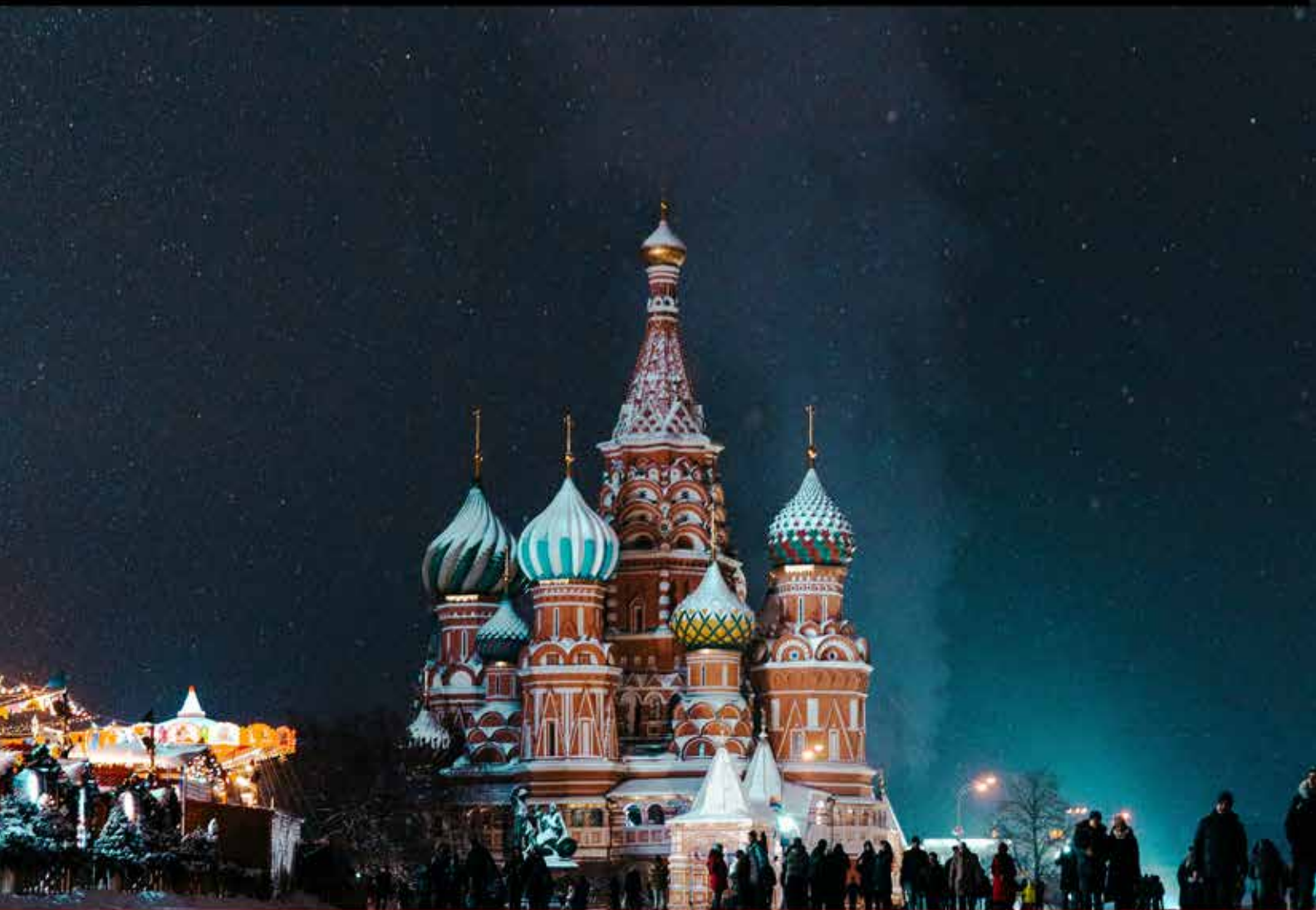


ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



RUSSIAN CONNECTION

Ukraine and Myanmar feel the heat

Crimea Global 2026 brings Ukraine
and Global South together

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

THE DANGERS OF LEGITIMISING MYANMAR'S MILITARY JUNTA

The growing willingness of foreign governments to meet representatives of Myanmar's military rulers has raised serious concerns among critics of the junta. Since the military seized power in February 2021, Myanmar has endured years of armed conflict, political repression, mass displacement and economic hardship. Against this background, diplomatic engagement carries a significant risk: it may help a military leadership seeking international acceptance present itself as a legitimate government.

The danger is not that diplomacy should cease altogether. Governments need channels of communication to address security threats, humanitarian emergencies, cross-border crime and the delivery of aid. The question is whether engagement is conducted to protect the people of Myanmar or whether it inadvertently strengthens the authority of those responsible for the country's continuing crisis.

For the junta, meetings with foreign officials offer valuable political currency. Photographs, official statements and diplomatic visits can be used to suggest that international isolation is easing and that other countries are prepared to accept military rule as a political reality. Even when governments insist that discussions are pragmatic rather than an endorsement, the distinction may be lost in the junta's domestic propaganda.

The participation of US officials is particularly sensitive. Washington has imposed sanctions on military leaders and associated entities following the coup. Any apparent shift towards closer engagement therefore invites questions about consistency and purpose. If contact is necessary to address specific concerns, such as online scam operations or access to strategically important minerals, governments must ensure that

these priorities do not eclipse the wider political and humanitarian crisis.

Legitimacy matters because it affects who is heard, who receives resources and who is recognised as representing Myanmar internationally. The country's democratic opposition, ethnic organisations, civil society groups and communities resisting military rule being marginalised if foreign capitals increasingly treat the junta as the only authority capable of making decisions. Such an approach could also weaken efforts to secure the release of political prisoners, end attacks on civilians and establish a credible path towards an inclusive political settlement.

There is also a danger that diplomatic normalisation could reduce pressure on the military to change its behaviour. If international acceptance becomes available without meaningful progress towards peace, accountability or political inclusion, the incentive to make concessions may diminish.

Foreign governments should therefore distinguish practical contact from political recognition. Meetings should be transparent where possible, accompanied by clear public explanations and linked to measurable objectives. Engagement should include credible representatives of Myanmar's diverse political and ethnic communities, rather than granting the military a monopoly on diplomacy.

Myanmar's future cannot be secured simply by restoring relations with those who hold military power. International policy must remain focused on the people whose lives have been devastated by the conflict. Without clear conditions and accountability, diplomatic engagement risks turning a temporary necessity into an unintended endorsement of military rule.

EDITORIAL

mizzima WEEKLY

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Cover photo of Red Square in Moscow by Nikita Karimov



A Crimea Global panel, including Mizzima Editor-in-Chief Soe Myint, second from right. Photo: Mizzima

CRIMEA GLOBAL 2026 BRINGS UKRAINE AND GLOBAL SOUTH TOGETHER ON SECURITY, DEMOCRACY AND AUTHORITARIAN THREATS

KYIV, Ukraine — Journalists, policy experts, human rights defenders and civil society representatives from Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Ukraine gathered in Kyiv on 19 October for Crimea Global 2026, discussing security cooperation, authoritarianism, Russia's recruitment of foreigners, transitional justice, artificial intelligence and the future of democracy.

Held under the theme "Navigating a World of Great Powers," the conference sought to strengthen Ukraine's engagement with countries beyond Europe and North America while presenting Ukraine not only as a victim of Russian aggression, but also as a country able to share expertise in security, resilience, technology, democratic governance and accountability.

The conference was organised by the Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea/Office of the Crimea Platform, Human Rights Centre ZMINA, and the Media Initiative for Human Rights.

Crimea remains central to Ukraine's international message

The opening ceremony began with a musical composition dedicated to Ukrainian soldiers who gave their lives defending the country.

Opening speakers included Olha Kuryshko, Permanent Representative of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea; Yevhen Perebyinis, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine; Refat Chubarov, Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People; and Maria Tomak, co-organisier of Crimea Global.

In her remarks, Ms Tomak said Crimea Global was intended as a genuine two-way conversation between Ukraine and the Global South, rather than simply a platform for Ukrainians to explain the war to international visitors.

She emphasised the importance of listening to experiences from Asia, Africa, Latin America and other regions, identifying shared challenges and building longer-term relationships between Ukrainian institutions, civil society and international partners.

Tomak also stressed that Crimea must remain central to such discussions because Russia's aggression against Ukraine began with the occupation of the peninsula in 2014. She underlined the importance of keeping Crimea visible in international debates about sovereignty, occupation, human rights and Ukraine's future.

Philippine journalist highlights shared struggles over sovereignty

Philippine journalist and author Marites Dañguilan Vitug addressed the opening ceremony online.

Vitug drew parallels between Ukraine's resistance to Russia's military aggression and the Philippines' efforts to defend its sovereignty amid Chinese coercion in the South China Sea.

She said that although Ukraine and the Philippines are geographically far apart, both face pressure from much larger powers and share an interest in defending sovereignty, international law and a rules-based international order.

Vitug also highlighted repression in Russian-occupied Crimea and spoke about Crimean Tatar political prisoner Ernes Ametov, whom she has supported as a mentor.

Ukraine seeks to become a provider of security expertise

The first panel, "Know-How à la Kyiv: Ukraine as a Provider of Security and Resilience Expertise," examined how Ukraine could transform experience gained during Russia's full-scale invasion into practical cooperation with other countries.



The speakers included panelists from Ukraine, Mexico, Chile, Indonesia and Oman. Soe Myint, Managing Director and Editor-in-Chief of Mizzima Media, also joined the panel.

The session was moderated by Dr. Hanna Shelest, Security Studies Program Director at the Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism.”

Soe Myint drew attention to the broader security implications of Russia’s close relationship with Myanmar’s military authorities. Myanmar has been under military control since the illegal coup of 2021.

He said Ukraine’s struggle against Russian aggression and the democratic struggle in Myanmar take place in different contexts, but that authoritarian governments are increasingly cooperating across regions.

He pointed to Russia’s longstanding military relationship with Myanmar, including arms supplies, defence cooperation and military technology, and argued that developments in Ukraine and Southeast Asia should not be viewed in isolation.

Soe Myint said democratic forces and societies confronting authoritarian aggression could benefit from closer exchanges of information, experience and technology, particularly as Russia and other authoritarian powers expand their influence internationally.

Other panel speakers included Liudmyla Redutova, Head of Legal and Government Relations at Technological Forces of Ukraine; Dr. Radityo Dharmaputra of Universitas Airlangga in Indonesia; Dr. Angel Jaramillo Torres of Mexico; Juan Pablo Toro of AthenaLab in Chile; and Dr. Yousuf Al Bulushi, Chairman of the Muscat Policy Council in Oman.

The discussion examined Ukraine’s experience in drone warfare, defence technology, infrastructure protection, digital systems and crisis resilience, and whether that expertise could support new security partnerships with countries in the Global South.

Russia’s recruitment of foreign nationals examined

The second panel, “Countering the Predator: How to Stop Russia’s Recruitment of Foreigners,” examined Russia’s efforts to recruit people from other countries for its war against Ukraine.

Participants discussed whether those recruited should be regarded as mercenaries, combatants or victims of trafficking and deception.

Speakers included Brigadier General Dmytro Usov of Ukraine; Dr. Erich de la Fuente; Liubov Abravitova of Ukraine’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Kenyan journalist Paul King’ori Wangechi; Indonesian researcher Dr. Ra-



Crimea Global allowed delegates from Europe and the South, including Myanmar, discuss geopolitical issues where their interests converge. Photo: Mizzima

dityo Dharmaputra; and Sri Lankan investigative journalist Saroj Pathirana.

Pathirana has investigated Sri Lankans recruited through human-smuggling networks to fight in Russia's war against Ukraine, while Wangechi has reported on the recruitment of Kenyans into the Russian armed forces.

The discussion has growing relevance for Southeast Asia as concerns increase about recruitment through employment offers, brokers and cross-border networks.

Transitional justice discussed before war ends

The third panel examined transitional justice, drawing lessons from Ukraine, Syria, Sri Lanka and Colombia.

Participants challenged the idea that truth, justice, reparations and institutional reform should only be considered after a conflict has ended.

Ukraine, the programme noted, is already preparing for the long-term consequences of occupation, authoritarian governance imposed by Russia and systematic human rights violations while the war itself continues.

Speakers included specialists from the International Center for Transitional Justice, alongside experts and practitioners with experience in Syria, Sri Lanka and Ukraine.

Myanmar experience brought into debate on AI and democracy

Soe Myint also joined the fourth panel, "Big Brother is Back? How Can Democracy Survive in Times of AI and Great Powers."

The discussion focused on the weakening of international institutions, competition among major powers, and the rapidly expanding role of artificial intelligence or AI.

The panel considered how AI can help journalists, activists and human rights defenders while also giving authoritarian regimes increasingly powerful tools for surveillance, disinformation, propaganda and repression.

Soe Myint drew on Myanmar's experience under military rule, including attacks on independent journalism, digital surveillance, propaganda and disinformation.

He stressed the importance of cooperation among independent media, democratic movements and civil society organisations across borders, arguing that authoritarian governments increasingly learn from and support one another.

Other speakers were Mohamed Lotfy, Executive Director of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms; Dr. Olexiy Haran, Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and Research Director at the Democratic Initiatives Foundation; Sophie Mugure Njehia, a Kenyan youth leader and civic activist; and Pedro Rafael, President of the Association of Young Entrepreneurs of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The panel was moderated by Tetiana Pechonchyk, Head of the Board of Human Rights Centre ZMINA.

Understanding Ukraine through the Global South

Crimea Global reflects a wider Ukrainian effort to deepen engagement with countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.

The organisers argue that such relationships complement rather than compete with Ukraine's European integration and that Kyiv needs to develop stronger political and social relationships with countries where Ukrainian perspectives have historically received less attention.

The conference formed part of a wider programme for international participants running from 14 to 20 October, including visits to Lviv, civilian infrastructure damaged by Russian attacks in Kyiv, the Chornobyl area, a military-technology exhibition and meetings with Ukrainian officials and civil society representatives.

For Myanmar, the gathering highlighted the growing relevance of exchanges between countries and democratic movements confronting military aggression, authoritarianism, disinformation and pressure from major powers.

Although Ukraine and Myanmar have very different political and historical circumstances, discussions throughout Crimea Global repeatedly returned to common questions: how smaller countries protect sovereignty, how democratic societies resist authoritarian power, how technology is changing conflict and repression, and how international solidarity can be turned into practical cooperation.

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



ARAKAN ARMY BEARS DOWN ON SITTWE

The Arakan Army (AA) is intensifying its offensive against the military junta's remaining strongholds in Rakhine State, particularly Kyaukphyu and Sittwe, despite the junta's attempts to regain territory through an operation informally called "4926." Launched in early September, the operation appears to have been named in reference to the resistance's "Operation 1027." However, the junta has encountered strong resistance as the AA continues to target strategic outposts, military columns and supply routes.

In Kyaukphyu, fighting intensified on October 23 in the eastern and western parts of the island. In the east, the AA launched attacks against outposts protecting the junta's Taungmaw Oo naval headquarters, seizing several positions and increasing pressure on the military base. As the AA advanced, junta troops relied on naval artillery and airstrikes to defend their positions.

In western Kyaukphyu, the AA also intensified attacks against junta outposts and military columns. A source close to the AA told local media that junta troops had suffered losses from sniper attacks and intercepted movements. Fighting has particularly intensified

around the Kyaungkhoe River, further complicating the junta's efforts to maintain control and move troops through the area.

Sittwe remains the junta's other major stronghold in Rakhine State, but the AA is advancing towards important military positions from several directions. In late October, the AA was reportedly pressing towards Infantry Battalion No. 344, approximately five miles away in a straight line. However, several other military and auxiliary units remain between the AA's positions and its target, meaning further advances could require sustained fighting.

Battles have also intensified around the junta's Shwemingan naval base, indicating that the AA is applying pressure from both the eastern and western approaches to the northern part of Sittwe. The fighting threatens the junta's ability to maintain secure military positions and reinforce its forces around the city.

The junta has attempted to land troops on Ngapi Island, between Sittwe and the AA-controlled Wirahtarni area, formerly known as Pauktaw. Despite deploying naval firepower and air support, the military reportedly struggled to reinforce its troops and deliver supplies to exposed positions. The AA subsequently defeated most of the landed forces, with remaining junta troops reportedly being pursued on the island.

The AA spokesperson told Mizzima that junta forces suffered significant casualties during the landing attempt, including 50 deaths in the first seven days.

The AA has also demonstrated what may be an expanding capacity for maritime operations. A video circulating on social media recently showed AA fighters firing a large, rocket-like projectile, prompting speculation among local military analysts that the weapon may have been developed through the group's



Michael Vance, Assistant US Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research

own research. The weapon's origin and capabilities have not been independently verified.

The AA's spokesperson praised the group's technicians and fighters following a reported successful maritime operation on the night of October 26 against three junta warships, including a frigate-class vessel. He described the operation as another step forward in the group's capabilities. The statement highlights the potential significance of the AA's technical development as the conflict increasingly involves naval assets and coastal supply routes.

Taken together, the fighting in Kyaukphyu and Sittwe suggests that the junta's efforts to retain its last major strongholds in Rakhine are facing mounting pressure. The AA's attacks on military outposts, reinforcement routes and naval assets could further constrain the junta's operational flexibility, although its continued use of airpower and naval firepower means the battles are likely to remain costly and protracted.

Washington's objectives in engaging the junta?

Two reported meetings between US officials and Myanmar's military junta have raised questions about Washington's objectives and the implications for the country's pro-democracy movement. While the engagement appears to focus on specific American interests, including detained US citizens, online scam operations and critical minerals, its political significance remains contested.

A US delegation led by Michael Vance, Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, reportedly arrived in Naypyidaw secretly on September

15 and met junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, who has declared himself president. Details of the meeting remained undisclosed, even among some senior junta officials, according to reports.

Unconfirmed accounts suggested that the US delegation raised five issues: reducing attacks on civilians, cracking down on money laundering and scam centres, engaging with ethnic armed organisations, releasing political prisoners, and allowing humanitarian assistance to reach all communities. However, these reported demands have not been established through strong, independently verified sources.

Less than two weeks after the meeting, the junta carried out a deadly airstrike on a civilian market in Kyauktaw, Rakhine State. The attack reportedly killed around 60 civilians, raising questions about the practical influence of any US appeals concerning civilian protection.

During the September visit, the delegation reportedly secured the release or return of US citizen Adam Michael Castillo, who had been serving a prison sentence in Myanmar following a case linked to the American Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar (AMCHAM). Some Myanmar analysts believe securing the American citizen's return was the delegation's primary objective.

In mid-October, the same delegation, again led by Vance and accompanied by around a dozen officials, reportedly met junta representatives in Tokyo. Although the US delegation's participation was disclosed, the identities of the junta representatives remained unclear in media reports.

The discussions reportedly included cooperation against scam centres operating in Myanmar, which have cost US citizens and others billions of dollars. A US official also reportedly identified rare earths and other critical minerals as an area of interest, suggesting that Washington's engagement may extend beyond immediate consular concerns.

The meetings have prompted differing reactions among Myanmar's political figures. A former National League for Democracy (NLD) member of parliament viewed the engagement as an opportunity to draw a major power's attention to Myanmar's crisis, while acknowledging that others may oppose communicating with the junta.

The National Unity Government's foreign minister has argued that the meetings should not be interpreted as US recognition of, or normalisation with, the junta. For revolutionary forces, however, the engagement

presents a reminder that international policy is often shaped by practical interests as well as democratic principles.

Some political analysts have described the meetings as tactical engagement rather than a fundamental policy shift, noting Vance's intelligence background. Others similarly argue that contact does not amount to recognition, although it could still affect the political calculations of Myanmar's revolutionary movement.

Ultimately, the meetings do not in themselves demonstrate a change in Washington's position towards Myanmar. However, they underline the challenge facing revolutionary forces: sustaining military and political progress while competing for international attention in a global environment increasingly shaped by strategic and economic interests.

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FORTY YEARS AFTER CHERNOBYL DISASTER, RUSSIA'S WAR CREATES NEW NUCLEAR SAFETY RISKS



Mizzima Editor-in-Chief Soe Myint on a visit to the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine. Photo: Mizzima

Forty years after the world's worst nuclear accident, Ukraine's Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant faces renewed safety risks because of Russia's ongoing invasion.

Mizzima Editor-in-Chief Soe Myint visited the Chernobyl nuclear facility during a visit to Ukraine in October 2026. It was a part of delegation of the Crimea Global 2026 conference held in Ukraine on 14-20 October. The delegates had an opportunity to witness the conditions surrounding Reactors 1, 2, 3 and 4, including Soviet-era control rooms, equipment and radiation-monitoring systems.

The accompanying video show parts of the facility associated with Reactor 4, where the catastrophic nuclear accident occurred in 1986.

The 1986 nuclear disaster

On 26 April 1986, Reactor 4 at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded, releasing large quantities of radioactive material into the atmosphere and contaminating extensive areas of Europe.

Approximately 30 people died in the immediate aftermath, while many others suffered long-term health consequences associated with radiation exposure.

At the time, Soviet authorities failed to inform the public promptly about the scale of the disaster and concealed important information about the accident.

The nearby city of Pripyat, located approximately three kilometres from the power plant, was evacuated following the explosion. The residents were forced to leave their homes with only a few hours to prepare.

Today, Pripyat remains an abandoned city, often described as a ghost town, serving as a lasting reminder of the disaster's devastating consequences. The readers can watch the video of the town.

The Chernobyl plant no longer generates electricity. Instead, operations focus on decommissioning, radioactive waste management and long-term nuclear safety.

New dangers from Russia's invasion

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russian forces temporarily occupied the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. During the occupation, Ukrainian security personnel were detained.

Major General Oleksandr Pivnenko, commander of Ukraine's National Guard, stated that three servicemen who guarded Chernobyl remained in Russian captivity.

On 14 February 2025, a drone struck the New Safe Confinement structure, the massive protective shelter covering the destroyed Reactor 4.

Ukraine accused Russia of carrying out the attack, although the IAEA initial statements did not independently establish who carried out the attack.

The strike caused a fire and damaged the protective structure, compromising its ability to contain radioactive material. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) subsequently inspected and assessed the damage.

According to information released through April 2026, the protective structure had not fully regained its original safety capabilities. However, radiation monitoring had not detected releases of radioactive material exceeding established safety limits.

Forty years after the Chernobyl disaster, nuclear safety challenges remain unresolved. Russia's war against Ukraine has introduced new risks to a site already marked by one of history's most devastating technological disasters.

The accompanying videos feature footage recorded during Mizzima's visit to the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in October 2026.



MONEY, CITIZENSHIP AND DECEPTION: HOW RUSSIA RECRUITS FOREIGNERS FOR ITS MILITARY



Brigadier General Dmytro Usov shakes hands with visiting Mizzima Editor-in-Chief Soe Myint. Photo: Mizzima

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia has recruited tens of thousands of foreign nationals from more than 150 countries and territories to serve in its armed forces, with recruitment increasingly extending across Africa and Asia, according to data presented by Ukrainian officials at the Crimea Global 2026 conference in Kyiv on 20 October.

The figures were presented during the conference panel “Countering the Predator: How to Stop Russia’s Recruitment of Foreigners,” which examined whether foreign recruits fighting for Moscow should be regarded as mercenaries, regular combatants or, in some cases, victims of deception, coercion or trafficking. The participants at the conference discussed the scale, reasons and consequences of Russian predatory recruitment.

Brigadier General Dmytro Usov, Secretary of Ukraine’s Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, was among the panel speakers.

According to Brigadier General Dmytro Usov, Ukraine has identified 45,959 foreign nationals who signed contracts with the Russian Armed Forces, originating from 151 countries and unrecognised territories. The total included 5,451 citizens of African countries, representing 43 African states.

The figures were presented as current to 1 October 2026.

Foreign recruitment rises sharply

The Ukrainian presentation indicated that foreign recruitment into Russia’s armed forces has risen significantly since Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

According to the figures presented:

- 94 new foreign contracts were identified in 2022;
- 4,067 in 2023;
- 8,877 in 2024;
- 16,085 in 2025; and
- 16,168 during the first nine months of 2026.

Russia’s reported target for 2026 was 18,500 new foreign recruits.

Among African nationals, the presentation recorded 176 new contracts in 2023, 616 in 2024, 1,910 in 2025 and 2,699 during the first nine months of 2026.

The recruitment networks have spread further across the world, including Southeast Asia and Latin America, after earlier investigations into recruits from Cuba and other countries.

Prisoners of war from 59 countries

Brigadier General Dmytro Usov said at the conference that Ukraine had captured foreign nationals

from 59 countries while they were fighting for Russia as of 12 October 2026.

The seven largest national groups among those identified were from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Belarus, Colombia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan, though these nationals are not the largest in terms of numbers in held in captivity.

The wider list shown during the presentation included nationals from African and Asian countries such as Kenya, Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Somalia, Uganda, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, among others.

The figures point to a recruitment operation extending well beyond Russia's traditional sphere of influence, but include former Soviet states. To inform the world on the current situation with Russian military recruitment, Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of POWs created an information resource called StopRussianRecruiters.org.

Asia media points to Myanmar nationals

Radio Free Asia (RFA) indicates that Myanmar nationals have been caught up in the net. According to a story published on 13 October, labor rights advocates familiar with the case told RFA that 19 of 40 Myanmar workers who were officially sent to Moscow

by Yangon-based overseas employment agencies have been forcibly recruited into the Russian military against their will.

The remaining 21 workers are also reportedly at risk of being sent for military recruitment. Their parents are deeply worried and are working with labour rights organizations to bring their sons back to Myanmar as quickly as possible, a process witnessed directly by RFA.

Media reports have identified the agencies that sent the workers to Russia as Myat Lin Thit, based in South Okkalapa Township; Top 1, based in North Okkalapa Township; and Aye Lin Let Htut, operating in Kamayut and Insein townships. Sources familiar with the case told RFA that the agencies charged each Myanmar worker between 15.5 million and 17.5 million kyat to travel to Russia, but that after arriving they were sent to military recruitment facilities.

The agencies are officially registered under the military-appointed Myanmar junta.

Mizzima is currently investigating the issue of Myanmar nationals being recruited for the Russian military under the growing military-to-military relations between Russia and the Myanmar military junta.

Citizenship, money and deception

Ukrainian officials also presented findings from a survey of foreign prisoners of war who had served in the Russian Armed Forces under contract.



Among those surveyed, 46.7 percent said they had signed contracts in order to obtain Russian citizenship, while 49.2 percent said they knew before signing that they would be sent to fight in Ukraine.

However, 28 percent said they did not know they would fight against Ukraine, 14.8 percent said they were unsure, and 13.8 percent said they had been told something different. The survey allowed multiple responses.

A regional breakdown suggested significant differences in recruitment motivations.

Among surveyed recruits from Asia, 42 percent cited obtaining Russian citizenship, 20 percent cited earning money and 10 percent said they had been deceived about the nature of the job.

Among recruits from Africa, the presentation showed 39 percent saying they had been deceived about the nature of the job and 30 percent saying Russian citizenship was a motivation.

The presentation described three broad recruitment mechanisms: financial incentives, coercion and deception.

Recruiters reportedly offer monthly salaries of around US\$2,000–3,000, Russian citizenship and military veteran benefits.

In other cases, according to the presentation, foreigners already living in Russia may be vulnerable because of expired visas, immigration violations, detention or criminal proceedings.

The slides also described cases in which foreigners were allegedly offered civilian employment in construction, security or driving, only to discover after signing contracts that they would be given brief military training and sent to the frontline.

Recruitment advertisements promise large bonuses

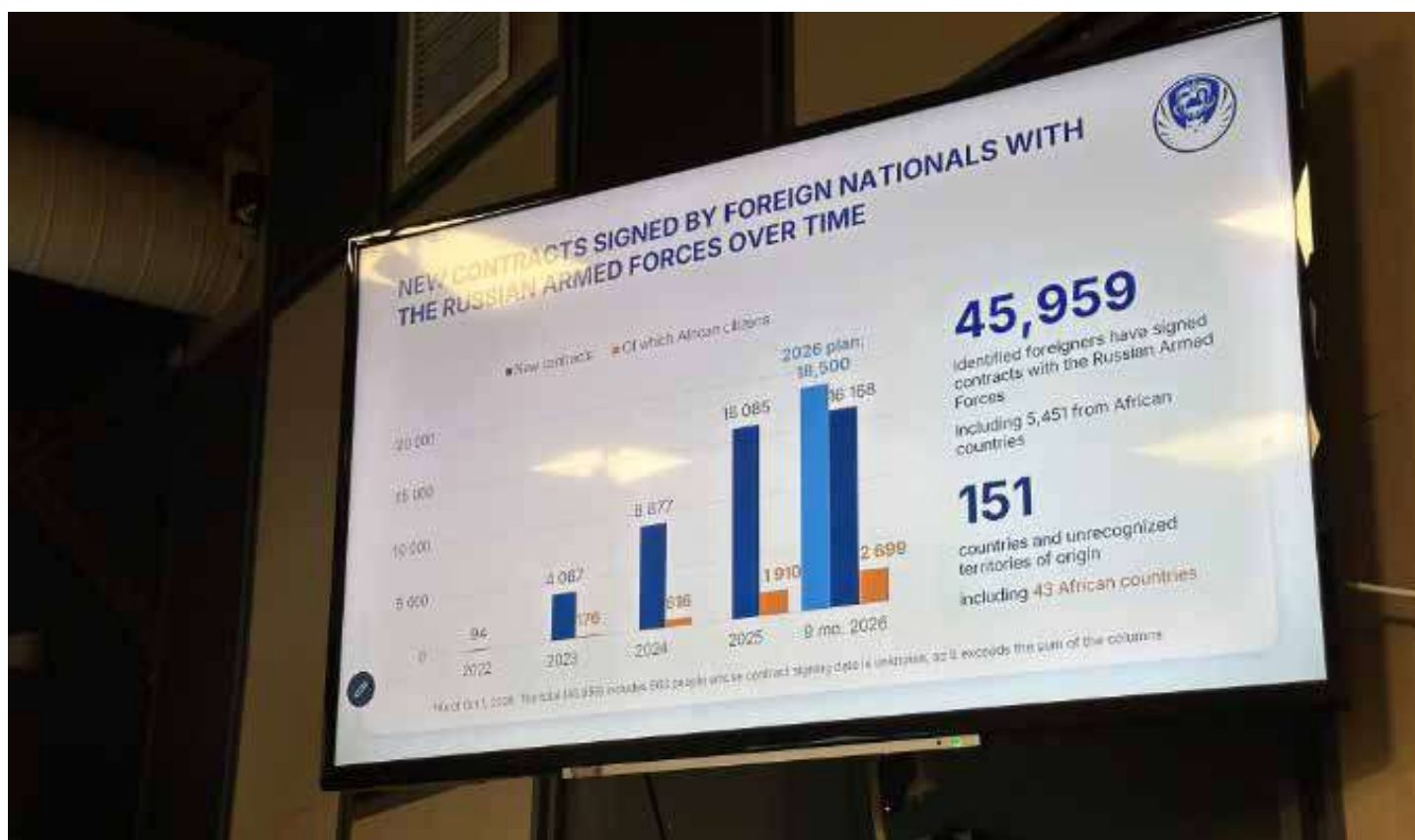
One example displayed at Crimea Global advertised an “exclusive opportunity to work and travel to Russia,” promising a salary of up to US\$3,000 a month, an arrival bonus starting at US\$13,000, housing, clothing, transportation and the possibility of Russian citizenship.

The advertisement said applicants of “all nationalities” were accepted.

Another advertisement aimed at Zimbabweans offered a US\$12,000 signing bonus and a monthly salary of US\$2,500.

African recruitment patterns changing

The Ukrainian data suggested that recruitment from some African countries has fallen sharply following government intervention, while increasing rapidly elsewhere.



Countries where recruitment was presented as having fallen substantially included Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt, Uganda, South Africa, Algeria and Ethiopia.

The presentation separately listed a number of African governments where Russian military recruitment had reportedly been halted, including Algeria, Ghana, Nigeria, Angola, Namibia, Libya, Egypt, Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa.

At the same time, recruitment appeared to be shifting toward other states.

During the first nine months of 2026, Ukrainian figures showed particularly rapid increases among recruits from Burundi, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, Chad, Congo, Sudan, Cameroon, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali.

Burundi was listed with 699 new recruits during the first nine months of 2026, compared with 30 in 2025, while Zimbabwe increased from 65 to 530. Cameroon was listed with 393 during the same period, up from 219 in 2025.

These figures, if accurate, suggest that Russia's recruitment networks can shift geographically when particular governments take action.

Why foreigners join — and why they surrender

The survey also offered insight into what happens after foreign recruits reach the battlefield.

Nearly half — 48.8 percent — were reportedly captured after being wounded.

Among Asian prisoners surveyed, 35 percent cited being wounded as a reason for surrendering, while 19 percent said they no longer wanted to fight and another 19 percent said they did not support Russia's war against Ukraine.

Overall, 56.5 percent of surveyed foreign prisoners said they did not want to continue serving in the Russian Armed Forces.

At the same time, 79.3 percent said they wanted to return to Russia, rather than necessarily returning to their country of origin.

Regional figures showed that 73 percent of Asian respondents wanted to return to Russia, while only 12 percent said they wanted to return to their home country.

The data indicate that the status of many recruits is complicated: some may have deliberately enlisted, while others may have been deceived or pressured,

and some may have built their lives in Russia before being recruited.

Ukraine has also created a channel to facilitate voluntary surrender called "I Want to Live" ("Hochu Zhyt") - <https://hochuzhit.com/en/> - for those servicemen of Russia's army who are willing to safely escape the battlefield.

<https://hochunaiti.com/en> - is a platform that provides families of Russian army personnel who went missing with answers on their fate.

Russia also increasing foreign labour in defence industry

The presentation suggested that Moscow is also expanding the use of foreign workers away from the battlefield.

According to Ukrainian figures, the number of foreigners working at Russian defence-industry facilities increased from approximately 235,000 in 2025 to 279,000 in 2026, a rise of 19 percent.

The presentation said Russia was increasingly targeting skilled tradespeople and engineering workers from countries where military recruitment had become politically difficult.

Ukrainian analysts argued that foreign workers offer Russia lower wage expectations and a workforce willing to work long hours. Mizzima could not independently verify the numbers.

Recruitment as part of Russia's wider strategy

The Ukrainian presentation argued that Moscow recruits foreign nationals partly to compensate for heavy battlefield losses and domestic manpower shortages while reducing the political consequences of Russian casualties.

It also suggested that foreign recruitment can help Russia expand its influence in Africa and other regions.

Such assessments represent the Ukrainian side's interpretation of Russian strategy and should be distinguished from independently established facts.

The Crimea Global conference brought together journalists and experts from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Ukraine to discuss how governments can respond to foreign recruitment networks. Speakers included journalists who have investigated the recruitment of Kenyans and Sri Lankans into the Russian military.

Kenyan journalist Paul King'ori Wangechi has reported on the impact of Russia's war on Kenyan families and the recruitment of Kenyans into the Russian armed forces, while Sri Lankan investigative journalist Saroj Pathirana has investigated Sri Lankans recruited through human-smuggling networks to fight in the war.

Ukraine created a channel of support for families of the victims of Russian recruitment. The "I Want to Find" (Hochu naity) - <https://hochunaiti.com/en> project provides families of the servicemen with information about their relative's fate - informing whether they were captured or logged as KIA or MIA by Russian authorities.

For countries in Asia, including Myanmar, the findings raise questions over recruitment conducted through overseas employment opportunities, intermediaries and promises of Russian citizenship or high salaries.

They also underline the need for governments and media organisations to distinguish between people who knowingly enlist in a foreign military and those who may have been recruited through deceptive employment schemes, coercion or trafficking.

The latter echoes the dangers posed by recruitment into illegal scam networks in Myanmar and Southeast Asia.

Myanmar recruitment companies pressured by junta

Myanmar's military regime is attempting to use the promise of overseas employment to lure more young men into Myanmar mandatory military service - a move that is facing resistance from employment agencies and arriving alongside new travel restrictions for existing migrant workers, according to a recent report by DVB, an independent media outlet from Myanmar.

During a recent meeting in Naypyidaw, the regime's Ministry of Labour instructed the Myanmar Overseas Employment Agency Association (MOEAA) to help secure jobs in Japan, Thailand, and Malaysia for conscripts who have completed their mandatory two-years of military service.

While the directive is currently framed as "encouragement" rather than a strict mandate, Myanmar employment agency operators are highly reluctant to cooperate, DVB reports.

REFLECTIONS ON ATTACKS IN UKRAINE AND MYANMAR

SOE MYINT,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF MIZZIMA
MEDIA



One of the places that I visited on a recent media trip with other journalists and researchers of the Crimea Global 2026 to Ukraine was a shopping center in Kyiv which had been destroyed by a Russian attack. It was the Kvadrat Shopping Center in the central-western part of Kyiv city, completely destroyed by Russia using drones and missiles.

The officers from the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SESU) explained to our group that as a result of that day attack on the city of Kyiv, a total of 144 residential buildings and 11 educational buildings in Kyiv were damaged.

Standing in front of the shattered shopping center and the nearby market, I could not avoid thinking about what happened last month in Myanmar's Rakhine State where a market at a busy time was bombed by the Myanmar military junta.

On 28 September, the Myanmar military carried out an airstrike on the crowded "India Market" in Kyauktaw,

Rakhine State. According to independent media outlets including Mizzima, at least 50 people were killed and dozens injured. Many were traders, shoppers, passers-by and workers; women and children were among the victims.

Ukraine and Myanmar are very different wars, but civilians in both countries are paying a terrible price when markets, homes, schools and other civilian places come under aerial attack. And Russia is involved in both.

Russia has for years supplied Myanmar's military with fighter jets, drones and other weapons, and Russian-made aircraft and military systems remain an important part of the junta's airpower. Russian support even comes down to helping maintain Myanmar equipment of war.

What I saw in Kyiv on my recent trip reminded me again why attacks on civilians must never become normal — whether in Ukraine or in Myanmar.





In the Ukrainian graveyard.
Photo: Mizzima

SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINE: COURAGE, RESILIENCE AND A HERO'S STORY

SOE MYINT,

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF MIZZIMA

I have wanted to visit Ukraine for the last four years, for two reasons: to show my solidarity with the Ukrainian people resisting Russian aggression, and to explore how we can work together for our shared goals of freedom, democracy and sovereignty.

I am proud to finally be here, learning from Ukraine's experiences and sharing our own struggle in Burma/Myanmar, where we are fighting not only the military junta but also facing the support it receives from Russia, Belarus and China.

What impresses me most is the courage, dignity and resilience of the Ukrainian people. Despite the brutality of Russia's war, the people I have met remain strong, determined and proud of their rich history and culture.

And one pleasant surprise: Ukrainian food is absolutely delicious! I honestly did not expect it to be this good. I would happily come back just for the food! And of course for more work to be done to struggle together against regimes such as the Myanmar junta and Putin's Russia.

A moving moment in Lviv

This morning, I visited Lychakiv Cemetery in Lviv and paid my respects to a Ukrainian soldier who died defending his country.

His name was Ihor Mykhailovych Shpek (Ігор Михайлович Шпек), born on 30 November 1967 and killed in action on 30 July 2024.

His grave particularly caught my attention because we were born in the same month and year. He was just ten days younger than me.

I wanted to know more about him and found his story deeply moving with the assistance of my AI agent.

Ihor was originally an electronics repair technician and businessman in Lviv. After Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, he joined the Ukrainian Armed Forces, serving as a sergeant in the 47th Separate Mechanized Brigade.

He was killed during a combat mission in the Donetsk region at the age of 56, leaving behind his wife, son and sister. He was posthumously awarded Ukraine's Order for Courage.

He was an ordinary man who made an extraordinary sacrifice for his country.

Standing at his grave reminded me of the countless Ukrainians and Myanmar people who have given their lives defending freedom and dignity.

My deepest respect to Ihor, his family and all those who have sacrificed their lives for Ukraine.

Вічна пам'ять Герою — *Eternal memory to the Hero.*

Slava Ukraini! Glory to Ukraine!



The grave of Ihor Mykhailovych Shpek. Photo: Mizzima

A photograph of Aung San Suu Kyi, an elderly woman with short grey hair, wearing a dark purple long-sleeved top. She is seated and holding a black telephone receiver to her ear with her right hand. Behind her is a wooden wall with a calendar hanging on it. The calendar shows the month of October, with the 22nd highlighted. To the right, a window with a wooden frame and a lattice pattern is visible.

Aung San Suu Kyi on the phone to her younger son, Kim Aris. Photo: Myanmar junta/AFP

AUNG SAN SUU KYI SOUNDED 'FAIRLY HEALTHY', SON SAYS AFTER FIRST CALL IN YEARS

The son of Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi told AFP she sounded "fairly healthy" after speaking to the detained ex-democratic leader on 22 October for the first time in more than five years.

Suu Kyi, 81, is under house arrest in the capital, Naypyidaw, according to Myanmar authorities, where she has been sequestered since being unseated in a 2021 military coup.

"She was sounding fairly healthy," her son, Kim Aris, told AFP after the telephone conversation, which he said was the first time he had spoken to his mother in more than five years.

"She was able to say she was in good health, but being 81, things aren't getting any better," said Aris, who lives in the United Kingdom.

News of the conversation was the second rare update on Suu Kyi this week, after Myanmar authorities

on Monday published pictures of her receiving a package sent by Britain's King Charles III.

Analysts say Myanmar's rulers are increasingly advertising Suu Kyi's wellbeing and her contacts with the outside world, as they bid to shake off their post-coup pariah status abroad.

"Essentially we just discussed family matters," Aris said, adding: "We knew the phone call would be recorded, so we didn't talk about anything sensitive."

Myanmar's presidential spokeswoman released photographs of Suu Kyi and Aris speaking into telephones, the detained Nobel Peace Prize laureate sitting under a calendar marked with Thursday's date.

A statement said the pair had a "consular telephone conversation" for 20 minutes starting at 2:30 pm (0800 GMT), and that Aris had taken the call from Myanmar's embassy in London.

"She was most concerned about my health and the rest of the family: that was her first question, if I was well," Aris told AFP.

"I remain very concerned about her wellbeing."

'Extract concessions'

But in recent months authorities say they have loosened her detention and have published photographs of her taking private meetings, as supporters have demanded "proof of life".

Analysts say Myanmar leader Min Aung Hlaing -- who as military chief ousted Suu Kyi in February 2021 -- is seeking international legitimacy after being installed as the country's civilian president in April.

Despite criticism from democracy watchdogs that the election putting him in office was a charade, he has made significant headway into being welcomed onto the world stage.

He has been invited on numerous diplomatic trips including to nations from the regional 11-bloc Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) -- where Suu Kyi's status has long been a sticking point.

Morgan Michaels, research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, told AFP authorities were "using" Suu Kyi "to extract concessions from members of the international community".

"But many within ASEAN and beyond want to see her release," he said. "These types of gestures are likely to be very well received even if they are insincere or tactical in nature."

One Yangon office worker, speaking anonymously for security reasons, said she still feared for Suu Kyi.

"She is getting older, and I just hope she can be free, healthy and with her family," said the 30-year-old. "But these new contacts give me some hope."

Books about soil

Analysts have said reintroducing the pacifist Suu Kyi into politics may be a canny way to peel off support for pro-democracy rebels who rose up to challenge the military after the putsch.

A former senior member of Suu Kyi's now-dissolved National League for Democracy party said she is "not a hardliner" and would likely engage with Min Aung Hlaing if released.

"We have only one way and that is dialogue," they said on condition of anonymity for security reasons. "For the sake of the people and the country, they have to meet."

Myanmar authorities said Suu Kyi was moved from a prison in Naypyidaw to house arrest in April, and in August they published images of her meeting the nation's Red Cross representative.

On Monday, authorities in Myanmar said she received a package from King Charles, including two books about soil and a "sealed diplomatic communication" from the monarch.

Buckingham Palace declined to comment on the announcement about the package.

Main photo: This handout photo taken and released on October 22, 2026 by Spokesperson for the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar shows Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi speaking on the phone with her younger son Kim Aris (also known as Ko Htein Lin) in Naypyidaw.//AFP

Courtesy of Thai PBS and AFP



FLASHBACK: Kim Aris with his mother Aung San Suu Kyi shortly after she had been released from house arrest in Yangon. Photo: AFP

KIM ARIS WARNS JUNTA IS USING 'SELECTIVE DISCLOSURES' AFTER PHOTOS OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI RECEIVING KING CHARLES'S BOOKS

Kim Aris, son of Aung San Suu Kyi, has urged world leaders who engage with Min Aung Hlaing to insist on his mother's release and that of all political prisoners, after the junta released photos of her receiving books sent by Britain's King Charles III.

The president's office said Ministry of Home Affairs officials delivered two books, a sealed envelope and a sealed diplomatic letter from the King to Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw on 19 October, according to AP and AFP. The two books are "Soil to Table" and "Soil: The World at Our Feet". The presidential spokeswoman described her as a "special female detainee," AFP reported. The photos are the first released of her in two months.

Aris told RFA he appreciates the King's gesture but warned that the military must not use such "selective

disclosures" to create an illusion of normality or gain international legitimacy. He urged governments engaging with Min Aung Hlaing to insist on regular direct family contact, independent medical access and his mother's immediate and unconditional release, along with all political prisoners.

In a social media statement on 20 October, Aris asked world leaders meeting Min Aung Hlaing whether they had demanded accountability and his mother's release. He said his 81-year-old mother remains detained and cut off from the world, and that he wants her to spend her remaining years in peace with her family.

Aris has run a campaign for her release, including the "Free Her" campaign launched on 7 September.



BRITISH GOVERNMENT: STOP WEAKENING POLICY ON BURMESE MILITARY, SAYS BURMA CAMPAIGN UK

Burma Campaign UK on 22 October called on the British government to end its policy of incrementally softening its approach towards the Burmese military regime. Instead, the British government should return to imposing sanctions to cut off sources of revenue and arms to help protect people in Burma from Burmese military attacks.

In a significant shift in approach, the British government has started inviting representatives of the Burmese military regime to meetings with government ministers and to pose for pictures with them.

On 14 October Baroness Winterton, the Foreign Office minister for Indo-Pacific who has responsibility for Burma, invited Win Zeyar Tun, Chargé d'affaires of the Burmese military-controlled embassy in London, to a meeting at the Foreign Office with ASEAN diplomats. She allowed herself to be pictured with him, handing the Burmese military a propaganda coup as they seek international legitimacy for their regime. The military-controlled Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement with pictures.

On 16 October Lord Sonny Leong at the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade invited Win Zeyar Tun, Chargé d'affaires of the Burmese military-controlled embassy in London, to a meeting with ASEAN diplomats to discuss trade issues. He was pictured with the delegation. The picture has been used by the Burmese military for propaganda

purposes, with the military-controlled Ministry of Foreign Affairs releasing a statement with pictures.

Details of these meetings were released by the Burmese military regime, not the British government departments involved.

"International attention has been on US engagement with the Burmese military, but at the same time the British government appears to be quietly normalising relations with the Burmese military regime," said Minn Tent Bo, Advocacy Officer at Burma Campaign UK. "There is clearly a policy shift happening from the British government, but they seem unwilling or unable to publicly justify why they are softening their approach to the Burmese military. The Foreign Office claim that policy is not changing, even as policy changes in front of our eyes. The meeting with Lord Leong is particularly concerning as the subject was trade promotion. The British government should be sanctioning the Burmese military, not discussing trade with them."

Until now it has been the policy of the British government to avoid actions which infer or confer legitimacy to the Burmese military regime. While there have been meetings in the context of ASEAN, there have not been ministerial level meetings in government buildings with publicly available pictures. Government officials often try to use ASEAN as a fig leaf stating that it was ASEAN who invited Burmese military representatives, but it is still a British government

decision whether to include them in meetings they host and whether to have pictures taken which include them.

The meetings appear to be part of a slow but steady shift of softening policy towards the Burmese military, with no public explanation given for why policy is changing. On 29 October it will be two years since any new sanctions against the Burmese military, despite escalating human rights violations. The British government is also softening its language towards the Burmese military, using terms such as 'unjustly detained' to describe political prisoners, instead of continuing to call them political prisoners. The frequency of UN Security Council meetings has also fallen; the UK is penholder on Burma at the UNSC.

The British government broke with allies in welcoming the alleged move of Aung San Suu Kyi to house arrest, other western countries instead used language such as 'take note', to reflect that keeping Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest is not progress or something to be welcomed.

It is not clear if the initiative for two books from King Charles being delivered to Aung San Suu Kyi was initiated by the King or part of the Foreign Office outreach to the Burmese military. Either way, it handed another propaganda opportunity to the Burmese military. The Foreign Office should be focusing on more important issues in Burma than negotiating book deliveries with a regime accused of genocide.

In the past year the Burmese military have forged ahead with a sham election and installed yet another

dictatorship, led by Gen (Rtd) Min Aung Hlaing, who faces an outstanding arrest warrant for genocide and is subject to an arrest warrant request by the International Criminal Court.

His regime has not even made superficial gestures of reform and instead continues to violate international law on a daily basis. Based on data from ACLED, they carry out an airstrike every two and a half hours, deliberately targeting schools, hospitals and civilians. UN data estimates a child is killed by their attacks on average every 29 hours.

Perhaps even more damaging than the propaganda benefits the military is reaping from the meetings is the signal sent to the Burmese military. One of acceptance. That British government ministers are now willing to host a Burmese military regime representative at the department, and be pictured smiling with him, even as they bomb, kill and rape, will be interpreted by the Burmese military as a sign of acceptance. They will believe that they can continue to commit these atrocities and not face any consequences.

"Inviting a representative of the Burmese military regime to meetings at government departments and being pictured with them is not critical engagement, it is normalisation and acceptance of the military regime," said Minn Tent Bo. "The British government keep saying it stands with the people of Burma, but they ignore our calls for new sanctions and instead are literally standing with representatives of the Burmese military."





JAPANESE ENVOY WHOSE RAKHINE TRUCE COLLAPSED RETURNS TO NAYPYIDAW TO OFFER JUNTA “PEACE” SUPPORT

Japan's special envoy for national reconciliation in Myanmar, Yohei Sasakawa, met junta leader Gen. Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw on 20 October to discuss support for the regime's "internal peace process," marking his second meeting with the junta leader in about 10 weeks.

According to state media, the two discussed plans for Sasakawa to assist the peace process, as well as support from the Nippon Foundation for human resource development in Myanmar. The report did not specify what form that support would take or how it would be funded.

Myanmar has been in conflict since Min Aung Hlaing led a military coup on 1 February 2021 that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The coup sparked mass protests and armed resistance across the country, and the fighting has displaced more than 3.5 million people, according to the United Nations.

Sasakawa has mediated between the military and ethnic armed organizations for years. In 2022, he brokered a truce between the military and the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic armed organization in western Myanmar's Rakhine State, according to the Nippon Foundation. However, that ceasefire collapsed in late 2023, and fighting resumed across Rakhine State.

The latest meeting follows talks between Sasakawa and Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw on 10 August, which state media described as focusing on the peace process. That meeting was his first with Min Aung Hlaing since the junta leader assumed the presidency.

The visit comes as the regime seeks wider international engagement. Earlier this month, officials from the United States and Myanmar held talks in Tokyo.



PROGRESSIVE VOICE EXPRESS CONCERN OVER US ENGAGEMENT WITH MYANMAR JUNTA

The United States (US) administration has begun to re-engage with Myanmar's illegal, criminal military junta, reversing years of concrete measures, including diplomatic isolation and targeted sanctions, imposed after its brutal coup attempt in February 2021, Progressive Voice says in a 23 October press statement.

The contradiction at the heart of Washington's Myanmar policy is deeply troubling: while claiming to champion Christian values and religious freedom, the US administration is engaging with a junta responsible for widespread atrocities against every religious community across Myanmar. Washington must immediately cease all engagement with the junta and avoid lending further legitimacy to a military that systematically targets religious sites as part of its campaign of terror on civilians.

As it increasingly adopts an "America First" policy, Washington appears willing to sideline human rights and democracy in favor of what it considers core US national interests. In Myanmar, these interests include tackling Chinese-operated scam centers, harbored and profited from by the Myanmar military, which defraud American citizens, and gaining access to substantial rare earth mineral deposits. On 15 and 16 September 2026, US officials led by Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research Michael Vance traveled to Naypyidaw to meet junta leader Min Aung Hlaing during a visit to secure the release of a detained American businessman. In October, US officials, including Vance, held further secret talks with junta representatives in Tokyo, Japan, following earlier discussions there in June.

After years of condemning the military's abuses and imposing sanctions, this re-engagement betrays the

US's longstanding position and support for Myanmar's democratic movement.

According to freelance journalist Emily Fishbein's analysis in Myanmar in Plain Sight of filings under the US Foreign Agents Registration Act, the junta's Ministry of Information signed a \$3 million annual contract with US-based lobbying and public relations firm DCI Group on 31 July 2025. The following day, the junta-controlled Myanmar Embassy in Washington hired the McKeon Group on a six-month, \$360,000 contract for "advisory services." The junta's willingness to commit millions of dollars to lobbying while struggling to finance its war against the Myanmar people shows the value it places on securing political and diplomatic support. The subsequent softening of the US approach raises concerns that these efforts are yielding returns. Engagement with a military responsible for attacking religious communities across Myanmar undermines Washington's professed commitment to religious freedom.

No religious group in Myanmar is safe from the junta's assault on religious freedom.

On 9 October 2026, a military fighter jet dropped a 500-pound bomb on the Presbyterian Church compound in Mindat Town, Chin State, destroying the church and several other buildings. That same day, Washington delisted an associate of the Myanmar military from its sanctions list. On 12 October 2026, a junta arson attack destroyed a church run by the Kachin Baptist Convention in Bhamo, Kachin State—an attack condemned by Kachin Human Rights Watch (KHRW) as a "violation of freedom of religion." In September, residents of Kachin's Mohnyin Township had reported that the military-aligned Shanni Nationalities Army (SNA) had repurposed their local Roman Catholic church as a regional headquarters and the adjacent Kachin Baptist Convention church for military training and graduation ceremonies.

Myanmar's Muslims, particularly the Rohingya community subjected to genocide, also face continuing religious persecution, with ongoing violations of religious freedom persisting since the attempted coup. Nor is Myanmar's Buddhist majority spared: on 11 October, junta warplanes dropped three bombs on the historic Mahasi Buddhist monastery compound in Shwebo Township, Sagaing Region, killing two civilians and injuring eight others attending a meditation retreat. This attack was part of a series of airstrikes targeting three Buddhist monasteries over a five-day.

The attacks on religious buildings and their use for military purposes demonstrate the junta's blatant disrespect and disregard for religious freedom, the rule of law, and international legal obligations. As religious communities of all faiths face increased persecution across Myanmar, international pressure on the military must increase. Washington's move towards normalization undermines the principles of the BURMA Act, enacted to increase pressure on the military junta, support the people of Myanmar, and advance accountability for serious human rights violations.

The US must oppose religious persecution and avoid complicity in the criminal junta's war crimes and crimes against humanity against the people of Burma/ Myanmar, whom the successive US governments have stood firmly with unwavering support since Myanmar's first wave of nationwide prodemocracy uprising in 1988. The US Congress must call on the administration to refrain from further legitimizing the junta, and instead work with allies to increase targeted sanctions. Washington must recommit to supporting Myanmar's democratic movement, defending religious freedom for all, and holding those responsible for the genocide against the Rohingya and war crimes and crimes against humanity against Myanmar people accountable.



EUROPEAN RIGHTS GROUPS URGE EU TO SHUT GAS SANCTIONS LOOPHOLE AS MYANMAR JUNTA RESTARTS JET FUEL REFINERY

Fourteen Europe-based rights groups on 20 October urged the European Union to close a sanctions loophole that allows European companies to keep working in Myanmar's gas sector, as the junta brings online a refinery capable of producing aviation fuel.

In a joint statement, the groups said it was deeply alarming that the military could gain easier access to jet fuel while its airstrikes continue to hit civilians, schools, hospitals and religious buildings. The groups include Burma Campaign UK, Fortify Rights and the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK). Junta leader Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, who declared himself "president," opened the Thanlyin oil refinery near Yangon on 14 October.

The EU sanctioned the military-controlled Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) in 2022 but did not impose a sector-wide ban. According to the groups, this leaves European firms free to operate in the gas industry as long as they hold no direct contract with MOGE.

The statement singles out SED Energy, an oil and gas services company listed in Norway and registered

in Cyprus. SED Energy works on the Zawtika gas field under a contract with Thailand's PTTEP, which the groups describe as one of the military's largest sources of funding. The groups cited news reports that Zawtika gas will supply the Thanlyin refinery. On that basis, they said the company now has a role both in generating revenue for the regime and in producing fuel that could be used in airstrikes.

The groups said the EU has imposed no new sanctions on the military in nearly two years. During that period, they said, airstrikes intensified and thousands more people were killed. They called on the bloc to close the loophole and return to a policy of systematically targeting the regime's sources of revenue, arms and equipment.

The EU holds its annual sanctions renewal in April. Ahead of that review, the groups urged the bloc to also target intermediaries, financial facilitators and cross-border sanctions-evasion networks. They also asked for safeguards to protect civilians, humanitarian work and migrant workers' remittances.



AMBASSADOR KYAW MOE TUN TELLS UN COMMITTEE MYANMAR JUNTA HAS USED CHEMICAL MUNITIONS, CITING GROUND REPORTS

Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, told the UN General Assembly's First Committee that the military junta has misused dual-use industrial chemicals and has dropped bombs containing tear gas, white phosphorus and aluminium phosphide from the air, citing ground reports.

He spoke on 20 October in the committee's thematic discussion on "other weapons of mass destruction" at the 81st session in New York.

He noted that Myanmar is a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention, and said the junta has repeatedly misused industrial chemicals since the 2021 coup. He said ground reports describe residents suffering dizziness, vomiting and oxygen deprivation after toxic fumes were released.

Kyaw Moe Tun also said chemical weapons production facilities operated in central Myanmar in the 1980s and 2009, producing agents including sulfur mustard, and that there has been no verified inspection confirming their destruction, so it remains unresolved whether the junta holds stockpiles.

He said the junta's lack of transparency and continuing rights abuses call for a closer investigation of the allegations. He urged the international community to monitor the situation and to cut the flow of arms, ammunition, aviation fuel and chemicals to the junta.

Resistance groups, including the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), have alleged chemical attacks since 2023, and BNI reported such allegations in Shan State in 2025. The military has previously dismissed similar US concerns as tear gas. Independent verification has been lacking.



Photo: AFP

UNICEF CHIEF URGES DONORS TO KEEP ROHINGYA CHILDREN IN SCHOOL AS AID SHRINKS

UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell on 20 October called on the international community to keep supporting Rohingya refugee children and their host communities in Bangladesh, warning that education in the Cox's Bazar camps is at stake as humanitarian funding declines.

According to UNICEF, Russell made the appeal at the end of a three-day visit to Bangladesh, during which she met Rohingya children and families and spoke with students and teachers at a UNICEF-supported learning centre in Cox's Bazar. She said Rohingya children had already lost a great deal to violence, displacement and uncertainty, adding: "They cannot lose their education too."

The agency said schooling in the camps does more than teach. It also protects children from exploitation, trafficking, child marriage and recruitment by armed groups.

The appeal echoes an earlier warning. In November 2025, UNICEF said about half a million children live

in the Rohingya camps and that a funding shortfall in early 2026 could leave more than 300,000 of them without access to education. The agency had already been forced to temporarily close most camp schools in June 2025, affecting almost 150,000 children. In October 2025 alone, more than 400 Rohingya children in the camps were reported to be victims of serious rights violations, mainly abduction and recruitment by armed groups, according to UNICEF.

Inside Myanmar, the dangers facing the Rohingya have not eased. On 29 September, UN human rights chief Volker Türk pointed to continued reports of forced labour and forced recruitment, particularly affecting the Rohingya, by both the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army (AA), the ethnic armed group fighting the junta in western Myanmar's Rakhine State.

Russell's visit also took her to Korail, Dhaka's largest informal settlement, where UNICEF pressed for an end to child marriage. Nearly half of Bangladeshi women aged 20 to 24 were married before 18, according to the Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2025.



Sittwe. Photo: AFP

OVER 10 CIVILIANS REPORTED DEAD IN MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON SITTWE IN RAKHINE

Local residents informed Mizzima that 11 civilians, including children, were killed when Myanmar military forces conducted an airstrike on crowded wards in Sittwe, Rakhine State, this morning 23 October shortly after 7:00 AM.

A Sittwe resident stated that a Y-12 transport plane dropped two bombs near the Shwe Ngar Bakery intersection between Maw Leik and Kyaung Tet Lan wards, as well as near the Ka Thit Taw junction.

"A Y-12 circled around 7:00 AM and dropped two bombs near the Shwe Ngar Bakery intersection. Since it was a busy morning hour, many people at the junction were hit," a resident of Maw Leik ward told Mizzima.

The airstrike resulted in five immediate fatalities. Out of 20 critically injured individuals transported to the hospital, six more succumbed to their injuries, bringing the total death toll to 11.

Investigations are ongoing to confirm the detailed list of victims and their gender.

"Some of the critically injured who reached the hospital have passed away, and their identities are still being verified. It is devastating as children are among the wounded. Everyone in the city is living in fear of further airstrikes," said a local providing assistance.

Currently, Sittwe residents are seeking refuge in secure shelters due to the threat of further aerial attacks, while the injured continue to receive emergency medical treatment at the hospital.

Intense daily clashes persist as the Arakan Army (AA) launches offensives to seize control of Sittwe, while military junta forces reinforce their presence to prevent the city's fall.

ONE KILLED, TWO INJURED IN MYANMAR JUNTA PARAMOTOR BOMBING IN MINDON, PDF BATTALION SAYS

Photo: Supplied

One resident was killed and two were injured on 22 October when three paramotors bombed civilians traveling in Mindon Township, Magway Region, according to Thayet District Battalion 4 of the People's Defense Force (PDF).

The paramotors, which the battalion said took off from the Thayet-based No. 12 Defense Equipment Factory (Ka-Pa-Sa 12), dropped nine bombs at about 5:00 p.m. on people between Ywar Thit and Hnget Pyin villages. Ko Myat, the battalion's information officer, told Mizzima that Maung Phoe La Min, 25, of Kyo Wa village was killed and two men, aged 42 and 62, were injured. One of the injured is in stable condition and the other seriously hurt, he said.

He said the group from Kyo Wa were traveling for work and resting between the two villages when they were attacked, and that there were no military operations or clashes in the area. No ground troops are present, but residents of Kyo Wa, Ywar Thit, Hnget Pyin and nearby villages have fled, he said.

The battalion accused the junta of deliberately attacking non-military civilian areas in Mindon and committing war crimes. Ko Myat said he believes the attacks are meant to frighten the public about the revolution.

The battalion urged residents to take cover when they hear a paramotor engine, which it said can be heard from a distance, and to build bomb shelters near their homes. The UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar said in August that in incidents in upper Sagaing, paramotor pilots allegedly cut their engines as they approached targets, leaving little or no warning.

Earlier attacks in Mindon include 8 October, when a paramotor strike on Chin Nit village killed a 12-year-old and an 83-year-old, and 12 October, when a bombing of Mae Zali village killed a 40-year-old man and destroyed two houses, according to the battalion.



Photo: Supplied

CHIN GROUP CONDEMNS MYANMAR AIRSTRIKE THAT KILLED NINE CIVILIANS, INCLUDING INFANT, AT PALETWA JETTY

A Myanmar junta airstrike on 18 October killed nine civilians, including a six-month-old child, at Pi Chaung Sone jetty in the Dai region of Paletwa Township, Chin State, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). A Chin group condemned the attack in a statement on 22 October.

According to the statement, the junta bombed the area with fighter jets and Y-12 aircraft on 18 October, killing civilians and injuring several. It called deliberate aerial attacks on civilians cowardly and said they repeatedly amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The statement offered condolences to the families of the dead and wished the injured a quick recovery, and urged the public to stay alert to air attacks as the junta keeps bombing civilians to hold on to power. It reaffirmed the group's commitment to continue the struggle with other forces seeking to end military dictatorship.

Reports differ on the toll. The Chin People's Union said strikes on 18 and 19 October killed nine and injured five, according to m.CDM, while other local reports say eight and more than 20 killed.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS AND MILITIA ARREST, BEAT 60 VILLAGERS IN MYINGYAN; OVER 10 STILL HELD, LOCALS SAY

Myanmar junta troops and members of the pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee militia arrested and beat 60 civilians from Khin Ma Kan and Kyauk Phyu Kan villages in Myingyan Township, Mandalay Region, on 17 and 18 October, and more than 10 are still in custody, according to local sources.

Ten residents of Khin Ma Kan were arrested on 17 October and 50 from Kyauk Phyu Kan on 18 October. Some were released on the evening of 18 October, locals said.

A Kyauk Phyu Kan resident said more than 10 of the 60 are still held, and that even those released were beaten. The resident said the reason for the arrests is unknown and might be that the villagers encountered the troops.

Many of those released had nosebleeds and head wounds, locals said, and the troops took phones from both released and detained villagers. Most of those held are men aged 19 to 20, according to a member of the Myingyan Public Movement Committee. The member said women were among those arrested but were not beaten, while all the men were.

The detainees were reportedly taken to Myingyan town, but where they are held is unknown. Those released are in hiding, according to the committee member.

Nearly all residents of Kyauk Phyu Kan have fled, while Khin Ma Kan has not been fully evacuated. Locals estimate about 100 soldiers and militia members are in the two villages. There was no fighting, but the movement of junta columns has forced people to flee. Mizzima couldn't independently verify the detainees' condition or location.

Residents say the junta and militia are also running conscription lotteries in Myingyan, charging each household "military service fees," and arresting locals for ransom.

Mizzima reported on 10 July that Pyu Saw Htee members in Myingyan were collecting sentry fees and conscription taxes from households, according to a member of the Myingyan Public Movement Committee.



AA SAYS IT CONTROLS WABO VILLAGE AS MYANMAR JUNTA REINFORCES SITTWE, MILITARY SOURCES SAY

The Arakan Army (AA) has taken full control of Wabo village across the water from a main military base on Kan Kaw Island in Sittwe Township, military sources told Mizzima, while the junta reinforces its defenses in the township.

Captain Zin Yaw, a CDM officer, said the military is on the defensive in Sittwe and is gathering reinforcements at the Sat Yoe Kya Bridge between the town and the Shwe Min Gan Naval Base. He said heavy shells are landing in the compound of Light Infantry Battalion 270 near the Yay Chan Pyin intersection, and that the military fears losing its link to the naval headquarters.

A military source in Sittwe said the junta is sending hundreds of troops by ship from the mainland during the night curfew, then moving them toward areas

bordering Ponnagyun and Pauktaw. Mizzima couldn't verify this.

Unconfirmed reports say the AA may have captured the 908th Military Engineering Battalion at Kyar Ma Thauk. DVB's AA source said on 18 October that fighting for the battalion continues.

A military source said the junta's attempt to land commandos and artillery troops on Ngapyi Island in Pauktaw Township has not been cleared, with neither side clearly ahead.

The AA controls 14 of Rakhine State's 17 townships and Paletwa Township in Chin State.



NUG WELCOMES SEANF EXPULSION OF JUNTA-CONTROLLED HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The National Unity Government (NUG) said on 20 October that it welcomes the decision by the South East Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum (SEANF) to disqualify the junta-controlled Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) from membership.

SEANF announced on 19 October that its governing board had resolved on 1 October, by consensus of five member chairpersons, that the MNHRC no longer meets the forum's definition of a national human rights institution, with immediate effect. The MNHRC is therefore ineligible to chair SEANF in 2027, SEANF said. The MNHRC had rejected the review in a 24 September letter and a 26 September statement, and the board found its replies unsatisfactory.

The NUG said the MNHRC failed to protect people from serious abuses by the military after the 2021 coup and instead helped conceal them. It noted that the

GANHRI Sub-Committee on Accreditation removed the MNHRC's accreditation in December 2024 for non-compliance with the Paris Principles, and that the Asia Pacific Forum expelled it in May 2025.

The NUG credited the decision to sustained work by human rights groups and regional bodies in documenting the MNHRC's conduct, and thanked the governing board members, including Malaysia's SUHAKAM, the 2026 SEANF chair, for heeding civil society.

It said the NUG Ministry of Human Rights and its partners are working to pass the Union Human Rights Commission Bill quickly, and that it will keep working with civil society, ethnic revolutionary organizations, Federal Units, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) to set up a commission able to protect citizens' rights.



CHINA'S RARE-EARTH RUSH, MYANMAR'S ENVIRONMENTAL RUIN

SUN LEE

Myanmar today stands as one of Asia's most tragic examples of a nation trapped between political conflict, economic collapse, and geopolitical competition. While the country continues to grapple with the aftermath of years of military rule, civil conflict, and humanitarian suffering, a growing number of analysts are questioning the role of China in shaping Myanmar's trajectory.

Beijing officially presents itself as a partner in development, stability, and economic cooperation. But on the contrary China's deep involvement in Myanmar has coincided with expanding resource extraction, environmental degradation, and a political landscape that serves Beijing's strategic interests more than the welfare of ordinary Myanmar citizens.

The crisis did not emerge overnight. Since Myanmar's military seized power in 2021, the country has experienced widespread instability, armed resistance, and economic deterioration. During this period, China has sought to maintain relations with multiple power centres across Myanmar, including the military authorities as well as various ethnic armed groups operating near the China-Myanmar border.

The fact is, this dual-track approach has enabled Beijing to safeguard its strategic investments regardless of which faction gains temporary control in different

regions of the country. While Chinese officials argue that their engagement is aimed at preserving regional stability and protecting economic interests, detractors see a more calculated effort to maintain influence over Myanmar's future.

Nowhere is this debate more visible than in the country's rapidly expanding rare-earth mining sector. Rare-earth elements are critical components in electric vehicles, wind turbines, advanced electronics, missile systems, and numerous high-technology applications. As the global race for clean energy accelerates, control of rare-earth supplies has become a matter of strategic importance.

China already dominates global rare-earth processing capacity and continues to strengthen that position through access to overseas resources. According to the Lowy Institute, northern Myanmar has become an increasingly important source of rare-earth ores that are transported across the border into China for processing.

The environmental consequences have become a growing source of alarm. Mining activities in northern Myanmar have reportedly expanded at an extraordinary pace in recent years. According to environmentalists, the race to exploit lucrative mineral resources has come at a heavy ecological cost, triggering

widespread deforestation, damaging natural habitats, contaminating rivers and streams, and leaving large tracts of land environmentally degraded.

Chemical leaching methods used in rare-earth extraction can introduce toxic substances into surrounding ecosystems, threatening both agricultural land and water supplies. The environmental damage does not stop at Myanmar's borders. Experts have warned that pollution linked to mining activity could affect river systems that ultimately feed into the wider Mekong basin, placing communities, fisheries, and agricultural livelihoods at risk across parts of Southeast Asia.

For many observers, the core concern is that Myanmar bears the environmental burden while much of the economic value is captured elsewhere. The ores leave Myanmar in raw form, are processed across the border, and then become part of a global supply chain that supports China's technological and industrial ambitions. Local communities, meanwhile, often face degraded ecosystems, shrinking agricultural productivity, and long-term environmental risks.

The pattern resembles a familiar criticism frequently directed at resource extraction projects in developing countries: profits flow outward while environmental costs remain local.

Beyond mining, concerns also surround broader Chinese-backed infrastructure and investment projects in Myanmar. Beijing has long promoted major initiatives under the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, a key component of the Belt and Road Initiative. Supporters view these projects as essential for economic development, infrastructure modernisation, and regional connectivity.

Critics, however, question whether these investments primarily serve Myanmar's national interests or China's strategic objective of securing access to the Indian Ocean while reducing dependence on vulnerable maritime routes. This debate has intensified as Myanmar's internal political crisis deepens and governance institutions remain weakened.

According to the Lowy Institute, the number of active rare-earth mining sites in Myanmar increased from roughly 130 in 2020 to more than 370 by 2024. The report also notes that thousands of chemical leaching pits have appeared across mining regions in northern Myanmar. China currently produces around 70% of the world's rare earths and controls approximately 90% of

global processing capacity, giving Beijing enormous influence over critical mineral supply chains.

Environmental monitoring has identified concerns about deforestation, heavy-metal contamination, groundwater pollution, and risks to river systems connected to the Mekong basin. Furthermore, reports have documented a rising number of allegations involving environmental and human-rights concerns associated with some Chinese-backed overseas mineral projects.

The geopolitical implications are equally significant. China's growing appetite for strategic minerals has made Myanmar increasingly important within Beijing's long-term industrial planning. At the same time, Myanmar's continuing instability has created conditions in which large-scale resource extraction can flourish despite concerns over accountability, transparency, and environmental oversight.

Environmental and policy experts argue that weak governance and ongoing conflict have created an environment in which short-term commercial interests frequently overshadow environmental protection and community welfare.

For Myanmar's citizens, the reality is stark. Vast portions of the country continue to struggle with insecurity, economic hardship, displacement, and environmental damage. Yet beneath the surface lies a deeper question: who ultimately benefits from Myanmar's immense natural wealth? As forests disappear, rivers face mounting pressure, and strategic minerals move across international borders, many fear that the country is becoming a source of raw materials for foreign industries without receiving proportional benefits in return.

Myanmar's crisis is therefore not merely a domestic tragedy. It is also a cautionary tale about the intersection of geopolitics, resource extraction, and environmental stewardship. Unless stronger safeguards, greater transparency, and more accountable governance emerge, the country's rare-earth boom may be remembered not as a path to prosperity but as another chapter in the long history of resource wealth generating riches for outsiders while leaving local communities to confront the consequences.

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



LARGE CHINESE LEAD MINE NORTH OF MYANMAR'S TACHILEIK 'RELEASING DEADLY TOXINS INTO RUAK TRIBUTARY'

A large Chinese-owned lead mine in Mong Ko tract, 15 kilometers north of Tachileik town, is releasing toxins into the Nam Toon stream, a Ruak River tributary, with deadly impacts on local Akha, Lahu and Shan communities, according to the Shan Human Rights Foundation

21 October.

The Ruak River flows along the northern Thai border before joining the Mekong River at the Golden Triangle.

Lead mining began in this Burma Army-controlled area in 2021, next to existing manganese mines which had been operating since 2007 – and which SHRF previously reported were contaminating the Ruak River.

Large amounts of manganese ore were transported each year by truck across the border into Maesai then to Thailand's Laemchabang Port (over 135,000 tons in 2019), from where it was shipped to China.

According to Maesai customs records, lead ore started being imported into Thailand (from Mong Ko) in June 2023. Thai export data shows lead ore started to be exported from Thailand to China, Laos and Cambodia in 2023, with export amounts, mainly to these countries, increasing fivefold in 2025. It thus appears that the lead ore from Mong Ko has largely transited Thailand, but some may also have been used inside Thailand (where lead is needed to produce lead-acid batteries, a vital component of the automobile industry).

The lead mining at Mong Ko was originally carried out by two main companies with permission from Naypyidaw: Sai Wanna Company and Sein Naw Mining Company, but the former Sai Wanna mine (directly north of the Sein Naw mine) is no longer extracting lead, only manganese. The lead ore is thus now being extracted exclusively by Sein Naw Mining Company, and is being exported by truck to Thailand via the 2nd Maesai River Friendship Bridge.

Sein Naw Mining Company is headquartered in Tachileik, and has been registered as a domestic company with Burma's Directorate of Investment and Company Administration since 2011. The first official director was Eike Kyin, a United Wa State Army (UWSA) officer. The current managing director is Eike Kyin's former Shan wife, Nan Shan Naw. However, the management and technical staff at the mining site are Chinese, and inside sources say the actual owners are from China.

Timelapse imagery shows the expansion of the Sein Naw Mining Company lead mine during the past six years. The imagery reveals that the Sein Naw mining site also contained a gold leaching facility, but this has fallen into disuse during the past few years.

Lead is being excavated at the Sein Naw site in underground tunnels, which reportedly stretch for 3 to 4 miles. Above ground, there are machines for crushing the lead ore, and chemical separation facilities. The machinery is powered by generators.

A Facebook post of a recent visit to the lead mine on July 24, 2026 by U Sai Khattiya, Chair of the Shan State Parliament's Forestry, Minerals, Natural Resources, Environmental Conservation and Protection and Electricity Affairs Committee, showed photos taken at the site, including machinery. However, no tunnels were shown.

There are about 100 personnel employed at the site. The management and technical staff are Chinese, but the mine workers are from Burma. The monthly wage of a local mine worker is about 10,000 baht. The workers rotate in eight-hour shifts, throughout the day and night.

The mining site is guarded by security personnel of the United Wa State Army (UWSA), and outsiders are strictly forbidden from entering.

In July 2026, locals say that a tunnel collapse caused the death of about 20 mine workers, but the incident was hushed up.

Lead ore is loaded into sacks at the mining site then transported in six-wheel trucks down to a village called Adin, four kilometers north of Tachileik town, where the ore is transferred onto 24-wheel lorries, which carry the ore across the 2nd Maesai River Friendship Bridge into Thailand. Locals say that the mineral depot at Adin is owned by the UWSA.



The late Vaclav Havel with Min Zin

INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL AND FORUM 2000 CALL ON CHINA TO IMMEDIATELY RELEASE MIN ZIN

International democracy coalition condemns the detention of prominent US scholar and democracy advocate, warning that his wrongful detention threatens academic freedom and the open exchange of ideas, according to a press statement on 16 October.

The International Coalition for Democratic Renewal (ICDR) and the Forum 2000 Foundation have called on Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Chinese authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Min Zin, a prominent independent American scholar on Myanmar, democracy advocate, political analyst, and founder of the Institute for Strategy and Policy – Myanmar (ISP-Myanmar). Min Zin has been wrongfully detained in China since June 3, 2026.

In a joint statement issued on October 15, following the 30th Forum 2000 Conference in Prague, the two organizations expressed deep concern over Min Zin's detention and the lack of information about his condition, access to legal counsel, and the absence of credible evidence supporting the accusations against him.

"The International Coalition for Democratic Renewal (ICDR) and Forum 2000 Foundation are deeply concerned by the wrongful detention of Min Zin, a prominent democracy advocate and independent scholar, in China," the statement declared.

The statement noted that Min Zin, a United States citizen, had travelled to China's Yunnan Province at the invitation of a Chinese professor to attend an academic workshop. However, he was detained immediately upon arrival at the airport on June 3.

"He has since spent over one hundred days in criminal detention at an undisclosed location investigated on spurious allegations of espionage and endangering China's national security," the statement said.

It further emphasized that since his detention, there has been little information about his condition, legal representation, or any credible evidence substantiating the allegations made by the Chinese authorities.

The organizations strongly criticized the broader implications of his detention, declaring:

"China's detention of Min Zin is an affront to international norms and standards and sends a chilling message to those in our community who uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and the open exchange of ideas."

The statement concluded with an unequivocal demand:

"We call upon President Xi and the relevant authorities in China to facilitate Min Zin's immediate and unconditional release and his safe return home."

Min Zin's Long Association with Václav Havel and Forum 2000

The joint statement also highlighted Min Zin's decades-long involvement in Myanmar's struggle for freedom and his close association with the international community of democracy advocates brought together by the late Czech President Václav Havel.

"Min Zin has long been a part of the Forum 2000 family and is an active believer in this community's mission," the statement said.

As a student activist during Myanmar's historic 1988 pro-democracy uprising, Min Zin spent nine years underground organizing communities and resisting military rule before eventually escaping to Thailand.

He subsequently became a journalist and analyst, using independent media to document Myanmar's struggle for democracy. Later, he studied at the University of California at Berkeley, where he received a master's degree in Asian Studies and pursued doctoral studies in Political Science.

In 2016, during Myanmar's period of opening, he founded the Institute for Strategy and Policy – Myanmar, an independent open-source research organization dedicated to political analysis, public policy, and the development of a new generation of Myanmar intellectuals and policy thinkers.

The statement recalled that Min Zin first attended the Forum 2000 Conference in 2001, an experience that profoundly shaped his understanding of international democratic solidarity.

According to the statement, he came away from that conference with a deeper appreciation of the importance of democracy activists supporting one another and learning from each other's experiences, struggles, and achievements.

In 2007, Min Zin was among a group of international democracy advocates who spoke alongside Václav Havel when the former Czech president received the National Endowment for Democracy's Democracy Service Medal.

Following Havel's death in 2011, Min Zin paid tribute to the Czech dissident and former president, recalling how Havel's writings had inspired him.

"Since I lived in Burma and was on the run to escape from the arrest of the military regime, I sought inspiration and courage from reading a poor Xeroxed copy of *The Power of the Powerless*. Havel has guided me all the way along."

Min Zin himself is a member of the International Coalition for Democratic Renewal (ICDR). By calling for Min Zin's immediate release, the ICDR and the Forum 2000 Foundation reaffirmed their solidarity with a longtime member of the coalition and of the international democratic community - and their concern over the treatment of independent scholars and democracy advocates.

More Than Four Months in Detention

Min Zin's detention has also attracted international attention because of the circumstances surrounding his arrest and his reported treatment in Chinese custody.

According to information circulated by advocates working on his case, Min Zin has been held in an undisclosed facility under China's Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location (RSDL) system, which has been criticized by United Nations human rights experts for its lack of due process safeguards and the risk of ill-treatment.

Reports indicate that his wife and teenage daughter have been unable to communicate directly with him, while his access to legal counsel has been denied.

On August 20, the United States government formally designated Min Zin as wrongfully detained following an official review of the circumstances of his arrest.

According to Reuters, a senior U.S. State Department official confirmed that securing his release is a priority for Washington.

Chinese authorities have accused Min Zin of espionage and activities endangering China's national security. The detention of a prominent American scholar who travelled to China for an academic event has also raised concerns about the risks faced by independent researchers and intellectuals engaging with Chinese institutions.

The full statement is available on the Forum 2000 Foundation's official website: <https://www.forum2000.cz/en/news/statement-on-the-wrongful-detention-of-min-zin>

What Is the International Coalition for Democratic Renewal?

The International Coalition for Democratic Renewal (ICDR) is a global network bringing together approximately 500 prominent intellectuals, political leaders, civil society activists, and democracy advocates from around the world. Founded in Prague in 2017, the coalition seeks to strengthen international solidarity among democratic movements and defend democratic principles against growing authoritarian challenges.

Its founding document, the Prague Appeal, was issued on May 26, 2017, and the coalition was officially launched during the Forum 2000 Conference in October of the same year.

Among its prominent members are Nobel Prize-winning writer Svetlana Alexievich, political scientist Francis Fukuyama, Russian opposition figure Garry Kasparov, historian and author Anne Applebaum, French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, political scientist Ivan Krastev, and Cuban democracy activist Rosa María Payá.

The coalition seeks to strengthen international solidarity among democratic movements, defend democratic principles against authoritarian challenges, and provide intellectual and political support to those struggling for freedom in authoritarian countries.



MAE TAO CLINIC FOUNDER DR. CYNTHIA MAUNG RECEIVES OKINAWA PEACE PRIZE

Dr. Cynthia Maung, founder and director of the Mae Tao Clinic (MTC), received the 13th Okinawa Peace Prize on 19 October at a ceremony in Naha, Japan, according to MTC. The clinic, based in Mae Sot, Thailand, provides healthcare and other services to displaced people, migrant workers and conflict-affected communities from Myanmar.

MTC says it is the first non-Japanese recipient of the prize, which Okinawa Prefecture awards every two years for contributions to peace in the Asia-Pacific region. The prize carries 10 million yen (about US\$62,000).

She accepted the award on behalf of the clinic's staff, partners and supporters, MTC said. It credited the people who have worked with the clinic since its founding in 1989, and its donors, partners, volunteers and supporters.

MTC said it will continue serving displaced people, migrant workers and conflict-affected communities who struggle to get healthcare and other help.



PDF fighters. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S RESISTANCE: FROM DIPLOMATIC SETBACKS TO STRATEGIC RENEWAL

NICHOLAS KONG

Self-appointed President Min Aung Hlaing's diplomatic charm offensive is drawing renewed international attention to the military's continued dominance of Myanmar's politics, while the resistance maintains a lower international profile despite its own overseas engagement and efforts to present an alternative political vision. Yet diplomatic access is not the same as international legitimacy, just as setbacks on the political and diplomatic fronts do not necessarily mean that the resistance has lost its strategic prospects.

Recent media coverage includes an assessment by a respected Myanmar scholar that the resistance has lost ground politically and diplomatically, though not militarily. His hypothesis of an alleged "insurgency-industrial complex" surrounding the National Unity Government (NUG) and its international support network raises questions about the resistance's effectiveness and incentives.

These questions deserve serious examination. But a comprehensive assessment must consider the junta's diplomatic maneuvering, the international calculations behind renewed engagement, the resistance's own

structural difficulties, and its efforts to develop a more coherent political alternative.

The Junta's Diplomatic Roadmap Was Never a Secret

The coup leader's pursuit of the presidency following a military-engineered electoral process is part of an effort to repackage military rule as civilian government. His claim to the presidency remains constitutionally contested, particularly because democratically elected President U Win Myint, who was unlawfully detained and remains under strict house arrest, did not constitutionally transfer power to him.

Since the 2021 coup, the self-appointed president has sought support from China, Russia, and India while exploring opportunities with the United States and Japan and exploiting divisions within ASEAN. Despite significant military setbacks, including those associated with Operation 1027, Chinese intervention helped alter the strategic environment in northern Myanmar and enabled the military to recover ground. The junta's tactical maneuvering deserves recognition, but it does not establish that the military has resolved

Myanmar's underlying political crisis or secured broad international legitimacy.

Realpolitik: Engagement Is Not Necessarily Recognition

Governments increasingly face competing security, economic, and geopolitical interests. Engagement with the junta may serve specific objectives, from border security and the suppression of transnational crime to the protection of nationals and commercial interests. Direct contact, including by Washington, should therefore be judged by its purpose, substance, and consequences—not automatically interpreted as diplomatic recognition or a wholesale policy reversal.

Nevertheless, diplomacy is not conducted in a political vacuum. When the junta gains access to regional leaders while democratic and ethnic stakeholders struggle to secure comparable opportunities, the result is an uneven diplomatic playing field. Public meetings and official receptions can help the junta chief-turned-president project an image of international acceptance, regardless of governments' stated reservations about recognizing his legitimacy.

This creates a dilemma for the resistance. Governments may prioritize immediate interests over democratic principles, while the junta exploits every opening to weaken its opponents' international standing. The resistance must respond with more coherent diplomacy, clearer communication, and credible political engagement. International partners, in turn, must distinguish pragmatic contact from endorsement and assess whether their engagement advances a sustainable political settlement or merely strengthens the military's position.

The “Insurgency-Industrial Complex” in Context

The allegation that an “insurgency-industrial complex” has developed around the resistance—including donors, exiles, diaspora communities, rights organizations, and humanitarian networks—raises legitimate questions about incentives, accountability, and effectiveness. However, the conclusion that participants in this support ecosystem are structurally invested in prolonging the conflict rather than defeating the junta and building an alternative government requires evidence. The persistence of fundraising and advocacy alone does not establish that claim.

Self-serving organizations and individuals can exist within any political movement. Fundraising and advocacy must serve the objective of political change rather than become ends in themselves. The resistance needs greater financial transparency, stronger coordination, and accountability for how resources are collected, allocated, and used. The resistance also faces a fundamental structural handicap: restricted access to legitimate international banking and financial infrastructure for humanitarian and other lawful transactions. These constraints complicate fundraising and resource allocation. They do not excuse poor accountability, but they must be considered when assessing the resistance's operational difficulties.

Which Industry Complex Deserves Greater Scrutiny?

The “insurgency-industrial complex” hypothesis risks diverting attention from the more entrenched military-dictator-industrial complex: military conglomerates and enterprises linked to the generals' cronies, which benefit from unchecked access to economic resources, extractive industries, procurement networks, commercial interests, and foreign-currency revenues. These networks help finance military procurement, including aviation fuel and weapons, and sustain operations against resistance forces and civilian populations. Myanmar's people, including migrant workers whose remittances support families at home, continue to bear the costs of a political and economic system dominated by military power.

The two alleged complexes should not be treated as equivalent merely because both can be described in terms of institutional incentives. Their structures, resources, and consequences require separate examination. The central question is how economic interests sustain the conflict and what institutional changes could prevent the continued concentration of national wealth and power in military hands.

The Resistance's Evolution: from NUG, Born Without a Silver Spoon, to SCEF, A Framework developed for Strategic Alliance

The NUG emerged in 2021 under extraordinary circumstances, following the arrest of elected leaders and the destruction of Myanmar's democratic transition. It was a premature political birth without the institutional foundations, territorial control, and

conventional resources available to an established government. This context helps explain its difficulties but does not excuse shortcomings in governance, accountability, or strategic coordination.

The resistance has since sought to overcome the limitations of its early formation through the establishment of the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) on March 30, 2026. The framework brings together the NUG, the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), and major ethnic resistance organizations (EROs), including the KNU, KIO, KNPP/IEC, and CNF, following years of negotiation, cooperation, and growing mutual trust. Its ambition is to establish collective, accountable leadership under “one policy, one strategy” toward a Federal Democratic Union.

SCEF must translate negotiated cooperation into effective decision-making, ensure meaningful inclusion of ethnic nationalities and other constituencies, strengthen equality and accountability, and improve coordination across political, military, and administrative fronts.

The Arakan Army (AA) is not formally part of SCEF, but its engagement with the framework and participation in the Spring Revolution Alliance (SRA) are important developments. The AA's distinct political aspirations pose difficult questions about federal arrangements and future political accommodation. These differences should neither be overlooked nor used to dismiss the possibilities for cooperation. A credible federal future requires practical ways to reconcile different political aspirations without assuming that all resistance organizations must share identical objectives.

SCEF must also promote effective governance and civilian protection in territories under resistance control, establish transparent and sustainable financing, and allocate resources according to collectively determined strategic priorities. The council must continue pressing for financial restrictions on the junta that limit its access to international banking channels and foreign-currency reserves. At the same time, it needs a more innovative diplomatic strategy, including making a credible case to Beijing that SCEF offers a more reliable partner for China's legitimate interests than a junta that opportunistically exploits its relationships with foreign powers. Such engagement must be grounded in SCEF's own political objectives, not dependence on any external power.

SCEF's formation is a beginning, not proof of success. Its credibility will depend on whether it can turn years of negotiations and mutual trust into tangible results while recognizing the distinct interests and aspirations of Myanmar's diverse nationalities.

From Setbacks to Strategic Renewal

The resistance has recently faced political and diplomatic setbacks, as well as persistent organizational weaknesses. The junta's diplomatic offensive presents new challenges. But setbacks are not necessarily strategic defeat. Political circumstances can change when movements learn from their mistakes, strengthen institutions, and adapt their strategies to changing conditions.

SCEF offers an opportunity to address the challenges of fragmentation that has constrained the resistance. Whether it succeeds depends on the willingness of its constituent organizations to place collective objectives above institutional competition and to demonstrate that their federal democratic vision can translate into accountable governance.

The international community faces a parallel test. Governments are entitled to pursue pragmatic interests, but neither bilateral diplomatic transactions should be mistaken for a resolution of Myanmar's political crisis nor resistance's efforts to build a more coherent political alternative should be disregarded.

Dismantling the military-dictator-industrial complex that has helped turn a resource-rich country into one marked by chronic poverty and conflict will require sustained political and institutional change. Building a Federal Democratic Union that offers justice, security, and opportunity to all its people will be equally demanding.

The resistance has no guarantee of success. But neither does the junta's diplomatic charm offensive establish its victory or indefinite military dominance in Myanmar politics. The decisive question is whether Myanmar's resistance can turn its setbacks into strategic renewal—and whether its leadership can translate collective sacrifice into a credible political alternative.

This commentary was originally published in Eurasia Review.

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



Dear President Trump,

I write to you from Bali, where I am presently based, as an American author, public speaker, and journalist whose life has been intertwined with Burma for almost five decades. I write with gratitude for your administration's willingness to engage with Myanmar, and with the hope that this opening might reach the people who have waited longest for the world's attention: the imprisoned, the displaced, the bereaved, and the families who still do not know when—or whether—someone they love will come home. I have supported your presidency and written to you before. Today, I ask you to consider an opportunity whose significance could extend far beyond the immediate objectives of diplomacy.

Your administration has called for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's immediate and unconditional release. I welcome that position wholeheartedly. Renewed conversations with Myanmar's military-backed government create an opportunity to give it practical

force. Speaking directly with those who hold power can be indispensable, particularly when they possess the authority to release prisoners and stop attacks. The moral seriousness of engagement will be measured by whether that access changes the conditions under which people live.

I do not know everything being discussed privately, and I would not presume to describe your intentions from a distance. What I can offer is the perspective of someone who has listened to Burma's people across decades of dictatorship, democratic aspiration, and devastating reversals. I know something of the human possibilities that disappear when a country is understood primarily through its rulers. I also know how much courage remains among people whose names rarely reach an American president's desk.

Last year, I sent you a letter and a copy of my book, *Conversation with a Dictator: A Challenge to the Authoritarian Assault*. The book imagines a sustained

encounter with Min Aung Hlaing, the general who seized power and now occupies the presidency. Its fictional dialogue asks whether someone responsible for immense suffering can still be addressed through conscience, and whether speaking truthfully to that person might help make a different course possible.

I wrote it because I remain unwilling to abandon the possibility of moral change. That conviction has been tested by what I have witnessed and by the testimony of people whose lives were broken by imprisonment and violence. Their suffering makes the question more urgent: how do we stop its continuation? An encounter worthy of the name must permit difficult questions, honest answers, and consequences beyond the encounter itself. Your administration now has an opportunity to bring that question into an actual room.

Burma is my Dharma home. It is where my understanding of spiritual freedom became inseparable from my love of democracy. But my education in the responsibilities of freedom began much earlier. Both my parents were veterans of World War II, and I grew up with an understanding of peace through strength and a respect for the sacrifices required to defend it. I later attended the University of Virginia on a football scholarship, with aspirations to become a diplomat and perhaps pursue a political career in Washington. Those ambitions eventually gave way to the adventure of self-discovery. I traveled overland to India and ultimately found my way into Burma, seeking to understand the mind, human suffering, and the possibility of liberation.

In 1979, I was blessed to ordain as a Buddhist monk and study in Burma under the great meditation teacher, the late Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw, and later under his successor, Sayadaw U Pandita. Their discipline and generosity changed my life. Over the years, the country's monasteries, friendships, democratic uprisings, and accounts of political imprisonment became part of the same education. The questions that had once drawn me toward diplomacy returned with a deeper intimacy: how do we live together, how do we resolve our differences, and what does freedom mean

when another person can punish you for expressing what you know to be true?

The people of Burma taught me that these questions cannot remain philosophical. They enter the body of the person being interrogated, the life of the child whose parent disappears, the decisions of the journalist who must choose whether to publish. They also enter the conscience of those of us fortunate enough to speak without asking permission. My affection for Burma has survived expulsion, separation, and decades of grief. I cannot regard its people as a distant population whose suffering becomes important only when a strategic interest brings them into view.

My relationship with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi grew within that world. She has been my friend and colleague over decades. Our book, *The Voice of Hope*, was based upon six months of conversations at her home in Rangoon in 1995 and 1996, following her release from her first six years of detention. Those conversations also included two of her principal colleagues and mentors, the late U Tin Oo and the late U Kyi Maung, whose experience and wisdom deepened our exploration of democracy, nonviolence, and reconciliation. I knew her late husband, Michael Aris, and came to know her family, colleagues, and the spiritual traditions that sustained her. We shared the influence of Sayadaw U Pandita. These relationships gave me an understanding of her that no headline could adequately contain.

In 1996, after the authorities learned of my work on *The Voice of Hope*, I was deported and subsequently blacklisted from Burma for seventeen years. In September 2012, I saw Daw Suu again in San Francisco, where she received the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent. It was our first reunion in nearly seventeen years. She encouraged me to return and continue my work, and an amnesty under President Thein Sein eventually made that possible. I returned to listen, interview, and document the lives and ideas of people whose voices had been withheld from the world. Mr. President, I know personally what it means when a government reopens a door it once closed. The

work that becomes possible can reach far beyond the person allowed to enter.

Across the many hours Daw Suu and I spent together, what stayed with me was her discipline of refusing to make personal hatred the foundation of political life. In my experience, she could address injustice firmly while remaining attentive to the humanity of those responsible for it. She understood that adversaries would eventually have to inhabit the same country. The challenge of freedom therefore included a challenge of relationship: how to resist domination while preserving the capacity to build a society together.

Her father, Aung San, helped lead Burma toward independence from Britain and occupies a place in its national imagination that Americans might begin to understand through George Washington. His daughter carried the struggle for freedom into another historical moment. I have understood her nonviolent courage in the company of Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela, while recognizing the distinctiveness of her own life. For many Burmese, she is the mother of the nation. Their attachment to her carries memories of sacrifice, endurance, and the possibility of being heard.

Mr. President, you have spoken often about what you regard as the distortion of your life, your family, and your intentions. I ask you to let that experience deepen your willingness to hear her beyond the descriptions others have imposed upon her. My research has led me to challenge portrayals of Daw Suu that obscure her convictions, the constitutional constraints of civilian government, and the military's entrenched authority. She deserves the freedom to speak for herself, answer difficult questions, and choose her own next steps.

That freedom does not depend upon everyone agreeing about her record. Nor does defending her require anyone to diminish the suffering of the Rohingya. Their testimony, safety, citizenship, and dignity belong within any honest vision of reconciliation. The same is true of every community subjected to persecution.

I want a Burma in which those experiences can be heard without coercion and examined without fear. The argument for her release is strong enough to withstand disagreement about her leadership. Human freedom must never become a prize awarded only to those the world finds beyond criticism.

I spent nearly ten years traveling in and out of Burma, interviewing former political prisoners and democratic leaders. Those sustained encounters resulted in the four-volume *Burma's Voices of Freedom* (co-authored with Fergus Harlow). Some of the people I interviewed were later imprisoned again. I listened to the intimate consequences of confinement: stolen years, interrupted families, the effort to preserve sanity, and the struggle to emerge without allowing cruelty to determine the remainder of one's life. To sit with someone who has endured years of imprisonment is to understand that a sentence continues in the lives of spouses, children, and parents who were never brought before a court.

That work is part of why I ask you to make the unconditional release of all political prisoners a central, measurable objective of American engagement. Independent monitors distinguish confirmed detention from cases still awaiting verification, but uncertainty about a final number cannot diminish the obligation to seek every person unjustly held. Let there be names, independent verification, access to medical care, family reunification, and protection against rearrest. A release must restore a person's freedom to live, speak, and participate in society.

The photographs released on October 19, showing Daw Suu receiving books sent by King Charles, brought another glimpse of a woman whose absence has become a wound in the world's conscience. I welcome every sign that she remains connected to life beyond detention. But photographs cannot establish whether she can speak freely, receive the care she needs, see her family, and choose how to spend her remaining years. Please help turn this moment of visibility into sustained access and unconditional freedom.

There is another urgent test of this diplomatic opening. On October 12, the regime's newspaper, Kyemon, called for the "elimination of any destructive element inside or outside the country." This followed official announcements targeting The Irrawaddy, Mizzima, DVB, Myanmar Now, and Khit Thit, and claims of coordination with Interpol and Aseanapol to pursue their staff abroad. These are the regime's announced efforts; they do not establish approval by those organizations. They nevertheless form part of an explicit campaign of intimidation against independent journalism.

Mr. President, please consider the word elimination and the lives beneath it. I contribute to the independent media the authorities have threatened, and I include myself among the writers who must take this language seriously. It reaches those of us bringing testimony, evidence, and the truth of Burma's suffering to the world. Our work may anger Min Aung Hlaing and disturb the account he wishes others to accept. The freedom to report cannot depend upon whether those being scrutinized find the reporting agreeable.

For journalists working beyond Burma's borders, such intimidation enters ordinary decisions: whether to travel, renew a visa, visit family, or publish another article. Uncertainty itself becomes a pressure to remain silent. I ask your administration to oppose politically motivated detention, deportation, and retaliation against journalists, including foreign contributors such as myself. Please ask the authorities to retract the language of elimination and protect the people whose work allows the world to know what is happening.

In my October 16th letter, published by Mizzima, I appealed directly to Min Aung Hlaing to choose open dialogue with the media over their elimination. I offered to meet him in Naypyidaw for a conversation recorded and shared unedited, with protection for everyone involved. That invitation remains open. I would welcome the opportunity to understand his thinking, question his decisions, and explore what might enable him to change course.

I would also welcome the opportunity to report meaningful changes in his conduct. The journalists he threatens could verify releases, document humanitarian access, and follow the difficult work of rebuilding trust. Their independence would give that reporting its credibility. If he believes we misunderstand him, an honest encounter offers him the opportunity to explain himself—and us the freedom to examine those explanations against what people are experiencing. The first assurance could be simple and consequential: everyone may ask a difficult question, and everyone may leave unharmed.

In that appeal, I drew upon the Dhamma I learned in Burma: the examination of greed, hatred, and delusion, and the cultivation of compassion and ethical restraint. These teachings ask something exacting of anyone exercising power. A change of heart must reach the chain of command. It must become a threat withdrawn, a prisoner released, a community protected. Otherwise, those who suffer have no reason to believe that anything has changed. Your engagement could help make that relationship between words and conduct central to the negotiations.

I recognize that American interests include transnational crime, regional security, and potentially access to rare-earth minerals. Those interests appear in reporting on the renewed engagement. I believe this relationship can reach beyond its immediate transactions. Lasting economic cooperation requires public trust, clear rights, and communities able to participate in decisions about their land and livelihoods. An agreement's durability depends in part upon whether the people living with its consequences have reason to support it.

Burma's deepest wealth is also human: its extraordinary variety of languages, cultures, religions, and ways of belonging. Bamar, Karen, Kachin, Chin, Shan, Mon, Rakhine, Karenni, Rohingya, and many other communities carry histories that any settlement must hear. Radical inclusivity requires more than an invitation to attend. It requires institutions capable of

protecting people when they disagree, safeguarding minorities, and allowing communities a meaningful share in governing their lives. That is part of what makes the aspiration for federal democracy so consequential.

Please ask Min Aung Hlaing directly to release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners, stop attacks on civilians, and enable an independently monitored ceasefire. Urge every armed party to protect civilian life and enter a credible peace process. Support humanitarian access wherever people need food, medicine, and shelter, including through trusted local and cross-border organizations. These steps would allow families to experience diplomacy through changes they can recognize: a loved one returning, a clinic reopening, a night without bombardment.

Engagement will require judgment about incentives, pressure, and the sequencing of commitments. I do not pretend those decisions are simple. But promises can be assessed against observable actions, and further steps can be tied to progress that independent witnesses can verify. Access to political prisoners, sustained humanitarian delivery, protection for journalists, and reductions in attacks provide concrete tests. The people most affected must have a way to tell your administration, freely and safely, whether an agreement has changed anything where they live.

I ask you to support an international forum for reconciliation in Naypyidaw, with conditions that make genuinely free participation possible. Let released political prisoners, democratic representatives, ethnic leaders, resistance voices, displaced communities, and independent journalists help shape its agenda. Give women real authority in the negotiations. Include religious leaders and young people whose futures have been decided in rooms they were never permitted to enter. Let experienced international mediators contribute while Myanmar's people determine the substance and direction of their future.

Such a gathering would require guarantees that participants can disagree and leave unharmed. It would need independent reporting, patient preparation, and a willingness to address the distribution of power. Its work would include questions violence has failed to settle: how communities are protected, how abuses are investigated, how resources are governed, and how a federal democratic future becomes credible. Naypyidaw could become a place where people previously excluded from authority begin exercising a voice in decisions that shape their lives.

Reconciliation must also respect the moral independence of survivors. Forgiveness may become possible, but it belongs to those who have suffered. No outside leader can require it of them, and no summit can declare their grief resolved. What diplomacy can help create are conditions in which truth can be spoken, accountability pursued, and people given reason to imagine a future together. A credible peace must leave room for the person who is ready to forgive and the person who is still searching for the body of someone they love.

Perhaps, Mr. President, you would consider going yourself if your presence could help secure meaningful commitments and protect an authentic process. Imagine meeting Daw Suu as a free woman, alongside others whose voices imprisonment has withheld from the world. Imagine helping make possible a conversation in which no participant must calculate whether honesty will cost them their liberty. The significance would lie in what endured after the visitors departed: freedoms protected, commitments honored, and people able to begin rebuilding their lives.

I would be honored to speak with you or anyone in your administration and offer whatever my decades of relationships, research, and listening might contribute. I can share the testimony I have gathered, the questions that remain unresolved, and the perspectives of people whose knowledge deserves to

inform these conversations. From Bali, I would make every practicable effort to meet wherever useful. I offer this with humility. The people of Burma must speak for themselves; those of us who know and love their country can help ensure they are heard, especially when their accounts complicate the assumptions of those holding power.

Sir, I still believe that speaking to another human being's conscience can matter, even after terrible harm. That belief carries responsibilities: to remain truthful, to listen, to refuse intimidation, and to recognize change when it becomes real. Your engagement with Myanmar could help create an opening in which those responsibilities become part of public life. Please use your influence to help free the imprisoned, protect the threatened, and make room for the voices a country needs to hear.

Ask Min Aung Hlaing to withdraw the threat of elimination and invite the conversation. Help bring Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the other political prisoners home. Let peace through conscience become visible in the decisions made next, and let dignity be something people experience in the way they are treated. After almost five decades of loving Burma, I can imagine no greater reason to write to you than this possibility: that families who have waited through years of fear might finally hear footsteps at the door and discover someone they love.

With respect, gratitude, and enduring hope,

Alan Clements

Bali, Indonesia

Alan@WorldDharma.com

ABOUT ALAN CLEMENTS

Alan Clements is an American author, investigative journalist, public speaker, and spoken-word artist whose work brings contemplative inquiry into direct conversation with political power, human rights, and the struggle for freedom. Drawing upon monastic training, firsthand reporting, and sustained dialogue with democratic leaders and former political prisoners, he examines how conscience survives coercion—and how individuals and societies can confront violence without surrendering their humanity.

His books include *Instinct for Freedom*, *Wisdom for the World*, *A Future to Believe In*, *Burma: The Next Killing Fields?*, *The Voice of Hope*, and the four-volume *Burma's Voices of Freedom* and *A Future to Believe In*. With Leslie Kean, he co-authored the internationally respected photographic book *Burma's Revolution of the Spirit*, featuring a foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and endorsements from eight Nobel Peace laureates. Clements also served as script revisionist and principal advisor on *Beyond Rangoon*, the feature film directed by the renowned filmmaker John Boorman.

His recent works include *Conversation with a Dictator*, *Unsilenced*, and *Politics of the Heart: Nonviolence in an Age of Atrocity*. Across books, journalism, film, public talks, and live performance, Clements explores the moral and psychological foundations of authoritarianism, the discipline of nonviolence, and the creative possibilities of democratic life. His work returns to a question that unites his spiritual and political inquiry: how can we remain fully human while confronting forces that seek to diminish the humanity of others?

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



The poster for the Asian Tea & Coffee Festival Prague 2026 features a scenic view of Prague's Charles Bridge and Old Town Square. In the foreground, there is a glass teapot and a cup of coffee. The text includes the Mizzima S.r.o. logo, the festival title, the date (23 October 2026), and the location (Prague, Czech Republic). It also mentions the official venue partner, Opero Prague, and provides contact information: +420-608616688 and mizzima@mizzima.com. A small map of Europe highlights Prague's location.

Mizzima S.r.o.

CONNECT • TRADE • INVEST

Asian Tea & Coffee Festival

Prague 2026

IMPORT FROM THAILAND & ASIA TO EUROPE

Discover Premium Tea & Coffee | Explore Business Opportunities | Build Global Partnerships

23 OCTOBER 2026
PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

OFFICIAL VENUE PARTNER
OPERO PRAGUE

+420-608616688 | mizzima@mizzima.com

Asian Tea & Coffee Festival Prague 2026 brings together producers, entrepreneurs, importers, and investors from Thailand, Asia, and Europe for a unique platform of trade, networking, and cultural exchange. Discover exceptional tea and coffee, explore investment and export opportunities, and build partnerships that grow together. Be part of the movement connecting Asia's finest with Europe's future.

ASIAN TEA AND COFFEE FESTIVAL IN PRAGUE CONNECTS ASIAN PRODUCERS WITH EUROPEAN MARKETS

The Asian Tea and Coffee Festival 2026 was held at Opero in Prague, Czech Republic, on 23 October, bringing together friends, business contacts, entrepreneurs and supporters to explore opportunities for promoting Asian tea and coffee products in European markets.

Organised through Mizzima s.r.o., the event showcased products from Myanmar, Thailand and Taiwan, while providing an opportunity for participants to learn about the region's tea and coffee traditions, exchange ideas and discuss potential business cooperation.

The gathering was part of a broader initiative to develop trade relationships between Asian producers and European distributors, retailers and consumers.

Tea and coffee from Asia

A selection of tea and coffee products was displayed, reflecting the agricultural diversity and traditional production methods found across Asia.

Products from Myanmar included B&B Green Tea, grown in Ywar Ngan, Shan State. The natural green tea was presented as an example of Myanmar's potential to reach international markets with locally produced agricultural products.

The exhibition also featured coffee from Thailand's northern highlands, including Thepsadej Coffee Roaster, which produces Arabica coffee grown in the Thepsadej area of Doi Saket, Chiang Mai.

According to the producer's information, the coffee is cultivated at elevations of approximately 1,100 to 1,400 metres above sea level. Different roasting profiles, including City, Full City, Turkish, Vienna and Italian styles, were presented.

Other Thai products included Bluemocha teas, featuring traditional Thai tea, fresh tea and green tea.

Taiwanese teas formed another important part of the exhibition. Visitors could explore High Mountain Oolong Tea, Special Milk Oolong Tea and Oriental Beauty Tea, each representing distinctive Taiwanese tea-making traditions.

Myanmar's traditional tea leaf salad, lahpet thoke, was also introduced through a presentation explaining its ingredients and cultural significance.

The products highlighted the potential for Asian agricultural producers to reach consumers beyond their traditional markets while preserving the character and identity of their products.

Building connections between Asia and Europe

The event provided a relaxed setting for participants to meet, exchange experiences and discuss ways to strengthen economic and cultural links between Asia and Europe.

Mizzima founder Soe Myint welcomed participants and shared the objectives behind the initiative, including developing business opportunities for Asian tea and coffee producers in the Czech Republic and other European markets. Other speakers included a well-known academic and supporter of Myanmar's democracy movement Mr Igor Blazevic. Burmese democracy activists residing in Czech Republic also joined the event.

Visitors examined product samples, learned about their origins and production methods, and discussed potential opportunities for import, distribution, marketing and future cooperation.

The exhibition reflected an approach that combines cultural exchange with practical business development, bringing producers and potential partners into direct contact.

The organisers also expressed appreciation to the friends, colleagues and supporters who attended and helped make the gathering possible.

Coffee becomes art

A distinctive cultural feature of the festival was an exhibition of paintings created using coffee by Susan Chan, an artist from Myanmar.

Rather than working with conventional paints alone, Chan uses coffee as an artistic medium, creating images with different shades of brown and expressive textures.

Her displayed paintings included flowers, natural subjects, a butterfly and a coffee cup, demonstrating how an everyday beverage can also become a medium for visual art.

Chan, a former member of parliament and government minister in Myanmar, has pursued a new chapter in her life as a full-time artist.

Her artistic work also extends to supporting women and children affected by conflict along the Thailand-Myanmar border through art therapy. She uses creative activities to encourage self-expression, emotional well-being and resilience.

Her coffee paintings added another dimension to the festival, connecting tea and coffee not only with agriculture and commerce but also with creativity, culture and social engagement.

Lorraine Artsy, an artist from the Philippines and Gabrio Linari, her husband and collaborator, an Italian growth systems architect joined and spoke at the event.

Looking towards future cooperation

The Prague gathering represented another step towards building connections between Asian producers and European markets.

Beyond introducing individual products, the initiative aims to encourage cooperation among

producers, entrepreneurs, distributors and other interested partners.

For Myanmar and other Asian producers, such opportunities may help establish new commercial relationships while introducing European consumers to the region's agricultural products and cultural traditions.

The festival concluded with appreciation for the participants, friends and colleagues whose presence and encouragement contributed to the event.

The Asian Tea and Coffee Festival in Prague demonstrated how a shared appreciation of tea and coffee and art can bring people together across countries, cultures and business communities.



Artist Lorraine Artsy talks to the gathering.

PHOTO ESSAY: A TASTE OF ASIA IN PRAGUE — TEA, COFFEE, ART AND NEW FRIENDSHIPS

From the tea-growing highlands of Myanmar and Taiwan to the coffee plantations of northern Thailand, a selection of Asian products was presented in the heart of Prague on 23 October 2026.

Held at Opero, the Asian Tea and Coffee Festival brought together friends, colleagues, entrepreneurs and supporters for an afternoon of cultural exchange, product presentations and discussions about connecting Asian producers with European markets.



A gathering in Prague

Participants attend the Asian Tea and Coffee Festival at Opero in Prague on 23 October 2026. The gathering provided an opportunity to introduce products from Myanmar, Thailand and Taiwan while discussing business and cultural connections between Asia and Europe.

Visitors explored different varieties of tea and coffee, examined product samples and promotional materials, and shared ideas about trade, investment and cooperation.

The event also featured coffee paintings by Myanmar artist Susan Chan and Filipino artist Lorraine Artsy whose work brought art and creativity into the gathering.

The following photographs capture highlights of the festival.



Opening remarks

Mizzima founder Soe Myint addresses participants at the festival, sharing the objectives of the initiative and the opportunities for bringing Asian tea and coffee products to European markets.



Friends and supporters

Friends, colleagues and supporters gather at Opero to exchange ideas and offer encouragement for the initiative. Their participation contributed to the welcoming atmosphere of the event.



Exploring business opportunities

Soe Myint discusses the tea and coffee products with participants. The event offered opportunities to explore future cooperation in importing, distributing and promoting Asian agricultural products.



Products from Myanmar

B&B Green Tea, grown in Ywar Ngan, Shan State, Myanmar, is displayed at the Prague festival. The natural green tea was among the Myanmar products introduced to visitors.



Coffee from northern Thailand

Coffee products from Thepsadej Coffee Roaster in Chiang Mai, Thailand, are displayed alongside product information and samples. The Arabica coffee is grown in the highland area of Thepsadej, Doi Saket.



Thai tea varieties

Bluemocha tea products from Thailand, including traditional Thai tea, fresh tea and green tea, are presented at the exhibition, highlighting different styles of tea preparation and consumption.



Taiwanese tea traditions

An assortment of Taiwanese teas, including High Mountain Oolong, Special Milk Oolong and Oriental Beauty Tea, is displayed at the festival. The varieties offer visitors an introduction to Taiwan's distinctive tea traditions.



Coffee paintings by Susan Chan

A collection of coffee paintings by Myanmar artist Susan Chan is displayed at the festival. Using coffee as her artistic medium, she creates floral compositions, natural scenes and other images in warm brown tones.



The artist behind the paintings

Myanmar artist Susan Chan, a former member of parliament and government minister, has turned to art as a full-time profession. She also supports conflict-affected women and children along the Thailand-Myanmar border through art therapy.

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



Rioters on the streets of Paris. Photo: AFP

FRESH CLASHES ROCK FRANCE AS PROTESTERS MARCH ON

Clashes erupted across France on Saturday 24 October as protesters took to the streets, a week after marches that degenerated into violence and prompted a firm security backlash from President Emmanuel Macron, who is scrambling to restore order.

Police arrested nearly 1,000 people as officers faced "an extremely elevated level of violence" from black-clad "ultra-left" extremists, Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said.

Riot police squads fired tear gas at protesters in the capital as well as in Marseille, Lyon, Bordeaux, Lille, Toulouse, Montpellier and Nantes.

Two people were "seriously" injured, Nunez said: one man in Toulouse, who reportedly had fingers blown off, and another person in Clermont-Ferrand. He did not give details of either case.

Authorities had deployed 70,000 security personnel across the country for the new marches, called to protest the cost of living.

The violence came a week after rioting that saw public buildings vandalised, hundreds of shops

looted and 2,700 people arrested, casting a pall over the country six months before an election to choose Macron's successor.

Nunez said Saturday's outcome was more "positive" than a week ago, with more police on the streets acting more rapidly, conducting more pre-demonstration checks and better protecting businesses.

But there was widespread anger at the government over a protest crackdown viewed as an assault on the right to protest.

Police battle 'rioters'

Saturday's demonstrations drew between 410,000 and 800,000 people across the country, according to different estimates by authorities and the organising CGT union.

The main Paris march had between 110,000 and 250,000 attendees, according to those sources.

Macron's government has ordered police to prevent protesters reaching city centres, where shops

are concentrated, and in Paris and some other cities, partial curfews were imposed in certain urban zones.

The French president had ordered non-union demonstrations be banned as "illegitimate".

In Paris, where many shops had boarded up windows to prevent looting, and the Louvre and the Musee d'Orsay museums shut for the day, the main demonstration passed off largely peacefully.

The march had been pushed to the capital's southeast rim under a last-minute order by authorities.

Afterwards, though, clashes broke out as the crowd was dispersing, with Nunez blaming "500 rioters" at the back of the march.

AFP journalists saw police charge several times, blasting tear gas and using batons against some, mostly young, protesters.

"They were just taking people down, you know, beating protesters," one demonstrator bleeding from a baton blow to his face, who gave his first name as David, told AFP.

Ultra-right vs ultra-left

Thousands of protesters in the western city of Nantes broke through lines of police firing tear gas and a water cannon to reach the city centre, an AFP journalist witnessed.

Emma, 23, who came out in the northwest city of Rennes, denounced the bans on demonstrations and the "repression" of protests by high school students demanding better learning conditions.

Marching in the rain at the head of the protest in the northern city of Lille, 47-year-old Delphine insisted: "Neither the president, nor the weather will stop me from demonstrating."

In Lyon, police used tear gas to disperse around 1,000 people gathered in the south of the city.

"If they ban protests, that means we're heading more and more towards a regime that is fascist, that is dictatorial," said one 20-year-old protester in Lyon, who gave only his first name, Silem.

In the southern cities of Cannes and Montpellier, far-right activists clashed with "ultra-left militants", in what authorities said was an unprecedented development.

There was looting on the sidelines of the marches in Marseille and Grenoble, police said.

The Yellow Vests, who staged disruptive protests against Macron eight years ago, called for more demonstrations on October 31 for "the freedom to protest".

Far-left presidential candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon, who marched in Paris, said the movement "is going to repeat itself every week".

Le Pen protest

Tensions were heightened by a rally in the city of Orleans by far-right leader Marine Le Pen's National Rally party to kick off her campaign for the presidential election.

Thousands of counter-protesters chanting anti-fascist slogans marched in the city.

The unrest across France highlighted the febrile political atmosphere ahead of the vote, in which Le Pen leads in surveys.

Inflation in France, particularly affecting the cost of fuel, has surged since the start of the Middle East war in February.

"I'm going to try and instill a bit of optimism," said the four-time presidential hopeful, who has cast herself as the law-and-order candidate, ahead of her first major campaign speech on Sunday.

Protests have also broken out in Italy, Belgium, Spain and Portugal over different issues, yet with some overlap on inflation and education problems.

AFP



BANGLADESH PRESSES INDIA BEFORE GANGES WATER TREATY EXPIRES

With a 30-year Ganges water-sharing treaty with India expiring in December, Bangladesh fears failure to strike a new deal could deepen water shortages, threatening tens of millions of livelihoods.

In Bangladesh's parched Barind region, 72-year-old Bikash Soren remembers when the Ganges river flowing in from neighbouring India carried large boats past his village year-round.

"For almost three months a year, you hardly see the river flowing," the Protestant priest said.

Two farmers killed themselves last season, he added, after dwindling water levels left their rice and wheat crops in tatters.

Shrinking flows in the Ganges have also slashed fish catches in the river, known in Bangladesh as the Padma.

"Where will we find fish now?" said Abu Bakar Siddique, 55, who has switched to fish farming in ponds.

"I used to catch many kinds."

The 2,525-kilometre (1,569-mile) Ganges flows through the world's most populous river basin, home to 655 million people including more than 50 million in Bangladesh, according to the World Bank.

The 1996 treaty, which expires on December 12,

governs dry-season water sharing at India's Farakka Barrage, 20 kilometres (12 miles) upstream of Bangladesh.

But Bangladesh needs a new deal based on "mutual benefit and respect", Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, a prime ministerial adviser who heads a technical committee on water-sharing, told AFP.

Water arguments over 54 cross-border rivers between India and Bangladesh stretch back decades, and the Ganges is among the most important.

Malik Fida A. Khan, a former Bangladeshi member of the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC), the body overseeing water-sharing, said India had built "additional dams" upstream.

"This time, the agreement must include provisions on climate change -- and take the entire river basin into account," he said.

Soured relations

Bangladesh said India had not responded to its request to negotiate a treaty renewal.

New Delhi's foreign ministry said that "discussions regarding river-related matters" are a matter for the JRC commission, which held its last technical talks back in May.

The last officially confirmed ministerial-level JRC meeting was in 2022 -- after a 12-year gap.

And a proposed water-sharing deal for the cross-border Teesta river has been stalled since 2011.

Relations between New Delhi and Dhaka have soured since Bangladesh's ex-leader Sheikh Hasina fled to old ally India, where she remains, following a 2024 uprising.

Hasina, sentenced to death in absentia for crimes against humanity, has vowed to return to Bangladesh from India in December, the month the treaty she signed expires.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Tarique Rahman may also reportedly visit India before the treaty expires, but no visit has been confirmed.

Arguments date back to 1975, when India opened the 2.2-kilometre (1.3-mile) long Farakka Barrage. Bangladesh accused India of diverting most of the water.

The United Nations intervened in the dispute and a deal was agreed in 1977.

But water-sharing arrangements lapsed a decade later, bringing severe consequences, said Sheikh Rokon of Dhaka-based environmental group Riverine People.

"The Ganges suffered during the years without a treaty, and at least three rivers almost dried up," Rokon said.

One was the Gorai, which carries freshwater into the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest and a World Heritage site, helping limit saltwater intrusion as sea levels rise.

Bangladesh's Ganges-Kobadak Irrigation Project, designed to water 955 square kilometres (369 miles squared) of farmland, the country's largest, "became inoperative because of water scarcity", Rokon said.

In May, Dhaka approved the Padma Barrage, a \$2.8-billion project intended to ease shortages and include a 113-megawatt hydropower plant.

'Disastrous'

The 1996 treaty has no automatic extension clause.

"If we fail to reach a deal, I fear the situation will be worse than what we experienced during the years without a treaty," Rokon added.

"Demand for freshwater on both sides has increased significantly."

Even with the treaty in place, the Ganges-Kobadak project has shrunk to 550 square kilometres, according to Bangladeshi state news agency BSS.

"If the river does not carry enough water, the consequences could be disastrous," said Chowdhury Sarwar Jahan, a geology professor at Bangladesh's University of Rajshahi.

Bangladesh's agriculture-dependent economy is already reeling from the impact of climate change, which compounds shifting river flows, alternating dry-season shortages and intense monsoon floods washing away farmland and villages.

In Chapainawabganj district, the river has widened by three kilometres in recent years -- nearly doubling its size -- according to Bangladesh's Water Development Board.

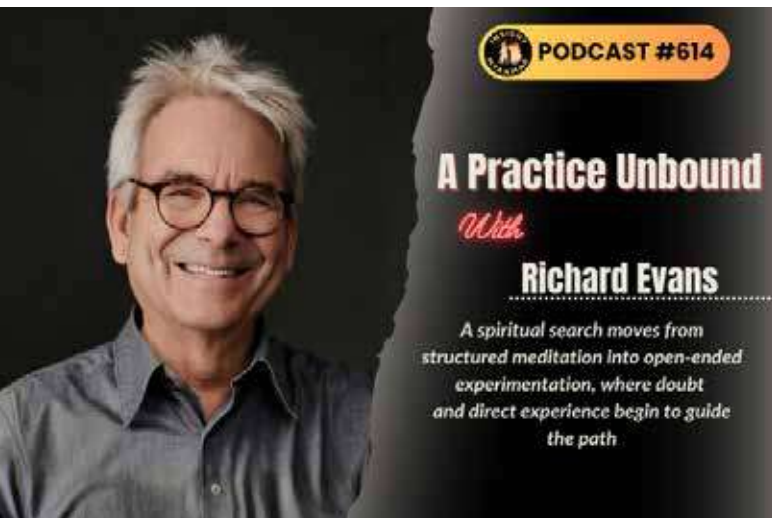
Rehana Khatun, 50, described the "howling sound" as floods destroyed her home in Fielder Bazar village.

"The river turned wild and started swallowing everything along the bank," said Khatun, who now lives in a bamboo shelter.

"And the trauma stays with children long after the waters recede."

AFP





A PRACTICE UNBOUND

“Well, I want to find the truth, or whatever that means,” explains Richard Evans, an architect and meditation practitioner shaped by the S.N. Goenka Vipassana tradition. He describes his life as an effort to understand reality through direct experience rather than belief, and how meditation has become the method through which he pursues that search.

His search began early, when he was a child attending Anglican church services and felt something did not add up. He did not accept what he was being told about God and expected some kind of consequence for that disbelief... yet nothing happened. That moment removed the sense that inherited belief could be trusted. If what he had been told did not hold, then something else had to account for experience, even if he could not yet name it. From that point forward, he began looking for something that could stand on its own. As he grew older, that question stayed with him and became more deliberate. At one point, walking down the street, he asked himself what he actually wanted from life and realized that the answer was not career or stability, but truth itself. That did not resolve the question, but it fixed his direction.

The search became more urgent through his feelings of anxiety. He describes this as not just something he suffers with, but a serious issue in his family, especially on his father’s side. For a long time, his experience of anxiety remained isolating; however, seeing similar patterns in others over time helped him recognize that what he was experiencing was not unique. That recognition, in turn, changed the direction of his search. The question was no longer only what is true, but how to relate to suffering without avoiding it. That process, he says “engages everything about who you are, and you really get down to the essence of yourself. And I find that part deeply satisfying, however difficult to do.”

That need led him to Vipassana meditation in the Goenka tradition. Vipassana was the first, clearly defined method in his search: a practice built around silence, a fixed schedule, and close observation of bodily sensations as they arose and passed. The first course was difficult and often felt unreal, and his general skepticism of organizational structures did not disappear. But his experience introduced something he had not had before—a way to check what he was being told against what he could actually observe.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here: <https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/9/28/episode-614-a-practice-unbound>



MYANMAR JUNTA EXTENDS MARTIAL LAW IN 55 TOWNSHIPS ITS OWN LAWMAKERS SAY REMAIN OUTSIDE NORMAL CONTROL

The Myanmar junta-backed Union Parliament on 18 October extended a state of emergency in 55 townships for another 90 days, as lawmakers supporting the move conceded that administration and the rule of law had yet to return to normal across the affected areas.

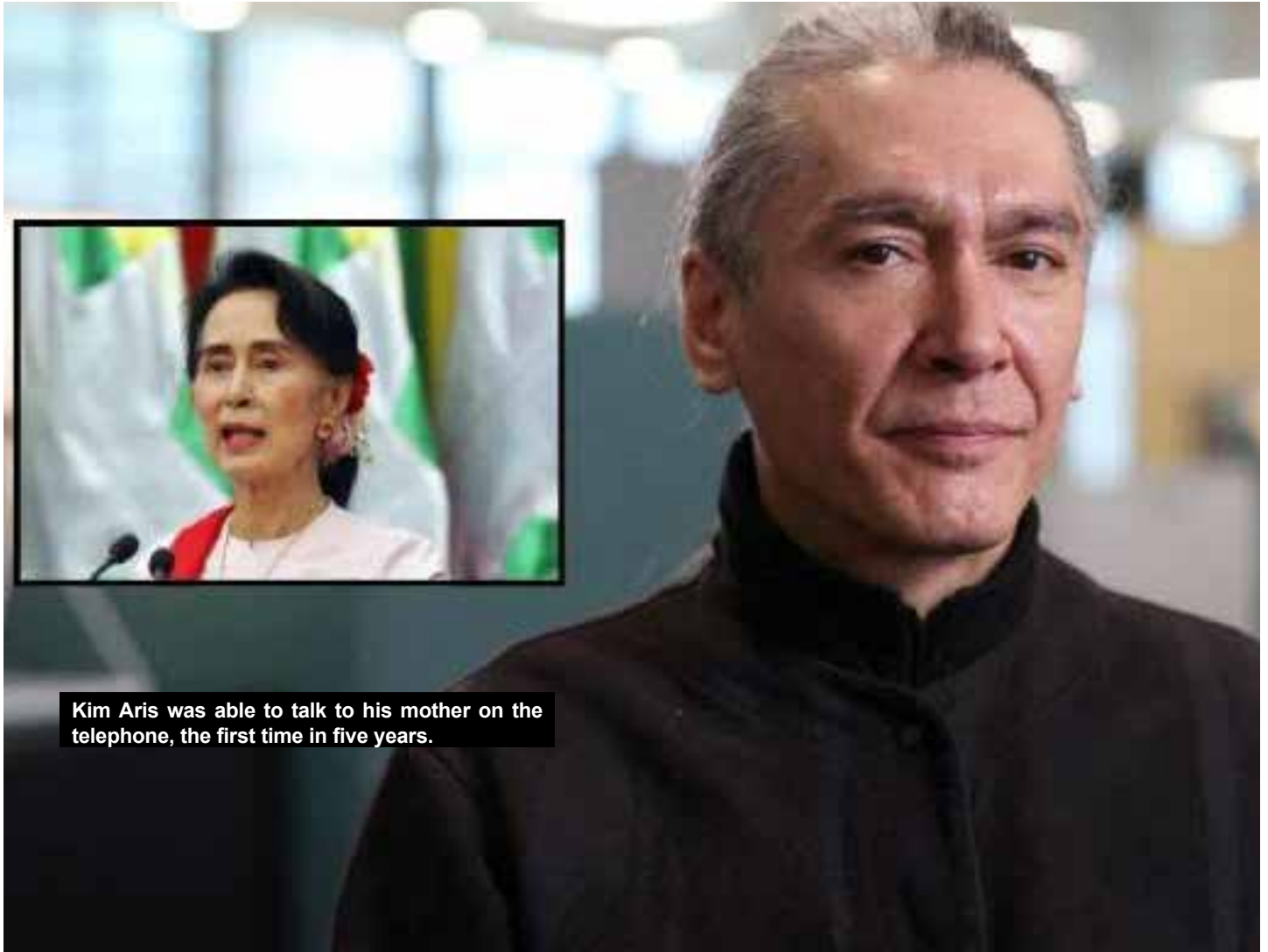
The extension passed without a single objection. The townships lie in Sagaing and Magway regions and in Chin, Rakhine, Karenni, Karen and Shan states. Ngazun Township in Mandalay Region and Kyaukme and Hsipaw townships in northern Shan State were dropped from the list.

Two orders followed on 18 October, according to the junta's Ministry of Information: a martial law order from the Commander-in-Chief's Office and an order with the force of law from the office of junta leader Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, who declared himself "president."

Earlier martial law orders transferred all administrative and judicial powers in the listed townships to the Commander-in-Chief, who may delegate them to regional military commanders.

The list has shrunk slowly. The junta first imposed martial law in 63 townships on 31 July 2025, when it ended the nationwide emergency it had declared after the February 2021 coup. In April 2026, a new declaration covered 60 townships. In July, it dropped Tonzang and Falam in Chin State, citing a return to normal conditions.

Kyaukme and Hsipaw, two of the three townships removed this week, were recaptured by the military from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), an ethnic armed group based in northern Shan State, in October 2025.



Kim Aris was able to talk to his mother on the telephone, the first time in five years.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S FIRST CALL WITH SON IN FIVE YEARS DRAWS ONLINE ATTENTION

Detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi's 20-minute phone call with her son Kim Aris on 22 October, their first in more than five years, drew wide attention on Myanmar social media this week. It followed months of online campaigns demanding proof that the 81-year-old was alive.

The military has held her since the February 2021 coup, which ousted her elected government and sparked a civil war. The call came three days after officials delivered books and a letter from Britain's King Charles III to her in Naypyitaw.

On Facebook, Kim Aris thanks supporters, saying their voices helped make the call possible, but warns that "one conversation is not regular family access."

The president's spokesperson posted photos of the call on Telegram, showing Suu Kyi beneath a calendar marked with the date. A pro-military news page takes a different line, criticising Kim Aris for not mentioning the charges against his mother.

Speaking to reporters after the call, Kim Aris said his mother sounded "fairly healthy" but that they discussed only family matters, knowing the call was recorded.

Suu Kyi spent nearly 15 years under house arrest between 1989 and 2010. She was returned to house arrest in April, after an election made coup leader Min Aung Hlaing president.

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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