

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

## SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

**Former Myanmar  
junta prisoner  
Sean Turnell  
reveals new book  
on NLD economic  
reform period**



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Analysis & Insight



# DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

# MYANMAR'S NUG ADDRESSES MINORITY COMMUNITY RIGHTS

**T**he Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government (NUG) appears to have embraced a thorny subject that so often divides the Myanmar community.

Responding on 9 July to the UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrew's recent report on human rights in Myanmar, the NUG appears to say the right thing in relation to racial and religious division that dogs the country.

To quote the NUG report: "In his presentation to the Council, the Special Rapporteur gave deserved attention to the situation in Rakhine State, particularly the plight of the Rohingya people. To Mr Andrews, forced conscription, forced displacement and the dire humanitarian situation in Rakhine State carry 'echoes of the lead-up to genocidal violence in 2016 and 2017'.

"The National Unity Government is fully committed to ensuring that the horrendous atrocities committed against minority communities in Myanmar, including the Rohingya, Rakhine, and others in Rakhine State, are never repeated. All attempts to foment divisions between ethnic communities must end. We will intensify our efforts to build trust, mutual respect, understanding and tolerance."

The NUG's public proclamation should be welcomed.

An anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya sentiment is a divisive element amidst some elements of Myanmar society and the Myanmar military junta appears to be pulling out the stops to worsen the

situation in the embattled Rakhine State. The Arakan Army has also muddied the waters in their "mixed treatment" of Rohingya communities as they battle to take over Rakhine State as an autonomous territory – their *raison d'être*. The AA has tried to tidy up its public relations after allegations were made about burning down Rohingya villages in the north of the state, but there are still reasons for concern.

Whether it is a visionary or a pragmatic stance, the decision by the NUG to embrace an "inclusive approach" to Myanmar's minorities is a wise decision, particularly for a post-military junta future, given the country is a mosaic of ethnic and religious groups, plagued at times by division. International court cases against the Myanmar military remain in play, accusing them of genocide and crimes against humanity.

The NUG's public stance, running counter to the junta's "divide-and-rule" strategy, is crucially important if this leading resistance body wants to hold its head high and play the key role in the development of a truly democratic, federal union and maintain the high ground in the post-junta era.

Exasperating racial, religious and gender divisions should be anathema in a future, free and democratic Myanmar.

## EDITORIAL

# mizzima

WEEKLY

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Australian economic advisor Sean Turnell with Aung San Suu Kyi during Myanmar's brief "democratic" period. Photo: Supplied

# SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

**FORMER MYANMAR JUNTA PRISONER SEAN TURNELL REVEALS NEW BOOK ON NLD ECONOMIC REFORM PERIOD**

**S**ean Turnell, an Australian economist and former economic advisor to Aung San Suu Kyi, may be safely back in Australia after 650 days' incarceration in Myanmar jails but the junta's legal team are nipping at his heels.

In an interview with Mizzima, Turnell reveals the upset Myanmar junta and crony bankers are threatening him with litigation as he boldly steps forward with a new book in the wake of his best-seller "An Unlikely Prisoner" – detailing his arrest, interrogation, and sentencing in Myanmar on trumped up spying charges.

With his new book, Turnell is clearly on a mission to detail Myanmar's brief window of economic reform under the National League for Democracy (NLD) government 2015-2021 before the curtain came down in a military coup. He hopes to set the record straight and is uniquely qualified to do so as he had his hand on the tiller during the process.

In the interview, Turnell reveals an interesting insight into Myanmar and its people and how an Australian professor got caught up in the Myanmar military's crosshairs.

**Mizzima: Hi, Sean, thanks for the opportunity to talk to you. Now maybe we could start with a question focused on the present. You posted on Facebook recently that the Myanmar junta and their crony banking friends are using international law firms to threaten you into silence. What's this about?**

**Sean Turnell:** Yeah, it's an interesting story.

Ever since I got back (to Australia), I came to the attention firstly of the Myanmar regime, who were incredibly unhappy that I was sort of blowing the whistle on them and the conditions in which I was held. But then as I started to write more analytical pieces about the country's finances and the role of Myanmar's banks, I suddenly got these letters from international law firms acting on behalf of some of Myanmar's crony banks, basically trying to shut me up. And this has happened again and again.

And so I decided just the other day that, you know, I've just got to go public on this. I can't go public, unfortunately, on the bank or the law firm involved, because in fact, that is part of the threat. But I thought the broader issue is one that needs to be drawn attention to, basically.



And since doing that, I found out that there are other people who have likewise faced this practice. So, yeah, it's an interesting one. You know, the terrible irony of it, you know, that here's a regime and people connected to them who are anything but law abiding, who are sort of renegades from the international system.

And yet they use Western law firms to try and shut people up who are critiquing them. So, the ironies abound. But I just thought it was time to draw people's attention to it, even though I can't mention them individually by name, but at least I can just alert people

that this sort of thing is going on.

**Mizzima: Okay. And technically, the Myanmar junta has removed the pardon it gave you. Is that right?**

**Sean Turnell:** Yeah, it sure did.

I don't know what they were thinking. Somehow, Min Aung Hlaing seems to have had the idea that I wouldn't tell anyone about what happened to me. You know, the most extraordinary thing.

And when I was released, I signed nothing. You know, I was under no legal compunction to be silent or anything like that. So, I had no desire to be silent either when I got home.

So, yeah, but anyway, he seems to have been particularly affronted by this and personally upset, I'm told, and revoked the pardon. So, there it goes. I suppose the one practical thing for me is that, of course, I can't be in Myanmar anytime soon.

I need to avoid the place. Right.

**Mizzima: So, that's the only way it affects you directly, isn't it?**

**Sean Turnell:** That's right. Yeah. Yeah, that's right.

And also, you know, some other places in the world that might be aligned to them. So, it has clipped my wings a little bit. But to be frank, probably the sort of countries for which it would be an issue, not particularly the ones I'd want to be in anyway.

But there you have it.

**Mizzima: And with regard to this threat of litigation, is this tied in with your plans for a new book?**

**Sean Turnell:** It is. It's a bit strange, though, because the book actually doesn't really deal with the issues that might concern these people.

But I think they get anxious whenever I write something. So, as



Sean Turnell with Burmese economist Hla Myint - during happier times.  
Photo: Supplied



I say, these letters are quite common. I get them any time that something is coming up.

So, my latest book is coming out in a month or two. And I think that sort of provoked them into action. But, yeah, it's become a little bit routine, as I say.

But at the same time, something that I really wanted to let people know about, because it's yet another avenue through which the regime is sort of extending, you know, trying to control people, even outside Myanmar.

**Mizzima: And what's the main message of your new book?**

**Sean Turnell:** Well, essentially, it's the story of economic reform in Myanmar under the Aung San Suu Kyi or NLD (National League for Democracy) government. I'm really worried, to be honest, since coming out, that the story of what that government was trying to do is a bit lost.

You know, there's what I think the narrative is all about, and rightly should be about the coup and the terrible abuses happening now. But the story of that government (NLD government), particularly on the economic front, is of deep and profound economic reforms. Some of those reforms, in fact, I think,

discomforted the military very greatly and the cronies connected to them.

So, it's a story that's not without relevance to the coup and all that has come after it. But, yeah, I really feared that it was going to be lost. And I think I wanted to make sure that the story went on the record.

Also, I wanted to pay tribute to my Myanmar friends who were very much the very brave drivers of these reforms. It was brilliant stuff, quite frankly, and I really wanted to pay tribute to them. And I didn't want their contributions to be forgotten.

**Mizzima: Right. Obviously, this follows on from your book, Fiery Dragons, doesn't it? I mean, is it a logical follow up book?**

**Sean Turnell:** Yeah, I think it is in a way, because, you know, I wrote Fiery Dragons when I was an academic and, you know, studying Myanmar in great detail and all that.

But in some ways, this new book, which is called "The Best Laid Plans", is really after I put my money where my mouth was, you know, I was given an opportunity to try and apply some of the ideas that were around about how to reform Myanmar's economy. So, this is really the story of how we tried to do that. It's



not a story with a happy ending, of course, because the coup took place.

But it's also very much a story of a great struggle. And so, you know, for every victory we made on the reform journey, we had at least one defeat. So, it was always a struggle, you know, all the way through.

And it's not in any way an objective story, I hasten to add. It's very much just the story of what we were trying to do. Half of it, you know, as I mentioned, never came off anyway.

So, it's very, very subjective. But I just wanted to get on the record. Well, this is what we were trying to do.

This is the motivation. This is who were driving it. This is the sort of resistance that we encountered.

And these were some of the outcomes.

**Mizzima: Right, I guess given the 2021 military coup, Myanmar is actually in uncharted waters here. Where's Myanmar's economy headed at this moment?**

**Sean Turnell:** Yeah, into the abyss. I'm really sad to say. And I think you've used exactly the right expression, that this is uncharted.

You know, the current regime, the SAC (State Administration Council) regime, have abandoned, it seems to me, any pretense at sort of economic management for any purpose other than using the economy to extract resources, you know, for their own survival. If you look at all the policies they announced these days, none of them have got to do with trying to improve Myanmar's GDP or living standards or agricultural output or anything like that. It's all about extracting resources to buy munitions and advance weaponry.

And that, of course, usually means trying to get foreign exchange. And so, you know, you look at all the policies, the import restrictions, the restrictions on the earnings of exporters, the restrictions on remittances, there are various exactions on the banking system, etc. But it all has that one aim which is how can they yield as much foreign exchange as possible from the economy, then in order to buy military equipment and munitions, as I mentioned, from places like China and Russia and so on.

So, it's interesting. I think it's almost to the stage where I think we can say that Myanmar doesn't have an economic policy. You know, the entire economy, as far as the regime is concerned, is a war economy.

And it's really just an arena to extract resources from.

**Mizzima: Right. And so what this suggests is that there's no possibility of reform until a democratically-elected government and peace is in place in the country, right?**

**Sean Turnell:** Yeah, I think that's absolutely right, mate, particularly the sort of bestial regime that we've got at the moment, you know, that really is facing, I mean, you use that wonderful expression, the abyss.

So, they're facing into a different sort of abyss. And I think they're using the economy to try and avoid that. And that is really their only objective.

So, yeah, I think, you know, once again, we're almost in a realm where to talk about economic policy and so on is almost irrelevant, because I think their vision is so incredibly narrow and just about their own survival that the usual metrics, the usual statistics, the usual analytics just don't have any relevance.

As I say, in Myanmar today, it's actually interesting.

**Mizzima: And if you look at, say, for example, the recent World Bank report on the economy in Myanmar, if you read it as somebody who doesn't understand Myanmar, you would almost think, well, they're going through a little bit of a difficult period. But things are still sort of ticking over. But is it in fact a basket case?**

**Sean Turnell:** Yeah, I think so.

Unfortunately, I think you're absolutely right. I think if you didn't know about Myanmar, you'd look at this and think, oh, well, look, it's a developing country. It's a very poor country trying to struggle its way through and things are not going well and so on.

But you would think that, nonetheless, it has a government that's trying with some sort of development focus, some sort of idea of where they want the economy in the country to be, where that's just not the case. You know, this is a regime that doesn't have a development focus, that that is not the purpose of the of the economy at the moment. Again, as I say, the focus is really just incredibly short term.

And so those usual narratives, the sort that we typically read in reports by the World Bank, the IMF, Asian Development Bank and so on, they really don't have any relevance to a country like Myanmar at the moment where it really is just a story of regime and even individual leadership survival.

**Mizzima: Right. Now, in your book, "An Unlikely Prisoner", you stress you don't hate Myanmar. It's just that you ended up spending 650 horrifying days**

## **behind bars on trumped up charges. So what's your approach to Myanmar today?**

**Sean Turnell:** Yeah, no. So, in fact, I love the country.

And in fact, my love for Myanmar, I think, was enhanced by the time that I spent in the prison, funnily enough, because and I guess for the same reason that we've been talking about. And that is that the country, unfortunately, is captured by a very narrow elite of the country's military. But for the average Burmese citizen, firstly, they are the number one and first victims, and then later people like me become victims as well.

But I was protected. I survived simply because of the help of Myanmar people who, as I say, are the first and primary victims of that regime. And I guess my experiences of Burmese people being firstly incredibly courageous and then secondly, but linked to that, incredibly generous, you know, because again and again and again, I encountered people in conditions far worse than me who had no chance of escaping.

Whose families outside the prison were being persecuted. All of that. I didn't have to worry about any of that.

And yet they extended incredible generosity to me again and again and again. So, yeah, so to me, the ledger, if you like, of Burmese people is just so overwhelmingly positive that, yeah, my appreciation of the people in the country is still one of profound love, even though. Not even though, I am so saddened by the fact that a group of people who I think are the nicest in the world are being ruled over by the most terrible people in the world.

It seems something is cosmically out of order in that structure. But that's where it is, alas.

## **Mizzima: Right. Why do you think the junta authorities arrested you and sentenced you? I mean, what was their purpose?**

**Sean Turnell:** Yeah, a number of things. I think, number one, they wanted to use me to get at others. You know, I think they, as we know, they've always had this narrative, particularly about Suu Kyi, but I think the NLD more broadly, that somehow they're beholden to foreign interests and all of that.

And, you know, that the military are "the only patriots". And so I think what they wanted to try and do is paint a story that I was some sort of master spy pulling the strings of Aung San Suu Kyi and the ministers and all of that. And that, you know, that they were just sort of dupes in my hands and so on, which is, you know, to anyone who knows me, knows Suu Kyi or knows the

ministers would know how utterly absurd that was.

But I think that was the story. So, I think they wanted to paint something along those lines and exploit xenophobia that they thought existed amongst the Burmese people, which I don't think it does, by the way. But, nonetheless, I think that's their direction that they were going.

So that's number one. The second, I think, does relate to the economic reforms that we were trying to put in place. And those reforms were not only about making Myanmar a more prosperous place, but it actually was to try and lever the military and the cronies out of the economy.

I mean, the reforms were liberal, but liberal not just in terms of getting better outcomes, but at structural transformation. You know, how could we make Myanmar a more normal country where the focus of economic activity was things like living standards and I guess just general prosperity? And so they hated that so many of the policies that were being put in place were about injecting new competition, creating new opportunities for people outside the old power structure, outside the old military crony elite. So, I think they were upset about that and therefore upset about me.

So quite personally, I think, and I mentioned the banks again and again, I think that they were some of the leading figures in this because, you know, some of the reforms on that side of things were really starting to bite. So I think there was a bit of a personal element as well. And then the final thing I think, but not to be dismissed easily, I think I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I was sort of the most prominent foreigner who was there to be caught. So, I think I was there for the taking, basically. So, I think that determined who it was, perhaps, rather than that they were going to grab some prominent foreigner, which I think they probably always had in mind.

## **Mizzima: Okay. You could, for example, as soon as the coup had happened, ... have rushed off to the Australian embassy or gone to the airport?**

**Sean Turnell:** It's an interesting one, because it obviously was on my mind at the time, you know, and I think to be honest, I'm a little bit at fault.

I dilly-dallied around a little bit, mainly because it seems ridiculous for me to say this now. But part of it, I felt that I didn't just want to run out on my Burmese friends, even though, you know, there was little that I could do for them. Although there were some things we could do in those first few days after the coup.

But, I didn't want to just get out, if you know what I mean. I'm not sure I could have got out anyway, I hasten to add, because, of course, one of the things we forget now is that this is still COVID. There were no regular flights out.

There were only those very limited flights for people with special tickets and special reasons to move and all that. So, it wouldn't have been easy. But as I say, I think I probably should have tried to enforce the issue very early on or even just got in the car and drove to the border or, you know, something like that.

But anyway, I didn't do that until a few days afterwards, when it then it became sort of obvious that that someone like me was going to be really vulnerable and it was time to get out. But, yeah, by then it was too late.

**Mizzima: Right. Your arrest and incarceration stirred up so much bad publicity for the junta. Do you think they made a mistake in doing this?**

**Sean Turnell:** I think they made a huge mistake. I think that all the way through.

The only thing is, I thought that right at the beginning, and it gave me a little bit of false optimism, to be honest, because I thought this is such bad publicity for them. And particularly, remember, in those early days after the coup, the initial narrative that the regime wanted to spread was that they were still going to continue with economic reforms. You know, their initial thing was, oh, look, you know, we've come in.

We're going to clean up the mess and get sort of a degree of control, but we're going to continue moving the country forward economically and all that. So, arresting someone like me who was so known on the economic side just didn't make any sense. And it could only upset the West, if you like, and many other countries that were likely investors.

So, yeah, it didn't make any sense at all. But it did, as I say, give me a little bit of false optimism at the start, because I remember thinking even after the arrest, I thought, you know, they're going to release me soon. This doesn't make any sense, even for them, you know.

And I was always reliant on them knowing their own interests and thinking, well they can't keep me too long because it's in their interest to get the international community off their back. So, surely they'll release me. But, of course, as the days, weeks, months and ultimately years went by, yeah, that wasn't the case.

**Mizzima: Right. A more commonsense approach would have been maybe the junta questions you and then they expel you.**

**Sean Turnell:** Absolutely, mate. Yeah. I really thought that that's what they would do, to scare me, scare other international people into not interfering and all the rest of it.

And then just deport me straight out of the country. And, you know, good riddance sort of thing was what I thought they would do. But instead they kept me, which, of course, they just made for a country like Australia particularly, which doesn't have that much skin in the game in terms of individuals.

You know, it just meant that everything they did was a constant story in Australia. You know, whatever happened in Myanmar, the local press, who were wonderful here in Australia, would then just link it to my continued imprisonment. So, yeah, so it just made a continual stream of bad press.

It just didn't make any sense at all. But it didn't stop them, just as it doesn't stop them these days.

**Mizzima: Right. No, I think obviously they misjudged the situation in terms of the fact that I think they probably thought they'd get a response from the public to the coup that was similar to what happened maybe in the 80s or the early 90s and that things would then get back to normal. So, I think they misjudged things. In those terms, it doesn't even make sense, locking you up, in fact.**

**Sean Turnell:** Yeah, yeah. No, absolutely, mate. And I agree with you completely.

It's a broader context of them just misreading the situation, which, you know, a line that I like that's out and about these days is that this is a "failed coup". And I think it's absolutely right. It's a coup still in progress, which hasn't reached its end point, but the end point does seem to be failure rather than success.

**Mizzima: Right. Now, you've covered the story of your imprisonment in depth in your book, "An Unlikely Prisoner". What actually kept you going during those long days of incarceration?**

**Sean Turnell:** Yeah, a few things kept me going.

I think, firstly, the support from home, from my wife, my dad, my sister, family, things like that, and then support from everyone, basically. It's just remarkable to me. And I still find every day since I've come out, I find out something new about what people were doing for

me while I was inside.

But I knew some of that while I was inside. So, that was really incredibly helpful. Equally or even more important, I suppose, again, something I've alluded to earlier, the incredible support of Burmese people inside (prison) was just inspirational.

And I would look at them, be inspired by them, as well as help in all sorts of practical ways. So, you know, that kept me going as well. Then some other things.

I'm a real bookworm, always have been. Books have been my entire life. The reason I exist is to read, basically.

And so once I was able to get books, but mind you, that was only after about three months in, then I could just read and read and read and read. And, you know, and the books inspired me, thinking about them inspired me. Yeah.

So that's a very large part of the story as well, of psychological survival, having books, reading them, but then also just thinking about them, memorising them, things like that. Because I think that the psychological aspect to me is probably more important than the physical side, up to a point, of course, as long as you've got actual enough sustenance and so on, which, of course, some people have not had. But once that's out of the way, I think the psychological issues are probably more difficult to deal with day to day.

So, if you've got some way of coping with that, then I think you can get through it.

**Mizzima: Right. What was the hardest part of being in prison?**

**Sean Turnell:** I think the hardest part was definitely that those first few months when I was just locked in solitary in this box, as I call it, in a police station that was just outside the walls of Insein Prison. So, I was totally alone with absolutely nothing, nothing to read, nothing to keep my mind anywhere but, you know, being in that cell. So, I had to really reach deep into my own psychological resources on that, which, and this is probably not been helpful for much of the rest of my life.

But here it came to the fore in that I have a very rich imagination that I'm able to reach into and come up with stories. And it's usually silly stuff, you know, imagine different endings to sporting events or, I don't know, even like political terms of office and coming up with, as I say, all sorts of narratives that I can just run with and keep my mind occupied. So, I think in those periods, without anything at all, those were the most

difficult times.

But, yeah, where you're just sort of thrown on resources that you may or may not have, you know, depending on who you are and so on. And I think in this case, I was lucky. But, yeah, but touch and go, to be honest, because even though I was able to use that, it didn't take much to send you off into a spiral, you know, and which you then try to recover from.

But, yeah, so I think those times of complete isolation and also, I suppose, in that early period as well, because at that point I hadn't even been charged, there was no real direction where things were going. It became apparent after a while that I was just going to be there for a long time. But there didn't seem to be any signpost I could look for, for when it would end.

So, yeah, those first couple of months were the worst, I think.

**Mizzima: Now, many Burmese political prisoners remain in jail. Some of them you know personally. What's your message regarding them?**

**Sean Turnell:** Oh, well, I suppose my message to people outside of just how admirable these people are, the courage of them is incredible. The whole time I was there - so nearly two years - I never saw a single instance, not one, of anyone sort of cracking under the pressure of it all.

The incredible solidarity and goodwill I saw. I mean, occasionally little tensions would arise, but not much. You know, I was just gobsmacked at the way that people looked out for each other in all sorts of ways.

Again, practical, but socially, psychologically, spiritually and all of that. So, yeah, just utterly inspiring. They were and are.

And, as I mentioned earlier, their situation was much worse than mine, because, I mentioned the worst times for me was when I thought things were not going in any particular direction and there didn't seem to be an end point. But of course, they have to live that all the time. You know, I knew that I had an entire government, an entire country behind me, as well as, you know, many other countries.

And they don't have that at all. Their only support is their families outside. And those families are consistently being harassed and all that by the regime outside.

Many of them are poor and so on as well. So, I'm just lost in admiration for them. And, yeah, these people are so admirable.

And I think I just took a real positive message out of their energy, out of their courage. And it gives me hope if I think about it now, just in terms of these people will feature in the country's rebuilding, just as, you know, all the people resisting the regime more broadly are. And that gives me confidence because these are just top-quality people, if I can put it that way.

**Mizzima: Right. Now you're free, what are you focused on?**

**Sean Turnell:** Good question.

So, my initial focus was to write that book "An Unlikely Prisoner". But both are sort of a little bit of a catharsis to me to tell the story. And above all, I think to tell the story and this is the hint to the title, of course, to tell a story that would resonate with people outside Myanmar.

Because, unfortunately, in countries like Australia, Europe, America and so on, you know, people don't know very much about Myanmar. They often have trouble identifying with it. It seems a place a long way away and all the rest of it.

But I think because my story was, again, you know, as per the title, just so unlikely. I think people could sort of identify with that because people who know me will know that I'm barely over five foot. I was 57 years old when I was arrested.

I was an academic. I was about the most harmless person you could imagine. And I think the idea that I would be locked up by this regime and put in this prison and all that, I think just sent an incredible message to people around the world that as to the nature of this regime.

So, yeah. So, the first thing to do was to write that book, get the story across, pay tribute to my fellow prisoners and the Burmese people more broadly. But also to get the message across of the horror of what was going on in Myanmar and the extraordinary corners that it could reach if it could get someone like me.

So, above all, I wanted to do that. Then I think, secondly, look at the economics and try to continue the usual thing of trying to work out what's going on, trying to document the descent of the country and to critique that.

And even though that I think the regime's mishandling of the economy has been so bad that there is no narrative that really needs to be pushed on, because I suppose I was a little bit worried when I first got out. I thought, gee, is this regime getting the applause for managing the economy or something, you

know, and the Mussolini thing, you know, they're not very nice, but they're making the trains run on time. Well, of course they're not.

It's a complete catastrophe. And I don't think I've ever seen a single serious suggestion that anything they're doing is good for the economy. So, I guess that part of an objective hasn't loomed large because this regime just condemns themselves daily by their mismanagement.

But I was initially concerned to do that. As I mentioned with his latest book, I want to get across the story of economic reform under the NLD government. I didn't want that story to disappear to history.

So, I wanted to do that. And other than that, to be honest, I just want to assist my friends in Myanmar. That's really it now, just to keep plugging away in whatever capacity I can.

The struggle is theirs and they're the ones who will win it. But, you know, anything I can do is sort of what I want to do. And so for the foreseeable future, I think that's what I'll be trying to do.

**Mizzima: How do you view the future of Myanmar?**

**Sean Turnell:** Well, it's dark at the moment and I think more horrors are to come. But to me, there is light at the end of the tunnel in the sense that this regime is doomed, I think, and it is only a matter of time. But I don't want to sound too sanguine or too naïve about that as they will cling on to the end. And as I say they will visit more horror upon the country in their departure. So, I am not at all blasé about what's ahead. But to me the end point is clear that they will fail – I think everything points to it – I'm not a military expert at all so wouldn't venture an opinion on that. But people who I have come to respect who do commentate on that would suggest the military story is all going one way. But what I can talk about is the economy, finances and all that, and that backs up the military story, that this is a regime that is absolutely desperate and, as we were talking earlier, that all the economic policy is focused on survival now.

And they are doing the sorts of things that regimes do when they are in their death spiral. There again, it is all short term, medium term, a lot of their stuff is destructive. By every announcement, they make the place, a place where no one will invest, and yet they will do that because they want whatever it is they are stealing or expropriating, they need it and they want it now.

So, if I look at that, everything is pointing towards regime collapse, there are horrors to come, but after that, again, I don't want to come across as being too naïve or too optimistic, too sunny-side-up and all the rest of it. But just looking at the courage I saw in prison, the courage, the incredible nous the young people have, in particular outside of Myanmar, coming up with all sorts of plans for the economy and those sort of things, post-regime, I am quite confident that things will be different this time. And I would back that up to even in comparison to what happened before, back before the NLD period. If I look around and see the international situation now, things the Burmese diaspora are doing, the things the young people are doing to oppose this regime, it just gives me immense confidence, they do seem to be different and so I am hopeful come regime collapse that the ultimate outcome will be much different as well.

**Mizzima:** Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Sean Turnell:** I don't think so, mate. Except to just urge – to the extent that anyone would listen to me – for the rest of the international community to pay attention

to Myanmar as it is terribly worrying to us all. We care about the country and its people, the way Myanmar and its issues have just fallen down the league table of international interest. The horrors in Myanmar are just daily and it will seldom be reported but I would like to think the international community might pay a little more attention to the place, because just with a little bit of support the opposition to the Myanmar regime would bring about their end quite quickly.

**Mizzima:** Well thanks Sean. It has been good to talk to you and good luck with the new book. Do keep us updated on that.

**Sean Turnell:** Thanks very much.

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**HOTELS CAPTURED** - The high-end hotels on Ngapali beach have been captured by the Arakan Army - but it is unclear as to what they plan to do with them. Photo: Danny Mizo

# ARAKAN ARMY INTENSIFIES NORTH & SOUTH RAKHINE ASSAULT



The Arakan Army is making substantial progress in Rakhine State, including the capture of the Ngapali beach resort, the Thandwe airport and positions in the north.

On July 3, the Arakan Army (AA) launched a significant offensive against five positions held by the junta troops in Maungdaw township in northern Rakhine State. The skirmishes began at 3 pm and continued until the morning of July 6, persisting even in torrential rain. The intensity of the AA's offensive led to wounded junta soldiers being evacuated via marine routes, while some conscripted Rohingya soldiers from the State Administration Council (SAC) side surrendered to the AA.

In a related incident, SAC troops stationed near the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) warehouse looted supplies and instructed Rohingya youths to sell cheaply the stolen goods to local people. These troops also barred ICRC security staff from inspecting the warehouse.

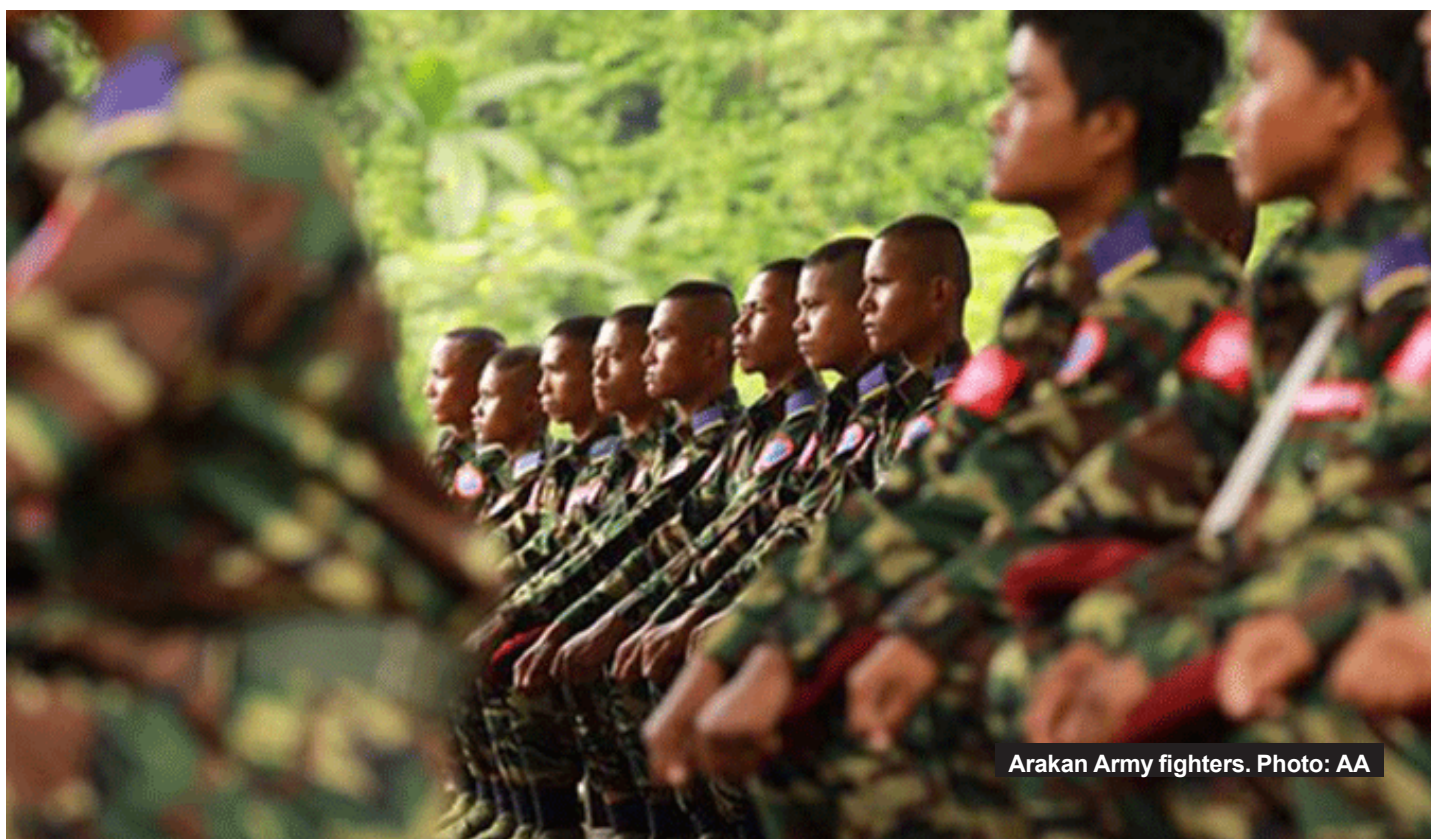
On the morning of July 4, SAC troops, retreating from Hka La Ya (55), killed a father and son in Gyaketaw ward in Thandwe township, after the civilians stated they were unfamiliar with operating a motorboat to transport the retreating soldiers to the opposite bank,

where the SAC navy is based. That afternoon, the AA raided the SAC's temporary base in Gyaketaw, resulting in a skirmish that lasted for one hour.

Meanwhile, a SAC strategic force has taken up a position at Thandwe prison on the Rakhine coast, with the strategy commander reportedly providing targets for the air force to bomb civilian wards. The presence of junta forces at the prison has prevented family members from visiting and supporting prisoners for two weeks.

On July 7, the AA released a statement detailing their ongoing military operations. The statement indicated that the AA is targeting the remaining SAC headquarters of the Western Command, strategic posts, battalions, and Border Guard Police to eliminate junta troops from Rakhine State. According to the statement, the AA seized No. (566) Light Infantry Battalion on June 27 and Thandwe Airport on July 5. Throughout these months-long battles, the AA claims to have captured more than 400 bodies of SAC troops along with their weapons. AA became the first revolutionary force to seize an airport in Myanmar.

Information as of July 14, indicates the AA have also managed to capture the Ngapali beach front, including the hotels and restaurants in the area.



Arakan Army fighters. Photo: AA

In Ann township, where the Western Military Command headquarters is located, the AA seized the SAC strategic post (called Tawhein Taung) on June 23, after two months of offensive operations that began on April 15. In Maungdaw township, the AA seized the No. 2 Border Guard Police headquarters, where both Border Guard police and Light Infantry soldiers resisted the AA's advance. In this battle, the AA reportedly confiscated 350 bodies of SAC troops and their weapons. The AA statement also paid tribute to their fallen and wounded soldiers, though it did not specify their numbers.

The AA's continued offensive efforts highlight the escalating conflict in Rakhine State, underscoring the severe humanitarian and security challenges faced by the region.

## **NIGHTTIME RAIDS TO SEIZE CONSCRIPTS**

As the military junta faces increasing defeats on the frontlines, the forced recruitment of soldiers has intensified across Myanmar. Local authorities from Monywa have resorted to enforcing the colonial-era Guest List law to justify nighttime raids, aiming to conscript youths and even women into the military.

Residents report that authorities have been using the pretext of checking the Guest List to enter homes. A local resident recounted, "They (authorities) come at night, claiming they need to check the guest list. We have to open the door, or they will throw stones at the house. They take youths if they find them inside. This will continue until they reach their target of 60 people in Monywa."

The situation has created a climate of fear and insecurity among the youth of Monywa, especially as authorities also target daily commuters for conscription. Attempts by family members to rescue their children have been met with refusal by officials who say: "We only want manpower not money (bribes)".

In the Naypyidaw region, the families of conscription-listed youths face severe threats and intimidation. One family was warned that failure to produce their son would result in a three-year prison sentence. Following this warning, the family received visits from over ten

military and police personnel, including a Police Major, who informed them that a warrant had been issued for the youth avoiding the draft. The Police Major also threatened to seal the family's home and seized their household registration document (Form 66). During negotiations with the authorities at the police station, a family member observed at least 15 other families facing similar threats and coercion.

On the other hand, the first batch of conscripted soldiers completed their military training on June 28 and were immediately deployed to various frontlines across the country. Reports indicate that these soldiers are being deprived of basic rights, such as being denied leave to attend close relatives' funerals.

## **OPERATION 1027 SECOND WAVE SEES FURTHER PROGRESS**

The resumed Operation 1027, referred to as the "Second Wave" has seen significant progress over the last week. The TNLA-led revolutionary forces seized Naungkhio city by capturing the SAC Regiment, No. (606) Artillery Battalion on July 10. The city remains quiet and free of skirmishes as of July 11, marking a notable turning point in the ongoing Operation 1027.

The Mandalay-PDF, involved in the Naungkhio operation, revealed a cache of captured weapons, including rifles, missiles, and anti-air guns, on July 11.

In a series of subsequent actions, TNLA forces have sealed over 20 properties associated with junta army officials, police officers, and pro-junta militias in the seized city. Furthermore, around 60 individuals suspected of being informers for the SAC have been detained, and several SAC departmental offices, ward administrative offices, and a veteran office have been sealed.

Following the successful seizure of Naungkhio, revolutionary forces shifted their focus to Mongmit and Tangyan townships by capturing some posts of the SAC. However, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) sent thousands of its troops to Tangyan to prevent a potential war between the junta and revolutionary forces.

During the assault on the Naugnkhio posts, junta troops retaliated with artillery fire on civilian wards, resulting in over 10 civilian deaths and nine injuries, and causing significant destruction to two monasteries and nine houses. Similarly, the urban battle between the MNDAA and junta troops in Lashio has also led to heavy civilian casualties, with 21 deaths and at least 34 injuries reported.

In another significant development concerning Operation 1027, the Mandalay People's Defence Force or MDY-PDF and allied forces have captured eleven military and police posts in Singu township, Mandalay region. The clashes led to the capture of a Lieutenant Colonel and 14 of his soldiers, while some SAC-armed militias (called Pyu Saw Htee) surrendered to MDY-PDF. In Madaya township, MDY-PDF seized a total of 25 military and police posts over two weeks of intense battles. In Mogok township, the revolutionary forces have secured the western part of the town and are now advancing on the eastern part.

### MOST POPULAR VIDEOS

Please find the most popular Mizzima Burmese videos of the last week:

The war council continues to lose between Rakhine and North Shan offensives (Editorial Talk)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psyZEX0ScDY>

Second wave of 1027 towards the interior of the War Council

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL1IJC3JBik>

Why is China bringing out former military dictators? Common Ground (EP-49)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sB8wJixTfns>

ရခိုင် နှင့် ရှမ်းမြောက်  
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ရုံးပွဲဆက်နေသည့် စစ်ကောင်စီ

**EDITORIAL TALK**

ဦးစိန်ဝင်း  
သတင်းခန်းစီမံခန့်ခွဲမှုအယ်ဒီတာ

ဂျူးချန်း  
မဏ္ဍိုင်သတင်းထောက်



# FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE - INSIDE THE ARAKAN ARMY INTERCOMMUNAL CONFLICT

INSIGHT MYANMAR

“**W**hat we can see is that there’s a very clear pattern after April 24 of whenever the Arakan Army captured a military position, within days the neighboring villages would all be burned,” says Nathan Ruser, a satellite imagery analyst, speaking on an Insight Myanmar Podcast recently. “You could almost track the Arakan Army’s military gains across the township by those fires. That’s why I titled the report that ‘They Left a Trail of Ashes,’ as they moved through and conquered big parts of Buthidaung town. The arson followed.”

This is Ruser’s second interview with Insight Myanmar. In his initial appearance, he described his ground-breaking geo-mapping of the conflict, and now he returns to discuss horrifying evidence of an arson campaign against Rohingya villages. His review of the data shockingly reveals that the destruction may well have been carried out by the Arakan Army (AA), an Ethnic Armed Organization (EAO) that gained significant public support as part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance behind the successful Operation 1027 against the Burmese army.

## TROUBLED HISTORY

The relationship between the AA and the Rohingya has historically been characterized by violence. Ruser describes the AA as having a nationalist and irredentist stance over Rakhine state, and while they have made some public overtures towards peace and cooperation, he feels that fundamentally, they still see the Rohingya as interlopers.

“[The AA] have been willing to build up on narratives of communal harmony, and building the community together when it’s been convenient for them,” he says. “There’s also the undeniable fact that they’ve launched some pretty horrible diatribes against [the Rohingya] in their official statements and communications. I still don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone from the Arakan Army use the word ‘Rohingya!’ They use ‘Bengali,’ or if they’re feeling a bit more generous, ‘Muslim.’ The biggest truth in where Rohingya-Arakan Army relations really lie is [from] talking to Rohingya activists... There’s a pretty universal dislike and distrust of the Arakan Army, and that speaks more than any of my analyst perspective to it could.”

## MUTUAL DISTRUST

The Rohingya have of course suffered terribly as well at the hands of the Burmese military, and have little love for either them or the AA. For their part, the AA would like to control Rakhine State, and of course they have long been bitterly opposed to the regime, but also have their own history of skirmishes with minorities such as Rohingya in the region. In other words, the three major players in Rakhine state mutually distrust each other, and this tension has at times boiled up over into direct conflict. But while direct alliances are rare, there have been instances where strategic interests have led to temporary alignments or indirect cooperation against a common adversary. And this is what continues to play out today.

Ruser notes that for the last few months, AA has been in ascendance. "For the better part of this year, we've seen the Arakan Army capturing huge parts of Rakhine State," Ruser says. "Essentially ... they've captured the entirety of the countryside. They've captured all the rural areas, they've besieged the military outposts and the military bases for weeks, if not months, and then one by one, they're going in and attacking and overrunning them. [At] the same time, the junta has been facing unprecedented defeats not just in Rakhine State, but throughout the country, and that's led to massive manpower issues; basically, it's the conscription law, it's mass mobilization and recruitment. So for much of this year, the writing's been on the wall for Rakhine State ... that this is the Arakan Army marching, and they're going to take it, essentially. It's a matter of how long it takes rather than if it happens."

## SOWING DISCORD

Returning to the machinations of military policy in ethnic regions, Ruser describes how it has long been standard practice for the military to deliberately sow discord between ethnic groups if they feel they can no longer hold onto a region. This is intended to incite inter-ethnic violence, and destabilize any possibility for stable governance and defense. The junta's attempts to inflame tensions between the AA and Rohingya have been in full swing from at least February of this year, mostly in the form of Rohingya anti-AA rallies orchestrated by the military. "It's debatable how much it matched community sentiment... this is very obviously

a junta-directed ploy to divide and sow sectarian conflict." Nathan notes that the protests were written off as a failed junta psy-op in various resistance media, including the AA's, but this did not prevent the very real violence which followed.

The military's infamous conscription law, enforced in late March and early April in response to their defeats in Operation 1027, has pushed the situation into an even more complex, kaleidoscopic and unstable direction. "The junta has never recognized Rohingya people as citizens, it's never even recognized them as residents," Ruser says. "But despite this, they were caught up in that forced mobilization and forced conscription moved by the junta. We started seeing hundreds of Rohingya youth across the state being conscripted not just by the military council, but also by Rohingya militant groups that had previously fought them!" He notes that the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO)—both initially formed as insurgent groups fighting against the military (and deadly enemies of each other)—have also begun to collude with the junta; towards this effort, they been forcibly conscripting youth from Rohingya communities and refugee camps, including children as young as 14!

## VIOLENCE IN BUTHIDAUNG

This forced recruitment of Rohingya was crucial in laying the groundwork for military-orchestrated ethnic violence. To begin this campaign, Ruser says that "from April 11th to 17th the junta directed and was involved in a widespread arson campaign in Buthidaung town." About 2,400 structures in Buddhist and Hindu neighborhoods, mainly multi-story apartment buildings, were targeted by the Rohingya units under its control. This appears to be an effort to stoke communal conflict into a spiraling escalation of violence reminiscent of 2015 and 2017. And so, tragically, the junta's initial arson attack using Rohingya units was not just mindless violence but a calculated strategy that succeeded in sowing further discord. But despite the military's clear involvement in this horrific campaign, Ruser notes that following the arson, the AA began to direct "increasingly violent rhetoric" towards the Rohingya community.

Words were converted to action on May 17th and 18th, as Ruser describes from eyewitness accounts:

"Reports started coming of the rest of Buthidaung town being burned down, as the Arakan Army moved in and captured it. From our from our estimates, about 50 acres of Buthidaung town was burned in this overnight, [targeting] Rohingya neighborhoods." However, Ruser adds that the true scale of the destruction was not then apparent. One detail that caught his eye included reports of some 200,000 people fleeing the violence. "Buthidaung is not a town of 200,000 people!" Ruser exclaims. Looking up census data, he saw that the city, itself, perhaps housed 20,000 residents, with more in villages in the broader township. So that left a question in his mind: "Why were there so many people in the town?!"

He deduced from his online search was that, for whatever reason, as many as 150,000 Rohingya from villages in Buthidaung township may not have counted in prior censuses, because the "official" figures did not add up. Then the question was, "What were they fleeing from?" Using his satellite imaging techniques, he was able to complete the puzzle. He uncovered a disturbing pattern of violence, revealing that 50 to 60 predominantly Rohingya villages in the broader Buthidaung region had been burned within a span of three weeks, but which slipped "under the threshold of detectability." The imagery further revealed AA's modus operandi. "There's a very clear pattern after April 24, whenever the Arakan Army captured a military position, within days the neighboring villages would all be burned!" He notes the clear contrast to back when the AA captured a battalion in northern Buthidaung in early April, before the military-orchestrated arson attack by the Rohingya, there was no immediate AA attack in response. However, after that time, every subsequent capture of military positions by the AA was followed by nearby villages being burned within days. These attacks against Rohingya civilian settlements served no purpose, but were just arbitrary and punitive retribution for what the AA expected had been a regime-orchestrated arson campaign, and not a Rohingya-planned attack.

In the end, that initial attack by Rohingya conscripts in Buthidaung accounted for less than seven percent of the total destruction resulting from the junta's machinations; the resulting AA campaign is estimated to have destroyed around 8,500 buildings and directly displaced over 150,000 people from the township villages!

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

The obvious question is, who exactly is responsible for ordering this egregious, destructive arson campaign? Was it the AA leadership? Or was it maybe a campaign led by overenthusiastic soldiers? To Ruser's mind, fighters on the ground most likely undertook these actions on their own; at the same time, he finds it unlikely that local commanders or foot soldiers would act so drastically if they felt it was against the wishes of the leadership. He also doubts that the AA leadership would not have known about the attacks soon after they had started. Given this, Ruser has come to believe that soldiers were inspired by the AA's inflammatory, anti-Rohingya rhetoric, which he now sees as effectively greenlighting the attacks. Ruser now speculates that while the AA leadership did not order the attacks, they must have known about them early on, choosing not to put a stop to them until negative press coverage began to leak out, forcing their hand. This indicates that they could have stopped them at any point earlier on if they had wanted.

Then there is the question of why the AA would knowingly fall into the strategic trap that the military had set for them, by allowing the attacks to go on until they felt pressured to stop them, thus fanning the flames of increased interethnic strife, which can only benefit the military. Ruser surmises that the AA was particular incensed that ARSA and RSO had joined up with the military in launching the original attack. "Of course," Ruser says, "it's an atrocity to communally punish and retaliate against an entire community for the actions of a few militants, especially considering how many of those individual militants on the ground would have been coerced and co-opted into doing this."

## NEGATIVE PRESS

Ruser noted that the AA put a stop to the arson because of negative press, and he emphasizes that negative press is a powerful influence, though often underestimated. He stresses that messaging and image are invaluable assets for the revolution, crucial not only domestically but also for attracting international support. Therefore, the revolution must maintain what he calls the "moral high ground." This is because Ruser says, "A lot of the Western world is looking for any excuse to not support a non-state resistance group! The international community for decades has been very

hesitant to support anything that's not an established thing." So, giving the international community any excuse to think that post-junta Myanmar would like be unstable and be prone to intergroup conflict would be a serious obstacle to garnering its support.

### NEED TO PRESSURE NUG?

Ruser echoes the sentiments of many past guests, emphasizing that despite the extreme challenges faced by the NUG and revolutionary actors, they have the unfair standard to maintain a blemish-free and positive international image. Yet Ruser also insists that NUG leadership must publicly admit and take responsibility for transgressions against civilians, which in this case may mean confronting and pressuring the AA, or any strategic ally, to adhere to a code of conduct. While this may seem risky, especially after years of courting the AA and in the wake of their recent successes in the northeast, Ruser believes it is worth the risk. He suggests that the AA would likely prefer to comply rather than sever ties with the resistance.

"To say to the Arakan Army that if you want to be part of a future democratic federalized Burma, this is unacceptable! And to hope that despite the nationalistic take that the Arakan Army's had, and their clearly nationalistic bent, [I would] like to think that they would rather play a role in a future federalized Burma then act as a pariah state sandwiched between India and Burma. And in their statements, that they have shown as much willingness to align themselves with the national resistance, [which] does show that they would prefer a role in a future without the military. What they said and what they do is a different matter, and they've quite explicitly said that they are only looking for autonomy within a federalized Myanmar. They're not looking for independence."

Listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/77fd3276-ef4b-40a7-b5a2-910bab90f1f3>



Arakan Army fighters in training. Photo: AA



Arakan Army fighters have captured an airport. Photo: AA

## ARAKAN ARMY TAKES CONTROL OF THANDWE AIRPORT IN RAKHINE STATE

The Arakan Army (AA) successfully seized Thandwe Airport in Thandwe Township, Rakhine State on 5 July after launching an offensive in Thandwe Township on 13 April that had, by 5 July, killed about 400 junta soldiers.

The AA gained control of the 566th Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) base in Thandwe Town on the evening of 27 June. But, once the base had fallen junta troops continued to defend Thandwe Airport, surrounding buildings and hotels and a three-story building in Zee Phyu Gone quarter but, despite their best efforts, the AA eventually took control of it all.

The AA said that it had also seized many weapons in the fighting for Thandwe and had buried the dead junta soldiers.

The AA is currently launching an offensive against the junta's LIB 55 base, the last junta-held military base in Thandwe Town.

In Rakhine State, according to the AA, there is ongoing fighting between the AA and the junta in Thandwe Town, Maungdaw Town and Ann Township, where the junta's Western Regional Military Command Headquarters are located.





Lashio. Photo: Mizzima

## RENEWED FIGHTING DRIVES 50,000 PEOPLE FROM HOMES IN NORTHERN MYANMAR

Some 50,000 people have fled their homes over the last five days amid renewed fighting around Lashio, the capital of northern Shan State, residents and relief workers told Radio Free Asia.

At least 15 civilians have been killed since 3 July, when forces allied with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, or MNDAA, began an offensive in the township around Lashio, which is home to the military junta's Northeastern Military Command's headquarters.

Battles have since taken place in Nam Tong, Man Hawng, Nam Ma Baw Da and Nawng Mun villages.

Most of the deaths happened in one area of Lashio Township that was struck by artillery fire during the first day of fighting, an aid worker who wished to remain anonymous for security reasons told Radio Free Asia. Several other residential areas have since been hit by artillery attacks.

"The artillery fire occurs frequently until now," the aid worker said. "The residents have fled their homes in these areas."

A heavy artillery shell that was dropped on another neighborhood on Sunday injured three Buddhist novices and two civilians, he said.

Residents of Lashio Township have been heading south toward the city of Taunggyi, the capital of Shan State that is about 340 km (210 miles) away, one resident told RFA. Others aimed to look for shelter in the Mandalay Region or in the commercial capital of Yangon, he said.

Lashio sits at the junction of a highway that connects mainland Myanmar to the Chinese border to the north.

Fighting between Lashio-based junta soldiers and insurgents resumed on 25 June after the collapse of a ceasefire brokered by Chinese officials in a series of meetings that began in January.

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army, an ally of the MNDAA, announced the capture of 26 junta camps in the days following the end of the ceasefire.

The TNLA and other resistance forces in Mandalay have been attacking junta outposts in four townships in northern Shan state and Mandalay region.

RFA tried to contact MNDAA spokesperson Li Kya Win and the junta's spokesperson for Shan state, Khun Thein Maung, for more details on the fighting, but neither of them answered the phone.

*Courtesy of Radion Free Asia*



Residents queuing up for supplies.  
Photo: CI

# 'THIS POOR, MISERABLE LIFE': NEW MYANMAR CLASHES TURN KYAUKME TOWN TO RUBBLE

Residents of Kyaukme in northern Myanmar are counting their dead and picking through rubble following fresh fighting that shredded a Beijing-brokered ceasefire between the junta and an alliance of armed ethnic groups.

Last week fighters from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) took control of the town of 30,000 -- on the main trade route to China -- in the latest setback for the military as it battles opponents across the country.

But air and artillery strikes, as well as rocket attacks, have gutted parts of the northern Shan State town, leaving buildings without roofs or windows, and residents desperate to flee.

Burned-out cars stood in front of one shattered four-storey building, its corrugated roofing strewn

about the streets.

TNLA soldiers in combat fatigues stood guard outside the police station, while others carried out patrols and checked vehicles.

Kyaukme resident Kyaw Paing told AFP his home was damaged by a huge blast after he saw a military plane fly overhead.

"Pieces of body -- head, hands and legs -- were scattered on my roof when the bomb hit some houses nearby," he said.

"Seven people were killed here, and there was huge damage.

"I don't want to live this poor, miserable life in the war... I feel so sad"

## MYRIAD ARMED GROUPS

Myanmar's borderlands are home to myriad armed ethnic groups who have battled the military since independence from Britain in 1948 for autonomy and control of lucrative resources.

Some have given shelter and training to opponents of the military's 2021 coup that ousted the government of Aung San Suu Kyi and plunged the country into turmoil.

In January, China brokered a ceasefire between the military and the "Three Brotherhood Alliance", made up of the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the TNLA.

The truce ended an offensive launched last October by the alliance that seized a swath of territory in Shan state -- including lucrative trade crossings to China -- dealing the biggest blow to the junta since it seized power.

Other towns along the highway that runs from China's Yunnan province to Myanmar's second city of Mandalay have also been rocked by the fighting.

On Thursday TNLA fighters attacked Lashio, around 85 kilometres (50 miles) from Kyaukme, and home to the military's northeastern command.

One Lashio resident who did not want to be named told AFP she heard artillery firing and airstrikes on Monday morning, but that the town had since been quiet, with some shops open.

A worker at Lashio's bus station said there were long lines of vehicles queuing to leave, but traffic was slow because of damage to the road outside the town.

Local rescue workers say dozens of civilians have been killed in the latest clashes.

AFP was unable to reach a junta spokesman for comment, but the military has said some civilians were killed in shelling by the alliance.

## CHINA DIPLOMACY

Amid the new fighting, top general Soe Win travelled to China to discuss security cooperation in the border regions, according to the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar.

China is a major ally and arms supplier to the junta, but analysts say Beijing also maintains ties with Myanmar's armed ethnic groups holding territory near its border.

Ties between the junta and Beijing frayed in 2023 over the junta's failure to crack down on online scam compounds in Myanmar's borderlands targeting Chinese citizens.

Analysts suggest Beijing gave tacit approval to the October "Three Brotherhood" offensive, which the alliance said was launched partly to root out the scam compounds.

The threat of further military air strikes had caused many residents of Kyaukme to try to flee, although fuel is scarce and food prices are soaring.

"We don't have extra money," said Naung Naung, another resident.

"We have faced many difficulties -- not only our family, but the whole town.

"All residents are very worried about how long this war will go on."

AFP



People fleeing in their cars.  
Photo: AFP

## CLASHES AROUND KEY MYANMAR TOWN OF LASHIO ENTER SECOND WEEK

Fighting raged for an eighth day around a Myanmar regional military headquarters, where an ethnic armed group had briefly captured a battalion command, one of its commanders told AFP on Wednesday.

Northern Shan state has been rocked by clashes since late last month when an alliance of ethnic armed groups renewed an offensive against the military along a vital trade highway to China.

The clashes have shredded a Beijing-brokered truce that in January halted an offensive by the alliance of the Arakan Army (AA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the TNLA.

Fighting was ongoing around Lashio town, home to the junta's northeastern command, on Wednesday, General Tar Bhone Kyaw of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) told AFP.

TNLA fighters had briefly captured the base of a military battalion there but junta air strikes had later forced them to retreat, he said.

He said TNLA fighters were inside parts of Lashio but that it was "not easy" to capture the town in a "short time".

On Tuesday the junta said 18 civilians in Lashio had been killed and 24 wounded in shelling, rocket and drone attacks by the alliance.

The military has carried out several air strikes around the town of some 150,000 people, according to residents.

On Tuesday residents piled into cars weighed down with belongings and navigated potholed and monsoon-soaked dirt roads in a bid to flee the fighting,

AFP images showed.

On Monday around 45 people crowded onto a boat to take them across a river swollen by the monsoon rains.

The alliance was in control of "most" of the town of Naungcho, around 120 kilometres (75 miles) along the highway from Lashio, a military source told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Myanmar's borderlands are home to myriad ethnic armed groups who have battled the military since independence from Britain in 1948 for autonomy and control of lucrative resources.

Some have given shelter and training to newer "People's Defence Forces" that have sprung up to battle the military after it ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government in 2021.

Fighters from the "Mandalay PDF" were battling junta forces in Madaya township around an hour north of second city Mandalay, a spokesman for the group told AFP on Wednesday.

The military had suffered a "large number" of casualties there, he said, without giving details, adding that the PDF fighters had also "faced some sacrifices".

Amid the fighting last week top general Soe Win travelled to China to discuss security cooperation along their shared border.

China is a major ally and arms supplier to the junta, but analysts say Beijing also maintains ties with Myanmar's armed ethnic groups holding territory near its border.

AFP



the highway from the former British hill station of Pyin Oo Lwin, home to the military's elite officer training academy.

Another road from the town leads to Taunggyi, the capital of Shan state.

TNLA fighters were also inside the town of Lashio, home to the junta's northeastern command, the TNLA said.

Its forces had briefly captured a battallion command near the city but had been forced to retreat when the military launched air strikes,

said Tar Bhone Kyaw.

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### FLEEING IN CONVOYS

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Some have given shelter and training to newer "People's Defence Forces" (PDFs) that have sprung up to battle the military after it ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government in 2021.

In recent days, PDF fighters have battled junta forces in Madaya township, around an hour north of second city Mandalay.

Amid the renewed fighting last week, top junta general Soe Win travelled to China to discuss security cooperation along their shared border.

China is a major ally and arms supplier to the junta, but analysts say Beijing also maintains ties with Myanmar's armed ethnic groups holding territory near its border.

AFP

# MYANMAR ETHNIC ARMED GROUP CLAIMS CONTROL OF NAUNGCHO TOWN ON KEY HIGHWAY TO CHINA

Myanmar ethnic minority fighters said Wednesday last week they had seized a town along a key trade highway to China following days of clashes, in another blow to the military.

Northern Shan State has been rocked by fighting since late last month, when an alliance of ethnic armed groups renewed an offensive against the military along the highway to China's Yunnan province.

The clashes have shredded a Beijing-brokered truce that in January halted an offensive by the alliance of the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA).

The town of Naungcho "is totally ours", General Tar Bhone Kyaw of the TNLA told AFP.

Earlier Wednesday, a military source told AFP that ethnic minority fighters were in control of "most" of the town.

AFP was unable to reach a junta spokesman for comment.

Naungcho is around 50 kilometres (30 miles) down

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July 9

www.thangmyat.org  
Shan State Post  
PSLF/TNLA  
PSLF/TNLA News

Operation Part(2)



Photo: Mizzima

## UNHCR: 899,000 IDPS IN SOUTHEAST MYANMAR

In the week ending 1 July, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in southeast Myanmar was 899,000 according to UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, a slight decrease on the previous week when there were 901,600 IDPs.

In Mon State, an airstrike on Kyaikmaraw Township forced some 2,500 people to flee to Kyaikmaraw Town.

There were similar cases of displacement due to fighting and junta airstrikes in Pekon Township, Shan State (south).

The fighting has also affected the population of Bokpyin Township, in Tanintharyi Region, where more than 500 people were displaced.

As of 1 July, the number of IDPs in southeast Myanmar by state were as follows:

Shan State south - 123,700 IDPs; Kayah State - 132,400 IDPs; Bago Region (east) - 200,900 IDPs; Bago Region (west) - 700 IDPs; Kayin State - 210,200 IDPs; Mon State - 80,600 IDPs; and Tanintharyi Region - 150,500 IDPs.



A doctor provides care at a clinic. Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA TARGETING WOMEN WITH VIOLENCE IN SOUTHEAST MYANMAR

Throughout the first week of July 2024, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) observed worrying patterns of violence against women and girls in its target areas of Mon State, Karen State and Tanintharyi Region.

Over the last week alone, a woman died, and three others were injured after artillery shelling by the junta's police station in Pala Town, Pu Law Township, Myeik District, Tanintharyi Region, on 28 June 2024, according to HURFOM. The shelling occurred without any prior fighting. At 9:00 am, the junta launched two artillery shells. One of the shells hit and exploded near a shop at the three-way intersection.

Daw San Yu, a woman in her 40s who was inside the shop, died due to the explosion. Another two women and a man who were near the shop, were also injured. Earlier in June, an artillery shell fired by the military junta's naval headquarters in Mawrawaddy exploded on a house in Yar Phu Village, Yebyu Township, killing four family members, including an infant.

On 29 June a novice monk was killed, and a woman was injured by artillery fire from Battalion 310 in Thane Zayat Township, Kyaik Hto Township, Mon State. According to locals who spoke to HURFOM, a shell fired by Artillery Battalion 310 under junta control struck the

Dhamma Duta Monastery, causing casualties.

This incident followed a similar tragedy on 14 June, when a shell fired by Artillery Battalion 310 exploded, killing a 14-year-old girl named Ma Nandar Lin and injuring a one-and-a-half-year-old girl named Shwe Zin Lay. On the same day, four people, including two monks, were injured by artillery fire from junta troops in the village of Kha Kwal.

Furthermore, Artillery Battalion 310 and other military units under junta control frequently launch artillery shells into villages where civilians live. On 3 June, an artillery mortar landed in Mok Kha Maw Village in Thane Zayat, injuring a resident. On 2 June, artillery fire destroyed two houses in Wa Duk Kwin Village in Thane Zayat.

The ongoing rise of attacks against women, children and young people should be of significant concern to the international community, according to HURFOM.

It says that the lack of justice referral pathways in Burma has made it impossible for justice and accountability. So, further, transparent, coordinated, and decisive calls must be organized in collaboration with local organizations to ensure evidence of the junta's crimes can be tried in international legal systems.



Kachin National Congress Party rally. Photo: Supplied

# MYANMAR JUNTA BANS TWO ETHNIC PARTIES FROM ELECTION

The Myanmar junta's Union Election Commission (UEC) barred both the Democracy and Human Rights Party, and the Kachin National Congress Party, from its proposed 2025 election.

According to reports in state-run newspapers on 9 July, the UEC rejected applications for political party registration applications by the Human Rights Party, founded by the mainly-Muslim Rohingya group, and the Kachin National Congress Party, representing the Kachin people.

On 26 January 2023, the junta amended Section 25 of the Political Parties Registration Law, to require that all parties re-register under the junta within 60 days. Political parties who want to contest the election must successfully register under Section 25 of the junta's Political Parties Registration Law to be allowed to stand.

In an 8 July statement about why it rejected the two parties' applications the UEC said: "According to the reviews of the ministries concerned regarding the application of the Kachin National Congress (KNC) and the Democracy and Human Rights Party for the right to continue as political parties and registration under section 25 of the Political Parties Registration

Law, the Union Election Commission found that the first party is contrary to the stipulations in section 6 of the Registration of Political Parties Law and the latter is contrary to the stipulations in section 5."

The commission told junta-backed newspapers that the Democracy and Human Rights Party was barred because it did not comply with the branding and policy requirements of the Political Parties Registration Law, but it didn't specify which point the group had violated.

The party's secretary general, Kyaw Soe Aung, told Radio Free Asia that it had not received any specific information from the commission.

"The Union Election Commission has not yet responded to us in detail, so it is difficult to say," he said on Tuesday. "We have to see if we will be allowed to amend the violations we were rejected for."

The Democracy and Human Rights party has resurfaced multiple times throughout the country's complicated political history. It was founded in 1989 and won four seats in a 1990 election, after which it dissolved and re-registered in 2013.



## JUNTA OVERVIEW

The Kachin National Congress Party, which was founded in 1949, was barred from the election under Section 6 of the political party law, which prohibits groups from carrying out speeches or campaigns that cause ethnic conflict. It also bars political parties that incite the “disintegration of the Union and communal riots” and those who do not safeguard the 2008 constitution.

In 2021, Kachin National Congress Chairman M. Kawn La criticised Chinese investment on social media and was sentenced to two years in prison under notorious defamation laws. He was released in 2023.

The election commission says it has accepted the applications of 49 parties and rejected six. Recently, the commission banned the Rakhine state-based Arakan National Party on the grounds that it was engaged in activities that supported terrorism.

The election is expected to be held next year. It has to be held within six months of the State of Emergency in Myanmar having been lifted. The junta is expected to extend the state of emergency imposed since the 2021

coup for another six months on 1 August 2024.

Junta leader Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing told Russia’s ITAR-TASS news agency in March he planned to hold elections if and when peace and stability could be restored, although he did not set a date.

In early October, junta officials will hold a census to draw up voting lists for a general election to be held in 2025, according to Min Aung Hlaing’s statements to junta-backed newspapers.

Opponents of military rule say the junta’s promised election will be a sham given that the country’s most popular political leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been jailed for 27 years on charges she denies, and the election organiser has banned more than 80 parties from any political activity.

Reporting: Mizzima, Radio Free Asia

# mizzima WEEKLY

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**HIGH-RANKING JUNTA PERSONNEL ARRESTED AT ILLEGAL GAMBLING ESTABLISHMENT THEY SANCTIONED**

High-ranking junta army and police officers and senior administrators were caught and over 900 million kyats were seized in a raid on an illegal gambling establishment in Myothit Ward, Maubin Township, Ayeyarwady Region.

The local junta township authorities had given the gambling establishment permission to operate, which was why it was raided by the Ayeyarwady Regional Crime Control troop on the evening of 6 July 2024.

Amongst the people they arrested there, were: Major Thant Zin Tun, the Maubin District Senior Inspector; a former military ward administrator; surveillance officers; traffic policemen and other wealthy people from Maubin, Pathein, Mawgyun, Pyapon, and Kyaiklet townships in Ayeyarwady Region. The owner of the establishment was arrested and two money-counting machines were also seized.

“At the time of the raid, Min Maung, the former 9th Ward Administrator in Maubin Town, had already won 100 million kyats. There were eight tables of card games in operation,” said a source close to the junta.

According to local residents, at least 30 people were arrested at the gambling establishment and a massive amount of money was also seized and taken to Maubin Police Station.

“It’s not just cash; there were also a lot of cars and motorcycles involved in the gambling too. With army officers and police officers involved, I’m sure they will cover up the the case and they might pocket everything. The township level of the Military Council granted permission for the card game gambling, which was subsequently raided by regional authorities,” said a source close to the Maubin Police.

All the arrested individuals were taken to Maubin Police Station. Initial negotiations for their release continued until midnight on 6 July, but they were unsuccessful, so the arrested had to spend the night in custody. Negotiations for their release continued on 7 July according to a source close to the junta.

Mizzima attempted to contact Maubin Town Police Station regarding these events but received no response.

# 'RECKLESS' SHIPMENTS OF JET FUEL TO MYANMAR CONTINUE AS AIR STRIKES MULTIPLY

**A**mnesty International has documented new shipments of aviation fuel to Myanmar despite global calls to deprive the country's military of the resources it needs to carry out unlawful air strikes.

In January 2024, Amnesty International exposed the Myanmar military's new evasive tactics for importing aviation fuel throughout 2023, following sanctions imposed on parts of its supply chain.

That pattern continues with at least two, and likely three, additional shipments of aviation fuel having entered the country between January and June of 2024. As with the previous shipments identified by Amnesty International in January, the fuel was bought and sold multiple times before reaching the last leg of its trip in Vietnam, ahead of shipment to Myanmar.

In two instances recorded by Amnesty, the Chinese-owned HUITONG78 oil tanker transported fuel from Vietnam to Myanmar.

Other companies appear to have played a role in the supply chain too, including fuel traders Singapore-based Sahara Energy International Pte. Ltd. and Chinese state-owned entity (SOE) CNOOC Trading (Singapore) Pte. Ltd. A likely third shipment, also by HUITONG78, appears to have come to Myanmar from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in May 2024.

It is unclear how the fuel was used after it arrived, but the military's control of the port means there are significant risks it could be used for non-civilian purposes.

"The Myanmar military is relying on the very same Chinese vessel and Vietnamese companies to import its aviation fuel, despite Amnesty International having already exposed that reckless supply chain," said Agnes Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

"It is a raw display of both the sheer impunity with

which the Myanmar military is operating, and the utter complicity of the states responsible, including Vietnam, China and Singapore."

## AIR STRIKES ON THE RISE

In June 2024 the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar reported that military air strikes against civilian targets in Myanmar have increased five-fold in the first half of this year.

Amnesty International documented one of these attacks. Witnesses told Amnesty that on the morning of 9 May, the Myanmar military launched an attack on a monastery in Saw Township's Ah Kyi Pan Pa Lon Village in central Myanmar's Magway Region.

Following two initial air strikes, witnesses said that a fighter jet then circled back around and followed up with heavy gunfire directed at those fleeing the initial explosions.

The monastery, which is believed to be roughly 100 years old, was destroyed.

Amnesty International interviewed four survivors of the attack in Magway and one person who arrived at the scene afterwards to help the victims. Researchers also analysed 34 photos showing the corpses of victims, wounds of survivors, weapons used in the attack and the extent of the damage.

All the visual evidence of the destruction of the monastery is consistent with an air strike that caused a fire and severely burned both the structure and many of the victims. Photos of fragments of the ordnance used show the remnants of a tail kit for an aerial bomb, as well as unexploded 23mm High Explosive Incendiary (HEI) ammunition that is fired from the GSh-23 machine gun mounted as pods on fighter jets such as the Russian YAK-130.

The date on the discarded cartridges from the 23mm HEI rounds indicate the ordnance was manufactured locally in Myanmar in 2024. The wounds of other victims of the attack are consistent with fragments from aircraft bombs or direct gunfire. Satellite imagery also shows that the monastery area has been heavily burned.

**‘I HEARD THE PEOPLE SCREAMING’**

Saw Township is located in a contested area of central Myanmar, where parallel administrative structures and armed groups known as People’s Defence Forces (PDF), which sprang up after the coup to resist the military alongside the civilian National Unity Government (NUG), are active.

Witnesses said that while some PDF forces known as People’s Defence Teams, or Pa Ka Pha in Burmese, were present at the monastery, the majority of people were civilians. They also said there had been no fighting in or close to the village before the air strike, according to Amnesty.

In the early morning of the attack, witnesses said they heard buzzing in the skies, which they described as sounding like a drone. Some hours later, about 50 to 60 locals had gathered on the first floor of the monastery to discuss their concerns about transport issues, including taxation and routes.

In addition, witnesses reported that at least one child and the head monk of the monastery were on the second floor of the site, a place where computer classes were sometimes held.

According to survivors, who asked to be anonymous for fear of being targeted further by the Myanmar military, the first bomb dropped at around 10:45 am.

“The bomb fell a bit far behind me, right into the place where my brother, uncle and sister were sitting,” one man said. His relatives were killed instantly.

“I am sure that the fighter jet aimed at killing all of us,” he said.

Following the first bomb, he said the monastery started to collapse and people were trapped under the falling debris.

He managed to escape the site: “Within a few minutes [...], I saw the jet come again to the monastery, and this time another bomb was dropped that set the main building on fire,” he said.

Another man said he escaped from the monastery unharmed following the first bomb. He was hiding across the road when the second bomb was dropped. He saw the monastery ablaze. A fighter jet then started to shoot at people running away.

“I heard the people screaming in the monastery. Some people were running on the street amid the continuous gunfire from the fighter jet,” the man said. “The fighter jet flew over the monastery and opened fire on the people running around. I witnessed my friends being killed right before my eyes on the street.”

Those killed in the air strike included a child, while the head of the monastery was among the injured, according to a list of victims given to Amnesty International by a rescue worker.

Even if members of the Pa Ka Pha were present in the monastery at the time of the attack, the pilot should have known there could be civilians as well. Thus, the shooting of civilians attempting to flee and the bombing of a site of religious, cultural and historical value suggest the attack was indiscriminate. It should be investigated as a war crime.

“This recent attack joins a rapidly growing list of violations of international humanitarian law in Myanmar including air strikes, ground raids, arbitrary detentions, torture and numerous other violations targeting civilians,” Callamard said.

## **ACCESS TO AVIATION FUEL**

Amnesty International and others have called on companies and governments to suspend jet fuel shipments to Myanmar or risk complicity in a deadly supply chain. But as these new findings show, many are still not listening.

Vessel tracking and trade data show that the Chinese oil tanker HUITONG78 transported two shipments of aviation fuel to the former Puma Energy terminal (now controlled by the Myanmar-based Shoon Energy group and the Myanmar military) in Thilawa, Yangon port, on 14 January and 29 February, respectively. In common with all shipments identified by Amnesty International in 2023, the oil tanker picked up the fuel at the Vietnamese Cai Mep Petroleum storage terminal operated by Hai Linh Co. Ltd., before departing for Myanmar.

Also like the 2023 shipments, the 2024 shipments involved multiple purchases and resales of the same fuel, making it hard to trace the original supplier. In regard to the January 2024 shipment, before its arrival in Viet Nam, the fuel can be traced to the Vopak Singapore Banyan Terminal, a storage facility controlled by Dutch storage and logistics company Royal Vopak. Royal Vopak confirmed the shipment but emphasized that “[o]ur service is the safe storage of our customers’ products while it is in our terminals in the ports” and that they “respect applicable laws, regulations and sanctions”.

The February 2024 shipment can be traced back to the BP Hua Dong terminal in Ningbo port, Hangzhou Bay, China. Amnesty International was unable to identify the company that controls the Chinese terminal.

Before the final transfer and sale of fuel to Myanmar, the January shipment was sold to a Vietnamese company by the Singapore branch of the global fuel trader Sahara Energy. The February shipment was sold by the Singapore trading branch of Chinese SOE China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC

Singapore). In both cases, customs data shows that Sahara Energy and CNOOC Singapore should have been aware that the fuel was transported to Viet Nam for transit purposes only. Each of the shipments was worth approximately USD 8 million.

## **SUSPICIONS RAISED**

Evidence also indicates there was likely a third shipment of aviation fuel to Myanmar, in May 2024.

According to vessel tracking data, the HUITONG78 loaded fuel at the Hamriyah port in Sharjah, UAE, in April, arriving at the Yangon port on or about 12 May. The vessel appears to turn off its AIS radar as it enters Thilawa port, during which satellite imagery shows what appears to be the HUITONG78 moored at the former Puma Energy terminal in Thilawa.

The vessel’s draught data (which indicates a change in overall weight of the ship) suggests that it offloaded fuel at the Thilawa terminal. Although Amnesty International was not able to confirm whether the fuel was in fact aviation fuel, it is quite likely the case given the pattern of shipments conducted by this same vessel.

The HUITONG78 vessel is registered for Protection & Indemnity (P&I) insurance with the West of England P&I Club, although in response to Amnesty International, the Club stated that “if [...] this vessel was carrying jet fuel to Myanmar, then there was no cover for those trades”.



## FINANCIAL ACTION TASK FORCE DESIGNATES MYANMAR AS A HIGH-RISK JURISDICTION

**M**yanmar was one of three countries named by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) as high-risk jurisdictions that have significant strategic deficiencies in their regimes to counter money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing.

The other two countries named in a 28 June statement by the FATF were the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Iran.

According to the FATF, high-risk jurisdictions

have significant strategic deficiencies in their regimes to counter money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing.

For all countries identified as high-risk, the FATF calls on all members and jurisdictions to apply enhanced due diligence, and, in the most serious cases, countries are called upon to apply countermeasures to protect the international financial system from money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing risks emanating from the country. This list is often externally referred to as the "black list."

Proliferation financing is defined by the FATF as the provision of funds or financial services used for the manufacture, acquisition, possession, development, export, trans-shipment, brokering, transport, transfer, stockpiling or use of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery and related materials.

In its statement, the FATF said the following about the situation in Myanmar:

In February 2020, Myanmar committed to address its strategic deficiencies. Myanmar's action plan expired in September 2021.

In October 2022, given the continued lack of progress and the majority of its action items still not addressed after a year beyond the action plan deadline, the FATF decided that further action was necessary in line with its procedures and FATF calls on its members and other jurisdictions to apply enhanced due diligence measures proportionate to the risk arising from Myanmar. The FATF requires that as part of enhanced due diligence, financial institutions should increase the degree and nature of monitoring of the business relationship, in order to determine whether those transactions or activities appear unusual or suspicious. When applying enhanced due diligence measures, countries should ensure that flows of funds for humanitarian assistance, legitimate NPO [non profit organisation] activity and remittances are not disrupted. If no further progress is made by October 2024, the FATF will consider countermeasures.

Myanmar's overall progress continues to be slow. Myanmar should continue to work on implementing its action plan to address these deficiencies, including by: (1) demonstrating an improved understanding of ML [money laundering] risks in key areas; (2) demonstrating that hundi operators are registered and supervised; (3) demonstrating enhanced use of financial intelligence in law enforcement authorities (LEAs) investigations, and increasing operational analysis and disseminations by the financial intelligence unit (FIU); (4) ensuring that ML is investigated/prosecuted in line with risks; (5) demonstrating investigation of transnational ML cases with international cooperation; (6) demonstrating an increase in the freezing/seizing and confiscation of

criminal proceeds, instrumentalities, and/or property of equivalent value; (7) managing seized assets to preserve the value of seized goods until confiscation; and (8) addressing technical compliance deficiencies related to R.7 to ensure effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions related to proliferation financing.

The FATF urges Myanmar to work to fully address its AML/CFT [anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing] deficiencies, including to demonstrate that its monitoring and supervision of money or value transfer services (MVTs) is based on documented and sound understanding of ML/TF [terrorist financing] risks to mitigate undue scrutiny of legitimate financial flows.

Myanmar will remain on the list of countries subject to a call for action until its full action plan is completed.

The FATF leads global action to tackle money laundering, terrorist and proliferation financing. The 40-member body sets international standards to ensure national authorities can effectively go after illicit funds linked to drugs trafficking, the illicit arms trade, cyber fraud and other serious crimes.

The FATF researches how money is laundered and terrorism is funded, promotes global standards to mitigate the risks, and assesses whether countries are taking effective action. In total, more than 200 countries and jurisdictions have committed to implement the FATF's Standards as part of a co-ordinated global response to preventing organised crime, corruption and terrorism. Countries and jurisdictions are assessed with the help of nine FATF Associate Member organisations and other global partners, the IMF and World Bank.

The FATF's decision-making body, the FATF Plenary, meets three times per year and holds countries to account if they do not comply with the Standards. If a country repeatedly fails to implement FATF Standards then it can be named a Jurisdiction under Increased Monitoring or a High Risk Jurisdiction. These are often externally referred to as "the grey and black lists".

The FATF was established in 1989 and is based in Paris.

# UKRAINE COMPACT

## Securing Ukraine's Future



NATO delegates, including Biden and Zelenskyy, pose for a photo. Photo: AFP

## NATO LEADERS VOW TO STAND BY UKRAINE AS DOUBTS HANG OVER US PRESIDENT BIDEN

**N**ATO leaders pledged enduring support last week for Ukraine and commitment to their alliance as they wrapped up a three-day summit overshadowed by doubts over US President Joe Biden's fitness to run crucial power the United States.

The 32-nation alliance used the pomp-filled 75th anniversary gala in the US capital to showcase its resolve against Russia two and half years into the Kremlin's invasion of its pro-Western neighbour.

But the gathering was clouded by uncertainty in the United States as Biden fights for his political survival.

"I will not walk away from Ukraine. I will keep NATO strong," Biden said in his closing press conference. "That's exactly what we did, and exactly what we'll continue to do now."

The US leader compared his commitment to the trans-Atlantic alliance to comments from his challenger, former president Donald Trump.

"My predecessor has made it clear he has no commitment to NATO. He's made it clear that he would feel no obligation to honor Article 5," Biden said, referring to the alliance's commitment of common defense.

Biden met Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy along with other NATO leaders on the third - and final - day of the summit after pledging new air defenses to help protect the war-torn country.

But Zelenskyy called on Kyiv's backers, especially the United States, to go further - including by giving his outgunned forces greater scope to strike inside Russia.

"If we want to win, if we want to prevail, if we want to save our country and to defend it, we need to lift all the limitations," Zelenskyy said.

Key allies such as the United States and Germany relaxed conditions on Ukraine hitting inside Russia in May in response to Moscow's offensive toward the



second city Kharkiv, but they kept in place some limits on how far and under which circumstances Kyiv could strike.

Biden said he taking advice from his military chiefs and evaluating on a "day to day basis" whether to make any adjustments.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz was more definitive, saying "no one is planning to change the previous measures and guidelines."

"It remains our task to ensure that we provide Ukraine with maximum support, but prevent the war from escalating into a war between Russia and NATO," Scholz said.

NATO's leaders at the summit once again risked disappointing Zelensky by refusing to issue Ukraine a clear invitation to join their alliance.

But in a bid to soften any upset, leaders called Ukraine's path to membership "irreversible."

"We are doing and will continue to do everything to ensure that the day comes when Ukraine is invited and becomes a NATO member, and I am confident we will achieve this," Zelensky said.

### MISSILES IN GERMANY

The United States also announced an important step to bolster NATO's own deterrence against Russia in Europe by saying it would begin "episodic deployments" of long-range missiles to Germany in 2026.

The White House said it would eventually look to permanently station them in Germany, and the missiles would "have significantly longer range" than current US systems in Europe.

The Kremlin struck back, saying it was planning "response measures" to contain the "very serious threat" from NATO, accusing the alliance of being "fully involved in the conflict over Ukraine."

CNN meanwhile reported that the United States foiled a Russian plot earlier this year to assassinate the chief executive of a major German arms maker supplying weaponry to Ukraine.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said he did not want to comment on those specific reports.

But he said there has been "a Russian campaign organized by the security services to conduct hostile actions against NATO allies, across the alliance, with sabotage attempts, with cyber attacks, with arson, with different types of hostile actions."

### CHINA 'ENABLING' RUSSIA

Ahead of the sit-down with Zelensky, NATO shifted attention eastwards by welcoming the leaders of Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

A strongly worded declaration from NATO released Wednesday called Beijing a "decisive enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine" through its supplies of dual-use goods such as microchips that can help Moscow's military.

China "cannot enable the largest war in Europe in recent history without this negatively impacting its interests and reputation," NATO leaders said.

Beijing hit back by warning NATO to "stop hyping up the so-called China threat and provoking confrontation and rivalry."

The United States has been pushing its European allies for years to pay closer attention to the challenges posed by China.

The Washington summit is the third such gathering attended by leaders from the four Asia-Pacific partners.

NATO agreed to several initiatives with the partner countries, including bolstering cooperation against cyberattacks and disinformation, and providing Ukraine non-lethal help.

AFP



# KREMLIN WARNS RUSSIA COULD TARGET EUROPE IF US DEPLOYS MISSILES

The Kremlin on Saturday warned that the deployment of US missiles in Germany could make European capitals targets for Russian missiles in a repeat of Cold War-style confrontation.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov spoke of a "paradox" in which "Europe is a target for our missiles, our country is a target for US missiles in Europe".

"We have enough capacity to contain these missiles but the potential victims are the capitals of these countries," he said, speaking to Russian state television channel Russia 1.

Peskov also hinted that such a confrontation could undermine Europe as a whole - in the same way that the Cold War ended with the Soviet Union's collapse.

"Europe is coming apart. Europe is not living its best moment. In a different configuration, a repeat of history is inevitable," he said.

The White House announced on Wednesday last week during a NATO summit that it would periodically station long-range weapons including Tomahawk cruise missiles in Germany from 2026 as a deterrent.

"Exercising these advanced capabilities will demonstrate the United States' commitment to NATO and its contributions to European integrated deterrence," the White House said.

## 'IT'S SECURING PEACE'

The Kremlin has already criticised the move, accusing Washington of taking a step towards a new

Cold War and of directly participating in the conflict in Ukraine.

Russia's defence ministry on Friday said that Defence Minister Andrei Belousov held a telephone call with his US counterpart Lloyd Austin where they discussed lowering the risk of "possible escalation".

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has hailed the US decision despite criticism from members of his Social Democrats.

The decision marks a return of US cruise missiles to Germany after a 20-year absence.

Defending the decision, Scholz told reporters at the NATO summit that it was "something of deterrence and it's securing peace, and it is a necessary and important decision at the right time."

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius told broadcaster Deutschlandfunk that the deployment decision addressed a "very serious gap" in the country's capabilities.

Responding to the Kremlin's warning that the US missile deployment could put European capitals at risk, a US State Department spokesperson said the United States and NATO "do not seek a military conflict with Russia... but any military action directed against a NATO Ally would trigger an overwhelming response".

Russia is "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area", the spokesperson said, adding it was "Russia that started this war and Russia could end it today".

The German army does not have long-range missiles that launch from the ground, only cruise missiles that can be fired by aircraft.

The 1980s deployment of US Pershing ballistic missiles in West Germany at the height of the Cold War prompted widespread demonstrations, with hundreds of thousands coming out in pacifist protest.

US missiles continued to be stationed through the reunification of Germany and into the 1990s.

But following the end of the Cold War, the United States significantly reduced the numbers of missiles stationed in Europe as the threat from Moscow receded.

Now NATO countries - spearheaded by the United States - have been bolstering their defences in Europe following the start of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine in 2022.

AFP



Trump gestures after the assassination bid.  
Photo: AFP

# BLOODIED US PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDER TRUMP **SURVIVES** **ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT**

**T**he United States is attempting to come to terms with another assassination attempt against a politician.

Donald Trump was hit in the ear in an assassination attempt by a gunman at a campaign rally Saturday, in a chaotic and shocking incident set to supercharge political tensions ahead of the polarising US presidential election.

The 78-year-old former president was rushed off stage with blood streaked across his face after the shooting in Butler, Pennsylvania, while the shooter and a bystander were killed and two spectators critically injured.

The Republican candidate raised a defiant fist to the crowd as he was bundled away to safety, and said afterward: "I was shot with a bullet that pierced the upper part of my right ear."

President Joe Biden, who is set to face Trump in November's deeply polarized election, said the

incident was "sick" and added that there was "no place in America for this kind of violence."

Biden later spoke to Trump, the White House said.

Unconfirmed images appeared to show the assailant's body lying on the sloping roof of a low building from where he had fired, plunging the rally filled with Trump supporters into screams and panic.

The FBI confirmed in a press conference that the shooting was being treated as "an assassination attempt against our former president, Donald Trump."

The shooter had been "tentatively identified," police said, and was believed to be working alone, but law enforcement officials said they would not release any details yet.

After multiple witnesses said they saw the gunman before the shooting and alerted authorities, Butler police said they had "responded to a number of reports of suspicious activity" but gave no further details.

## 'RIPPING THROUGH THE SKIN'

Trump, wearing a red "Make America Great Again" cap, had just started speaking at his final rally before the Republican National Convention when multiple bangs ran out.

He grimaced and clutched his ear, with blood visible on his ear and cheek, then ducked to the floor as Secret Service agents swarmed onto the podium, surrounding him and escorting him roughly off the stage to a nearby vehicle.

"It is incredible that such an act can take place in our Country," Trump said on his Truth Social network hours later, in remarks sure to stoke the political hostility already engulfing the United States.

"I knew immediately that something was wrong in that I heard a whizzing sound, shots, and immediately felt the bullet ripping through the skin," Trump said.

"Much bleeding took place, so I realized then what was happening."

He later could be seen walking unaided from his plane, though his wounded ear was not facing the camera, in video footage posted by his deputy communications director. The New York Times reported that he was staying the night in New Jersey.

The US Secret Service said in a statement that the suspected shooter "fired multiple shots toward the stage from an elevated position outside the rally" before being "neutralized" by agents.

Police confirmed that a male spectator was killed and two critically injured, all of them male adults.

## SHOCK WAVES AROUND THE WORLD

The attack sent shock waves around the world, with the leaders of Britain, Israel, Japan and a host of other countries expressing outrage.

Biden cut short a weekend trip to his Delaware beach house to return to Washington. He will receive an updated briefing from security officials on Sunday morning, the White House said.

The attack has already stoked political tensions, with some Republicans pointing the finger at Biden and right-wing conspiracy theories flooding social media.

Possible Trump vice presidential pick J.D. Vance said Biden's "rhetoric" had "led directly" to the Trump attack.

Trump's campaign said he would still attend the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, after he was reported to have had a precautionary hospital checkup.

## SCREAMS AND PANIC

But the convention will now be dominated by the shooting at the rally, which descended into panic with screams and shouts ringing out after the gunshots.

"Let me get my shoes," Trump was heard saying on the microphone, as security agents helped him back to his feet.

He turned back to the crowd and repeatedly raised his fist, as well as mouthing words that weren't immediately discernible, in what instantly became an iconic image.

Agents bundled the tycoon into an SUV, as he once more shook his fist.

"We saw a lot of people go down, looking confused. I heard the shots," said John Yeykal from Franklin, Pennsylvania, who was attending his first Trump rally.

US political figures including former presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton lined up to condemn the attack and say there was no place for violence in politics.

Billionaire Elon Musk meanwhile reacted by quickly endorsing Trump.

## NOTHING NEW

The United States has a history of political violence, and presidents, former presidents and candidates have tight security.

President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 while riding in his motorcade, and his brother Bobby Kennedy was shot dead in 1968. President Ronald Reagan survived an assassination attempt in 1981.

AFP



## A CRITICAL JUNCTION

“I had the pleasure to see many things develop [in Myanmar],” Rosalia Sciortino tells Insight Myanmar in their latest podcast. “Not always for the better, but this [becomes a] privilege when you stay for a long time in the region. The challenge for Myanmar is the fight for democracy, which has always been my passion. I believe in social justice.”

Rosalia, known as Lia by her friends and colleagues, has been working in Southeast Asia, and on Myanmar in particular, with the Ford Foundation, and then as Regional Director with Development Research Centre (IDRC). In these various positions she funded a variety of programs in Myanmar over the years, in such diverse fields as health, education, agriculture, and gender, among other sectors. Lia is currently the Founder and Executive Director of SEA Junction, located in the Bangkok Arts and Cultural Centre (BACC). Their mission statement reads: “Our aim is to foster understanding and appreciation of Southeast Asia in all socio-cultural dimensions—from arts and crafts to the economy and development—by enhancing public access to knowledge resources and by promoting exchanges among students, specialists and Southeast Asia lovers. SEA Junction contributes to these objectives as a public venue and informal space on Southeast Asia where people with an interest in the region’s art, culture and societies can meet, share information, consult available resource, and read related literature at their leisure.”

Taking advantage of BACC’s convenient location and splendid architecture, SEA Junction has hosted a number of Myanmar-themed events over the years that reflect recent developments. For example, they offered

a program on the Rohingya crisis when that was heating up, and on the consequences of the Chinese pipeline when BRI was gaining attention. “I think it is extremely powerful to reach a general public that doesn’t know much about the situation, and also hopefully [bring out an] awareness and empathy in people.” Following the 2021 military coup, SEA Junction has stepped up their focus on Myanmar, and now hosts regular talks and seminars, which feature guests presenting on various topics. They have brought a similar spirit to their other events, from evocative exhibitions on women’s roles in the revolution, to poignant showcases about refugee life at the border, to protest art shows, to the profound societal impacts of COVID-19, all connected to the themes of political resistance and social equality.

Through her many years of advocacy in the region, Lia sees an unfortunate thread connecting Myanmar to other countries in the region. “The issue of impunity, unfortunately, is very present in Indonesia, as it is present in Thailand, as it is present in Myanmar,” she says. “Part of the problem is that these countries have never dealt with the past, and have never brought justice to victims of abuses.” Where Indonesia was once presented as a kind of tentative example of democratic reforms that Myanmar could emulate—transitioning to a military that deferred to Parliament and an elected leader—recent elections there have left many concerned that Indonesia could be sliding back to older models, illustrating just how difficult it is to really move on from the past. This is why this current moment in Myanmar is so important, not just for the Burmese people, but for neighboring countries as well. “If Myanmar manages to indeed win, this battle eventually will be a significant example for other countries in the region. As you know, Thailand, as well, the Philippines, they’re all struggling at this moment with the issue of democracy.”

### CATCH THE PODCAST

Check out more here and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/6/28/episode-250-a-critical-junction>



## MYANMAR JUNTA AND ETHIOPIA SEEK CLOSER TIES AMID ONGOING INTERNAL CRISES

**M**yanmar junta and Ethiopia signaled a tentative step towards closer relations in early July as the Ethiopian Ambassador to Myanmar presented his credentials to Myanmar's junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, according to junta-controlled media.

Discussions reportedly centered on strengthening government-to-government ties in various sectors like diplomacy, education, agriculture, healthcare, and tourism.

Both countries are currently facing internal political issues.

Myanmar's military coup in February 2021 has led to widespread unrest and international censure over human rights violations.

Ethiopia, meanwhile, is grappling with a devastating two-year civil war impacting millions and causing severe food shortages.

Recently, the Myanmar junta reiterated its commitment to holding so-called multiparty elections, a claim viewed with skepticism by the international community.

## JUNTA SUMMONS BANK LEADERS AMID CRACKDOWN ON LENDING PRACTICES

**T**he military junta has called upon the patrons and presidents of all state-owned and private banks nationwide to gather at its headquarters in Naypyidaw on July 10 for a private session aimed at addressing banking concerns, as stated in a letter summoning the bankers.

Lt-Gen Aung Lin Dwe, Secretary of the Military Council, officially known as State Administration Council (SAC), spoke at a meeting with bankers to discuss banking matters, reported the state-run newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar.

"Speaking at the event, the SAC Secretary said the meeting was held to strengthen cooperation with banks, financial institutions, government, and the central bank, as well as to ensure a stable monetary system and the nation's economic development and to establish mutual understanding," reported the state-run newspaper. "Banks are responsible for protecting the interests of their customers and carrying out measures for financial stability, safety, and solidity."

In early July, the military junta recently issued a statement declaring punitive measures against leadership at seven private financial institutions, including prominent entities such as Yoma, AYA, and UAB. The statement said that these actions stem from the banks' non-compliance with regulations of the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) regarding the maximum allowable volume of mortgage lending.

The statement also indicated that CBM officials would face disciplinary action for inadequate oversight of these private institutions' lending practices.



## **NUG PROVIDES EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPLIES FOR FLOOD- AFFECTED IDPS**

**T**he Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management of the shadow National Unity Government (NUG) has provided over 20 million kyat in support for flood-affected IDPs in Myitkyina, Tsawlaw, Machanbaw, Sumprabum, and Chipwi townships in Kachin State from June 30 to mid-July due to flooding, according to the NUG’s official Facebook page.

Furthermore, the Ministry continues to provide necessary emergency food aid to flood-affected IDPs in Salingyi, Tigyaing, Katha, Mingin, Myaung, and Sagaing townships in Sagaing Region due to the rising water levels of the Ayeyarwady River.

This aid is funded from public donations and township humanitarian tax allocations.

The NUG’s Ministry is collaborating with local humanitarian groups, township People’s Defense Organizations (PDO) and rescue teams, as well as village, ward, and township People’s Administration Organizations (PAO) to support, rescue, and relocate IDPs including children.



## **MYANMAR BOXER TUN MIN AUNG CLAIMS KNOCKOUT VICTORY AT ONE FRIDAY FIGHTS 70**

**M**yanmar boxer Tun Min Aung, aged 18, defeated Vietnamese fighter Tuan Quoc Tran by knockout in the Muay Thai bout at ONE Friday Fights 70 on July 12, also earning a bonus of 350,000 baht, reported Soe Nae Thit Myanmar Sports Facebook page.

Tun Min Aung capitalized on his significant height advantage, utilizing superior technique throughout the fight.

In the first round, the Vietnamese fighter accidentally kicked Tun Min Aung in the lower abdomen. The round ended with both fighters exchanging blows.

In the second round, Tun Min Aung fought more intelligently and used more kicks, which caused hardships for the Vietnamese fighter.

In the third round, Tun Min Aung landed an elbow strike that severely hurt Tran Quoc Tuan, leading to Tun Min Aung’s knockout victory.

Tun Min Aung’s victory sparked a wave of cheers from Myanmar Facebook users.

One enthusiastic fan wrote, “Congratulations Tun Min Aung! Keep up the hard work and bring home more victories in your upcoming matches!”

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



# DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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