what he called the military dictatorship, saying the NUG and allied groups under the Steering Council for Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) are working toward a federal democratic union.



On the highway. Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA RECLAIMS MOST REVOLUTIONARY-CONTROLLED TERRITORIES ON SAGAING'S TAMU-KALAY ROAD

The Myanmar military junta has reclaimed most of the territory previously controlled by revolutionary forces along the Tamu-Kalay road in Sagaing Region, according to junta-aligned media and ground military sources.

Clashes began on 8 June as two military columns advanced from Kalay and Tamu. The junta subsequently reclaimed Bokekan model village in Khampat Township on 29 July, followed by Witoke, Teinteinyan, Yantaingaug, and Tweeban villages on 30 July.

"Yes, we yielded them. Under current circumstances, our level cannot match the state-level superior force. We withdrew to avoid casualties among our comrades," a Tamu District Defense Force official told Mizzima.

He said the route opened up because the junta launched an offensive with continuous troop reinforcements, despite suffering heavy casualties, while relying on disproportionate airstrikes and heavy artillery.

A military source assessed that only a few revolutionary-controlled villages remain, and that the junta could soon seize the entire 80-mile Tamu-Kalay road section.

A Tamu Township People's Administration member expressed sadness over losing the controlled areas but said People's Defense comrades "fully discharged their duties."

"It is not the comrades' fault; they did their duty. In a prolonged battle, ammunition, bombs, and heavy weaponry are crucial. Holding out this long is highly respectable," he said.

Revolutionary forces involved in the clashes included Tamu District battalions, the Kuki National Army (KNA), the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), and allies. The junta's side was reinforced by Kathe and Naga armed groups that fight against Indian government forces across the border, as well as Shanni and Pyu Saw Htee militias.

The offensive on the Tamu-Kalay road followed junta chief Min Aung Hlaing's statement during his trip to India in late May and early June that he would work on regional stability for bilateral border trade, including the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway project.

The military source said that because revolutionary forces had controlled the Tamu-Kalay road for nearly three years, they possess superior terrain knowledge, and trade will not run smoothly without their consent.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA CONDUCTS OVER 140 AIRSTRIKES IN MAGWAY'S MYAING TOWNSHIP WITHIN SIX DAYS

The Myanmar military conducted over 140 airstrikes in Myaing Township, Magway Region, over a six-day period from 24 to 29 July, according to data released by the We Love Myaing group.

The group's report details 21 airstrikes on 24 July, at least six on 25 July, approximately 10 on 26 July, over 70 on 27 July, over 20 on 28 July, and around 20 on 29 July.

However, the We Love Myaing group reported that one local resident was injured during an airstrike on Nhansarkyin village in northwestern Myaing Township on the evening of 24 July.

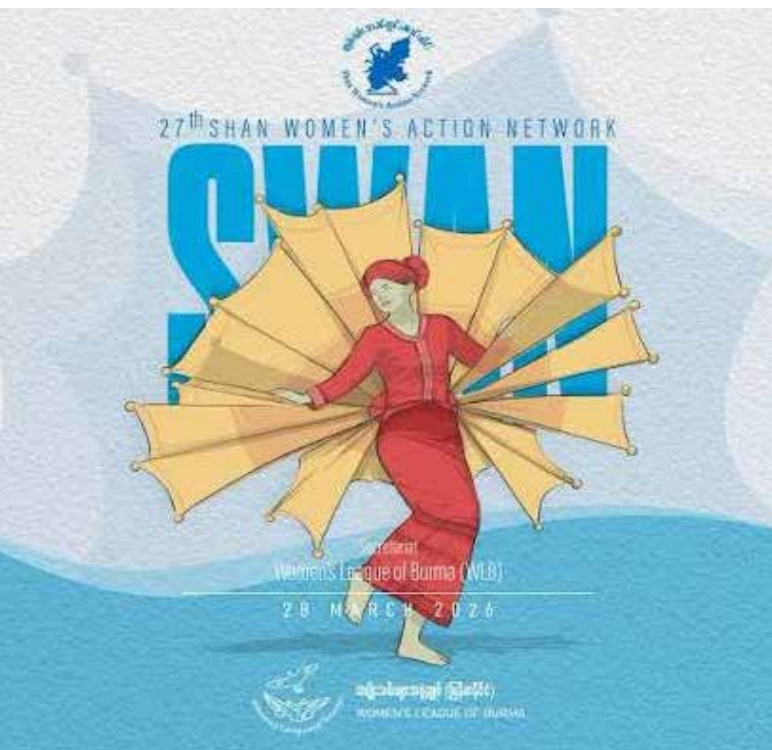
"We heard clashes around here about two days ago, but none since. However, last night, six jet fighters and two Y-12 aircraft conducted attacks all night. They are likely intensifying operations to secure their intended route. They have been stationed in Thinma for a long time. There were earlier clashes, and we heard they suffered heavy casualties," an official from the

Anyar Myay Civil Society Organization (Myaing) told Mizzima on 29 July.

The military column deployed in Thinma and Gyutkon villages in central Myaing Township remains stationary. On 29 July, a transport aircraft dropped ammunition and supplies to reinforce them, according to the Anyar Myay CSO (Myaing).

The organization has urged residents living within a five-mile radius of the military column to remain highly vigilant.

The military column advanced from Htauk Shar Pin village in Pauk Township, Magway Region, into Myaing Township on 13 July. During this offensive, several villages in Myaing Township — including Thinma, Kan Net, Let Khoke Pin, Nyaung Kone, Kaing Taw Ma, and Htan Nge Taw — were torched, and at least 24 residents from Pauk and Myaing townships have been killed within two months.



SWAN'S NEW REPORT REVEALS WIDESPREAD SEXUAL AND GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY GAPS IN SHAN STATE

Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) released a new report on 30 July entitled "Justice Denied in the Face of Violence: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Access to Justice," documenting alarming patterns of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and the persistent failure of justice systems to protect survivors in Shan State, Burma/Myanmar. The report also reveals how armed conflict and displacement have intensified women's vulnerability to violence while further weakening already fragile justice systems.

Key findings include:

- 172 SGBV cases documented across Shan State by SWAN data collectors.
- 89 domestic and intimate partner violence cases (51.7%), most of which were perpetrated by husbands or boyfriends and compounded by substance abuse.
- 70 rape and attempted rape cases, including 30 child survivors under the age of 18, with the youngest survivor being just three years old.

- 15% of perpetrators were members of armed actors, including the Burma/Myanmar military junta and Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs).

- Severe vulnerabilities and fatalities: At least 12 survivors were persons with mental or physical disabilities. Seven cases resulted in homicide, while seven others involved suicide or attempted suicide.

"The findings show that violence against women and girls continues to be a serious and pervasive human rights crisis in Shan State," said Hseng, SWAN's Empowerment Coordinator. "Survivors face not only the trauma of violence itself but also immense barriers to obtaining justice, safety, and support."

The report finds systemic barriers to accessing justice, with only around half of the 172 documented cases having a recorded resolution or action. More than 70% of survivors initially reported their cases to village leaders, who often dismissed domestic abuse as a "private family matter" or imposed forced marriages or financial compensation in place of justice and survivor protection. Survivors of SGBV committed by members of the military junta or Ethnic Resistance Organizations also faced heightened risks of intimidation, cover-ups, and impunity.

SWAN calls on Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs), local authorities, and all justice actors to strengthen survivor-centred responses to sexual and gender-based violence by ensuring accountability for perpetrators, guaranteeing survivors' access to justice and comprehensive support services, and addressing harmful gender norms that perpetuate violence.

SWAN also calls on the international community to strengthen targeted sanctions and enforce a comprehensive global arms embargo against the Burma/Myanmar military junta; support international accountability mechanisms, including the UN Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) and efforts toward International Criminal Court (ICC) accountability; and uphold the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda through sustained support for local women-led organizations.

"Without ending violence against women and ensuring meaningful access to justice for survivors, there can be no lasting peace in Burma," said Nang Kham Awn, SWAN Coordinator.



Htet Myat Aung

EIGHT PROTESTERS, INCLUDING MANDALAY PROTEST LEADER HTET MYAT AUNG, SENTENCED TO 37 YEARS IN PRISON EACH BY MYANMAR JUNTA

The Myanmar military junta has unjustly sentenced eight protest comrades, including Mandalay non-violent protest leader and former president of the Yadanabon University Students' Union Ko Htet Myat Aung, to 37 years in prison each, according to the Yadanabon University Students' Union.

They were sentenced to 30 years in prison for three cases under Section 23(b) of the Law Safeguarding the Prevention of Disturbance, Obstruction, and Destruction of Elections, and seven years under Section 52(a) of the Counter-Terrorism Law, totalling 37 years each.

The verdicts were handed down during a military court hearing on 27 July for cases filed at Mandalay's No. 3, No. 6, and No. 7 police stations.

Ko Htet Myat Aung, also known as "Patheingyi," was arrested on 14 December 2025, after protesting in Mandalay against the junta-led election alongside protest leaders Dr. Tay Zar San, Ko Nan Lin, and Ko Khant Wai Phyo.

Following their arrest, the junta held them in incommunicado detention. Seven months later, starting in January 2026, they were prosecuted separately in various township courts, leading to these verdicts. Protest groups previously reported that they were severely beaten during their arrest, raising grave concerns for their lives.

At least 200 people have been arrested and prosecuted under the junta's election protection law, with maximum prison sentences being handed down across different townships.

The Yadanabon University Students' Union strongly condemned the unjust sentencing of the peaceful student protesters, declaring that they will continue to fight alongside the public to secure the release of detained comrades and eradicate the military dictatorship.

The military junta has not yet released any official statement regarding the sentencing.



Photo: Supplied

ANYAR BEARS DISPROPORTIONATE TOLL AS MYANMAR MILITARY MASS KILLINGS CLAIM OVER 450 LIVES

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded more than a dozen military-perpetrated mass killings nationwide in the first six months of 2026, leaving over 450 civilians dead, with nearly 40 percent of those deaths occurring in the dry zone — known in Myanmar as Anyar — spanning parts of Sagaing, Magway and Mandalay regions.

The toll has mounted since March, when the military reshuffled its command structure and installed General Ye Win Oo as commander-in-chief ahead of junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's move into the "presidency" the following month, with fighter jets increasingly deployed in squadrons against single targets rather than the broader, less concentrated strikes of past years.

Beyond the aerial campaign, ground operations have been equally devastating. In Magway Region's Pakokku District, a military column of roughly 500 troops swept through Myitche town and 18 surrounding villages beginning 10 May, killing nearly 40 residents and burning approximately 1,000 homes, according to local aid workers.

The force included soldiers from a Pakokku-based light infantry division alongside pro-military Pyu Saw Htee militia fighters. More than 19,100 people fled the operation, and weeks later the displaced remained

unable to return, with aid groups warning of a growing food shortage across a dozen makeshift displacement sites.

Further north in Mandalay Region's Myingyan Township, junta troops and Pyu Saw Htee militia members killed seven civilians, including four women, during a raid on Hpetpinaing village on 2 April. Residents said soldiers opened fire as they entered the village, then used drones to target people who fled into the surrounding fields while gathering others at the village monastery. Nearly 300 of the village's 350 houses were burned down.

Similar attacks struck Sagaing Region in the preceding weeks. In Myinmu Township's Shwe Kyaungkan village, a paramotor-launched bombing killed nine to 10 people, including two five-year-old children, on 23 February. In Butalin Township's Ngapayin village, an airstrike on 30 March destroyed a village clinic, killing seven to 10 patients, most of them women, according to local accounts. ACLED has forecast that such attacks will ease during the current monsoon season before resuming once it ends in October, warning that further military gains would likely expose more civilians to arrest, displacement and violence.



The victims. Photo: Supplied

TWO CIVILIANS KILLED, NEARLY 20 HOMES BURNED IN MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES IN SAGAING'S WETLET

Two civilians were killed and three others injured after the Myanmar military junta launched airstrikes on Wetlet Township, Sagaing Region, on the morning of 28 July, according to local sources.

The military carried out four airstrikes around 10:30 AM on Paukkan Station and Samun villages in southern Wetlet Township.

An official from the Wetlet Information Network told Mizzima that the attacks killed Myint Than, 60, an internally displaced person (IDP) from Shwe Pyi village sheltering in Paukkan Station village, and Ma Myint Maw, 40, from Samun village. Three others were injured.

"One died in Paukkan, another in Samun, and three others were injured," the official said.

Approximately 20 homes were destroyed by fire in the airstrikes, the official added.

Another airstrike targeted Wetlet Township on 27 July, though no casualties were reported. "There were no casualties. People from that area had already fled. A military column was stationed about three to four miles northeast of the strike zone, so they just fired into the forest," the official said.

Separately, on 16 July, an airstrike on a school in Taline Kyun village, Sagaing Township, killed two civilians and destroyed four school buildings and three houses.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing with a fighter jet. Photo: Supplied

MILITARY JUNTA DROPS OVER 40 BOMBS USING TWO AIRCRAFT IN MAGWAY'S SAW TOWNSHIP

The Myanmar military junta used two aircraft to drop more than 40 bombs on a location in Saw Township, Gangaw District, Magway Region, according to local sources.

Yaw Alin Tan, a local news outlet, reported that the airstrikes occurred on 27 July. A jet fighter from Magway Air Base launched an attack around 11:44 AM, followed by a Y-12 transport aircraft from Ela Air Base dropping bombs between 12:47 PM and 1:40 PM.

"Casualties and damages cannot be confirmed yet as phone lines are down, and local residents have fled," a representative from Yaw Alin Tan said.

The junta also arrested and took away two women from Gyi village in Kyaukhtu Township, Yaw region, yesterday.

On 26 July, a junta drone strike on Kyankhin village, east of Thikone village in Saw Township, killed two

people, including a three-year-old child, and injured another.

The junta has been carrying out ground offensives, drone strikes, airstrikes, and civilian arrests across the Yaw and Saw areas. Local news outlets have urged residents to remain vigilant regarding junta troop movements and prioritize safety.

The junta is pushing into Magway Region's Saw and Yaw areas, bordering Chin State, in an attempt to reclaim towns lost in Chin State. Junta forces began reinforcing troops in the area in May, with fighting intensifying and displacing local residents as offensives expanded in the following months.

The Yaw Army has urged the public to support Yaw resistance fighters in their struggle against the military dictatorship.



Photo: AA

ARAKAN ARMY RENAMES MINBYA AND PAUKTAW TOWNS WITH HISTORICAL NAMES

The Arakan Army has renamed Minbya and Pauktaw towns in Rakhine State with historical names, erecting new town signs on 28 July, according to local sources.

Under the new designations, Minbya has been renamed "Anjanapura" and Pauktaw is now "Virathani."

A Minbya resident said the Arakan Army (AA) "fired a seven-gun salute when erecting the new town sign. Since 'Anjanapura' is an ancient historical name, locals view this as reclaiming our region's historical heritage."

A Pauktaw resident said "Virathani" reportedly means "City of the Brave," adding that the renaming has generated significant local interest.

Residents said there is growing public interest in the revival of historical names across AA-controlled territories.

Of Rakhine State's 17 townships, the AA currently controls Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Ponnagyun, Pauktaw, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Minbya, Myebon, Ann, Toungup, Ramree, Gwa, and Thandwe, as well as Paletwa Township in Chin State, where it is establishing administrative machinery.

The AA has yet to capture Kyaukphyu, Sittwe, and Manaung in Rakhine State, with intense clashes ongoing between the two sides in Kyaukphyu and Sittwe.



SPRING DEVELOPMENT BANK SURPASSES US\$2.45 BILLION IN TRANSACTIONS IN THREE YEARS

Spring Development Bank (SDB) has surpassed US\$2.45 billion in transactions in its first three years of operations, the bank announced 29 July on its third anniversary.

"Thank you to our revolution community — customers, token holders, partners, and colleagues. Your trust has carried us through every challenge, and without you SDB would not be where it is today," said Calvin Tang, CEO of SDB. "Three years in, the next 12 months are about execution and growth — building reliable systems for the customers who trust SDB every day."

Entering its fourth year, SDB will focus on the operational fundamentals: product and service upgrades, faster and simpler transactions, and a wider

ecosystem with stronger utility and a more secure platform.

ASEAN's first and only crypto bank now serves nearly 600,000 users across 23 countries.

To commemorate its third anniversary milestone, SDB held a live call across the bank's official social channels at Facebook and Youtube on 22 July 2026. In addition, SDB's esteemed Relationship Managers joined a special exclusive live call on 25 July 2026 with National Unity Government's Union Minister, U Tin Tun Naing as the guest of honour.

"I would like to express my deepest respect and appreciation to the people who have contributed in every way possible and placed their trust in SDB,

Relationship Managers who continue to deliver financial services on the front lines with unwavering commitment and resilience, our partner organisations, and all SDB team members working tirelessly behind the scenes," said U Tin Tun Naing. "Spring Development Bank remains committed to its two core pillars — 'Disrupting Junta's Fund Flow and Building the Public Finance.' Together with the people, SDB will continue to confront the current geopolitical and economic challenges and remain steadfast and resilient until the goals of the revolution are achieved."

This year SDB also added SpringZey – a mission-driven B2C cross-border e-commerce platform empowering and connecting merchant partners and the Spring community, and Spring Institute of FinTech (SIF) – an online education platform offering courses in FinTech, Cryptocurrency, Blockchain, Web3, AI, and emerging technologies. These businesses join the wider Spring Ecosystem alongside SpringBees, a gamified loyalty network; Spring CrowdFund, a fundraising platform for humanitarian causes in South-East Asia; and Nway Oo Hti, the NUG's official e-lottery.

SDB is accelerating partnerships locally and internationally, expanding its ecosystem in line with strengthening its long-term strategic vision.

"We are proud of how far we have come together. But three years is only the beginning," said Calvin Tang.

Spring Development Bank is a bank built on native crypto rails, licensed under the Interim Central Bank of the National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar. SDB offers a borderless, blockchain-based banking experience, with multi-currency accounts in over 10

currencies, including gold, and in-bank exchange functions. Fixed deposit savings are also available with up to 13% interest. SDB token holders can participate in the signature Earn Program, allowing interest to accumulate on a minute-by-minute basis.

About SpringZey: SpringZey is a mission-driven B2C cross-border e-commerce platform that empowers and connects global buyers with Myanmar sellers to trade freely, grow boldly, and drive positive change promoting economic freedom and fostering meaningful social impact. Visit <https://www.springzey.com/> for more information.

About Spring Institute of FinTech (SIF): Spring Institute of FinTech is an online education platform offering courses in FinTech, Cryptocurrency, Blockchain, Web3, AI, and emerging technologies. SIF connects learners, educators, and startups while empowering a financially literate generation aligned with Myanmar's revolution and future economy. SIF's mission is to develop future FinTech leaders for a New Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

MALAYSIA SAYS MYANMAR TO TAKE BACK 5,000 ROHINGYA REFUGEES

Myanmar has agreed to take back 5,000 Rohingya from Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur said on 29 July, in a rare repatriation push announced days after Malaysian authorities had detained dozens of refugees.

Malaysia hosts more than 215,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with the UN refugee agency, including more than 126,000 members of Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya minority, making them the country's largest refugee community.

"People ask why we do not simply send them back. Send them where? Myanmar had refused to accept them before," Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said during a visit to a town east of the capital, according to local media.

"Now, because of our good relations with Myanmar, they have agreed to take back 5,000 from Malaysia," media outlets including the daily New Straits Times quoted Anwar as saying.

His remarks come days after Malaysian authorities detained more than 100 Rohingya refugees outside a UN refugee agency facility in Kuala Lumpur.

A Rohingya rights group in Malaysia said the group sought shelter after they were threatened with eviction from an informal settlement in northern Penang state.

Officials later confirmed that the detainees had valid documentation issued by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Bernama news agency said.

A senior police official said on Wednesday that the group had been released and sent to various locations around Malaysia, after undergoing final verification.

Despite sheltering one of Southeast Asia's biggest refugee populations, Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not formally recognise refugee status.

AFP fact-checkers have found that Rohingya refugees in Malaysia have been targeted by online disinformation campaigns that rights advocates say are fuelling xenophobia and intimidation.

Many of the Rohingya, a mostly Muslim group, escaped Myanmar during a brutal military crackdown in 2017.

The campaign, which saw Rohingya villages burned and civilians killed, is the subject of a genocide case at the United Nations' top court in The Hague.

Myanmar's leaders have previously insisted the Rohingya are ethnic descendants of immigrants from Bangladesh, and that their 2017 crackdown targeted a militant uprising.

AFP



Photo: AFP

ROHINGYA MUST NOT BE RETURNED TO THE REGIME THEY FLED, SAYS APHR

A SEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) has voiced serious concern over Malaysia's announcement that Myanmar has agreed to take back around 5,000 Rohingya currently in Malaysia, warning that any return to Myanmar under present conditions would place lives at grave risk, according to a press release on 30 July.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said Myanmar had agreed to receive the 5,000 following negotiations, alongside 300,000 Rohingya from Bangladesh, describing it as a breakthrough reflecting strong diplomatic ties with the military-led nation.

"The Rohingya in Malaysia fled persecution, violence, and ethnic cleansing," said Charles Santiago, Former Member of Parliament for Klang, Malaysia and Co-Chairperson of APHR. "Returning them to the very military that drove them out, while that military still holds power and Rakhine remains a conflict zone, may constitute refoulement."

The principle of non-refoulement - a binding norm of international law - prohibits returning people to

territories where they face a real risk of persecution and serious harm. The Myanmar military, also known as Tatmadaw, that would receive these returnees is the same institution responsible for the 2017 atrocities in Rakhine State against the Rohingya people. Ongoing armed conflict, the absence of citizenship rights, and continued displacement inside Rakhine mean the conditions for safe, voluntary, and dignified return simply do not exist.

APHR also notes the rising tensions between Rohingya refugees and local communities in Malaysia, as the government continues to take action against those who disrupt public order.

"It is troubling to frame the Rohingya as a threat to public order," said Mercy Chriesty Barends, Member of Parliament in Indonesia and Chairperson of APHR. "Refugees are not a security problem to be managed, rather they are survivors entitled to protection. Malaysia has long been a place of refuge for the Rohingya. That must not end with people being handed back to their persecutors."



Photo: AFP

AMNESTY CONDEMNS MALAYSIA FOR DETAINING ROHINGYA ASYLUM SEEKERS

Rights group Amnesty International voiced concern on 28 July after Malaysian police detained more than 100 Rohingya asylum seekers at a UN facility in Kuala Lumpur.

The group had travelled by bus to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) compound in the capital early Monday, after being threatened with eviction from their informal settlement in northern Penang state the previous day, according to local media reports and UNHCR.

Police rounded up 110 men, women and children and transported them by truck to national police headquarters on Monday night, before moving them on Tuesday to a "location designated by a non-governmental organisation" elsewhere in the capital, authorities said.

"Malaysia cannot build a credible refugee protection system while simultaneously treating refugees as people to be rounded up, detained, and removed," Amnesty International's Malaysia branch said.

"Refugees and asylum seekers should be treated with dignity and in accordance with their human rights, as people who need protection," it added.

UNHCR said it supported dialogue among stakeholders to find longer-term solutions to Malaysia's refugee challenges.

The Rohingya, Myanmar's mostly Muslim persecuted minority, face mounting pressure in Malaysia, including an online campaign that rights advocates say is fuelling xenophobia and intimidation.

Malaysia currently hosts more than 215,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR.

Of these, more than 126,000 are Rohingya who fled persecution in Myanmar, making them Malaysia's largest refugee community.

Despite sheltering one of Southeast Asia's biggest refugee populations, Malaysia has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not formally recognise refugee status.

According to the UNHCR, this leaves Rohingyas in Malaysia exposed to arrest, detention and deportation, and with limited access to work, schooling and healthcare.

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



AI INDUSTRY SLOWDOWN MAY BE NEEDED AFTER SECURITY SCARE, LEADERS WARN

Over 1,000 employees at cutting-edge AI companies, including Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei, signed a petition on 29 July calling on the US government to help slow down the release of the most advanced AI models.

The petition, titled "Pacing the Frontier," requests "that the US government support an international effort to develop the technical and governance tools needed to deliberately pace the frontier of automated AI development."

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, who did not sign the petition, argued in an interview published Tuesday that developers of artificial intelligence models might need

to voluntarily pump the brakes on their rapid advances to give society a chance to catch up.

Among the signatories were the head of research at OpenAI, the strategic lead of Google's AI subsidiary DeepMind, and the chief scientist at Meta AI.

"The world's leading AI companies believe they could be close to automating AI research. It is hard to predict exactly how much this will accelerate AI progress, but there is a real risk that capability development rapidly accelerates beyond our ability to understand or control the resulting systems," the petition reads.

Altman's company, the maker of ChatGPT, recently saw two of its models carry out an autonomous cyberattack, bypassing security protocols meant to prevent such an incident.

OpenAI revealed last week that during recent testing, the models broke out of their confined environment, connected to the internet and infiltrated Hugging Face, a site developers use to store and share code.

"This is the first sort of security incident that I felt very viscerally," Altman said on the "Invest Like the Best" podcast, released on Tuesday.

He said he was "a little surprised that more people" were not having similar reactions.

The singularity?

It was not the first time a model slipped beyond the control of its developers, but the incident was widely seen as especially concerning.

OpenAI subsequently "paused" its own testing, Altman said, while it improved the security around its "sandboxing" -- the process of isolating code in a controlled environment.

But longer term, the industry might have to agree to a development slowdown, he said.

"We may have to pace the rate of AI development to give ourselves enough time for society to harden around some of these new capability levels," Altman said.

Such an initiative would need to be done "in a way that does not feel like regulatory capture for anyone, and also does not feel like collusion among the frontier labs," he said.

"That's going to take some work, and it's important to get right," he added.

On a different podcast published Saturday, Altman said he believes the "singularity" -- a hypothetical moment when technology becomes so advanced it surpasses human intelligence and control -- is already here.

"We are now, like, in the singularity," Altman said on the "Relentless" podcast. "This is the moment."

Rival AI lab Anthropic has also supported the idea of an intentional AI development slowdown.

Earlier this year, the US government invoked national security concerns to block the release of powerful new models created by Anthropic and OpenAI, both of which voluntarily complied with the orders until they were reversed.

AFP



NEPAL MOURNS 'BIG LOSS' OF MOUNTAINEER NIRMAL PURJA

Nepal was mourning 1 August the loss of mountaineer Nirmal Purja, with Prime Minister Balendra Shah leading the nation in paying tributes to the braveheart who etched his name in record books.

The 43-year-old British-Nepali mountaineer was killed alongside nine other climbers after they were caught in a deadly avalanche on Pakistan's Broad Peak, his expedition company said.

"No words can erase the pain of this unimaginable loss," Elite Expeditions said in a statement.

Purja, who served with Britain's Brigade of Gurkhas before joining the Special Boat Squadron of the Royal Marines, broke multiple climbing records since becoming a full-time mountaineer and guide.

In 2019, he stunned the climbing fraternity by scaling the world's 14 highest peaks in just over six months, smashing the previous record of seven years.

Nepal premier Shah described the deaths of Purja and the other climbers as a tragedy that shocked the nation.

"The physical journey of all the deceased climbers... has been interrupted, but the history of their courage, dedication, and contributions will always remain inspiring," Shah said in a social media statement.

In Kathmandu, a large billboard at the main city square displayed a picture of Purja in climbing gear with the message: "You will be remembered."

The avalanche struck on Thursday while the mountaineers were attempting to summit Broad Peak

(8,047 metres, or 26,400 feet) at an altitude of around 6,600 metres, according to authorities in Pakistan.

Purja's death was widely seen as a devastating blow to the climbing world.

'Life truly lived'

"It is a big loss for not just Nepal but the entire mountaineering community," Ishwori Poudel, senior vice-president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association, told AFP.

"He inspired so many. We had not seen climbers on the 8,000 peaks like this before him. His contribution for this is huge."

Beyond record summits, Purja's most enduring contribution was shifting global perception towards Nepali mountaineers.

Long relegated to supporting roles, Nepali climbers began gaining recognition in their own right as Purja's global profile shone a spotlight on their achievements.

"He showed Nepalis that climbing doesn't have to be just work, that you can climb for your own fun and passion," Tul Singh Gurung, president of the Nepal National Mountain Guide Association, told AFP.

Purja's exploits were documented globally and helped elevate a new generation of Nepali climbers onto the world stage, making him one of the most influential figures in modern mountaineering.

Gelje Sherpa, a Nepali mountaineer and guide who worked closely with Purja, said he will always miss his "brother".

"Because of you our nation gained recognition and the world learned who the Sherpas are," he wrote on Instagram.

The disaster also prompted tributes from the wider mountaineering community.

Italian great Reinhold Messner, who made the first solo ascent of Everest, said his thoughts were with his friends, family and everyone who had the privilege of knowing Purja.

"Nirmal chose his own path with courage and passion," he said in a post on Instagram.

"What remains is not only the sorrow of his passing but the memory of a life truly lived."

AFP



BEFORE THE UNION

“**T**he KNPP cannot do it alone, and should also not do it alone and impose its agenda on other people.” These are words spoken by Neineh Plo, the secretary to the International Relations and Alliance committee of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). In the discussion with the Insight Myanmar Podcast that follows, he describes a political project that has to function inside war conditions while still behaving like a government in embryo, with obligations to civilians, a need for legitimacy across a diverse state, and an international system that remains structurally biased toward dealing with whoever holds the capital.

Neineh Plo places the KNPP inside a longer Karenni resistance history that predates the current conflict cycle. He recounts Karenni State as having had its own governmental structures during the colonial period, and he describes the rupture that followed when “the newly independent Burmese Government invaded Karenni state.” In his account, armed resistance began as a coalition of civilians and people with governance and military experience, and it later took party form. He says the leadership concluded that “we should form a political organization to provide political leadership to the Karenni resistance,” and he characterizes the founding of the

KNPP as an effort to give the resistance a political spine rather than leaving it as an improvised armed coalition.

That insistence on political structure carries into how Neineh Plo explains the post-2021 landscape. The coup, in his telling, changed both scale and composition. A broader public joined resistance across the country, and in Karenni State that shift forced a choice about how authority would be exercised. He describes the state as small but internally plural, with “diversity in terms of ethnicity, linguistic groups, cultural groups and other identities in the state.” It is that diversity that also becomes the central constraint in his account; it makes unilateral leadership not only politically dangerous, but also operationally self-defeating.

Neineh Plo treats coalition governance as a practical requirement, not a moral slogan. He frames the KNPP’s post-coup approach as an effort to distribute leadership across stakeholders rather than consolidating it. The point is not simply inclusion as an aspiration, but rather that a resistance that does not build credible internal consent will replicate the same domination logic it claims to be fighting.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/6/30/episode-564-before-the-union>

Photo: AFP



MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER CRITICISES ASEAN FOR 'DISCRIMINATION', VOWS TO BUILD 'NEW NATION'

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing on 31 July criticised ASEAN for discriminating against Myanmar, dismissing the regional bloc's "Five-Point Consensus" peace plan as he outlined his government's plans for the war-torn Southeast Asian country nearly four months after taking office.

Dismissing ASEAN's peace plan, known as the "Five-Point Consensus", Min Aung Hlaing said the 11-member bloc had discriminated against Myanmar, according to Reuters.

"We have been patient. We will respond to non-constructive actions on a case-by-case basis," he said, without referring to any specific member of the Association of South East Asian Nations.

Myanmar was plunged into turmoil in February 2021 when the military ousted an elected government led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, sparking protests that expanded into a protracted civil war, killing some 100,000 people and displacing millions.

At the turn of this year, the military engineered a widely criticised election won by an army-backed party that allowed Min Aung Hlaing to transition into a civilian role.

His administration will hold by-elections in 2027 in 172 constituencies that were unable to vote during the December-January polls because of the ongoing unrest, he said.

The government will enhance the capacity of the military and police while continuing to implement a conscription law, he said.

His administration has invited rebel groups to talks without preconditions and, so far, has met with 13

ethnic armed organisations (EAOs).

The government is working to stop money laundering and arms smuggling by EAOs, as well as cracking down on drug trafficking and online scam centres, Min Aung Hlaing said.

He also said in his speech that the government is prioritising the 1,400-km (870-mile) India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway project, as well as the 410-km (254-mile) Mandalay-Muse railway project to reach the border with China.

"The goal is to export goods to international markets in a short time at low cost," Min Aung Hlaing said.

The government is currently working on 10 power generation projects, including the controversial Myitsone dam, and efforts are also underway to build a nuclear power plant.

His government will allocate 10% of the national budget to the education sector in the next fiscal year and up to 15% in the 2028-2029 fiscal year.

As for the tourism and agriculture sectors, Min Aung Hlaing said his government aims to boost domestic cotton production through loans and technical assistance for farmers.

Large numbers of young people aged between 18 and 34 have been leaving the country, affecting economic development, he said.

In his speech, Min Aung Hlaing announced: "I will take two years to build momentum for constructing a new nation and will also take three years to execute this build-up at full speed."

Courtesy of Thai PBS/Mizzima



SOCIAL MEDIA QUESTIONS MIN AUNG HLAING'S “FUTURE-HEAVY” 100-DAY SPEECH

Myanmar social media users are criticising junta leader-turned-president Min Aung Hlaing's speech marking 100 days in office, calling it long on five-year promises and short on measurable results.

Min Aung Hlaing, who led the 2021 military coup and was sworn in as president in April after a widely criticised election, addressed Parliament in Naypyidaw on 31 July. He outlined plans for democracy and federalism, by-elections in conflict-hit areas in 2027, higher education spending, and energy projects including the Myitsone dam and a nuclear power plant. He also confirmed the military conscription law would stay in force.

The opposition National Unity Government (NUG), Myanmar's parallel civilian administration, dismissed the plan as a strategy to entrench military rule rather

than build peace. One individual social media user was similarly critical, describing the period as "100 Days of Atrocities" marked by continued hardship and loss of life, rejecting official talk of stability.

An earlier analysis by policy group ISP-Myanmar had already described the 100-day programme as vague and lacking concrete steps on inflation and economic recovery.

Min Aung Hlaing also acknowledged that young people leaving Myanmar were hurting the economy, without addressing conscription's role in that outflow — a gap widely noted in online criticism.

The reaction reflects a recurring theme since the 2021 coup: scepticism that a civilian-styled government changes the military's underlying hold on power.

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.