

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

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Analysis & Insight

6,000+ DEAD

UN urges new approach to Myanmar crisis as civilian toll rises

● 260 CSOs sign position paper addressing ASEAN's Goal of a 'Myanmar-Owned and -Led Solution'

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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

HOW LONG CAN THE MYANMAR JUNTA HOLD ON TO POWER?

As our cover story in last week's issue of Mizzima Weekly pointed out, Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing faces serious challenges, with even supporters grumbling about his poor performance.

Social media offers a glimpse of the failing morale of the military and serious issues such as declining recruitment, defections, and dissatisfaction over leadership purges. Min Aung Hlaing's efforts to centralize power by dismantling traditional patronage networks have alienated senior commanders and eroded loyalty. On top of this, many soldiers join for economic stability rather than ideological commitment, which has weakened cohesion in the face of sustained resistance in the wake of the 2021 coup.

Resistance groups, including Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) and People's Defence Forces (PDFs), have gained significant ground in rural areas and border regions – notably in the north and west. These groups have demonstrated increasing military capability and cooperation, though they lack the resources to decisively challenge the junta in key urban centres like Yangon, Naypyidaw, and Mandalay. The opposition's growing strength is straining the military's capacity.

Myanmar's economy is in dire straits, with the military struggling to maintain its patronage system due to dwindling resources. The junta's self-proclaimed role as the guardian of Myanmar has also lost credibility, particularly among ethnic Bamar communities, due to its widespread violence and atrocities – particularly in Sagaing and Magway. Public resentment against the military is at an all-time high, further isolating it politically and socially.

While Russia and China have historically supported the junta, their assistance is limited and often transactional. China, for instance, is engaging with opposition forces near its borders, signaling frustration with the junta's ineffectiveness. The lack of significant foreign military support for the resistance, however, limits its ability to escalate the conflict further.

While the Myanmar military retains control over major cities and critical infrastructure, its long-term stability is undermined by internal divisions, growing resistance, and economic fragility. However, the fragmented nature of the opposition and limited external intervention mean the junta may endure for the foreseeable future, albeit in a weakened state.

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Cover photo of children at a festival by AFP





Praying for an end to the suffering.
Photo: AFP

6,000+ DEAD

UN URGES NEW APPROACH TO MYANMAR CRISIS AS CIVILIAN TOLL RISES

United Nations experts are demanding global action as civilian deaths in Myanmar surpass 6,000 since the February 2021 military coup.

UN experts released a statement on 2 December calling for a “course correction” in the international response to the escalating crisis in Myanmar as the civilian death toll continues to rise.

The experts include Tom Andrews, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar; members of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, members of the Working Group on arbitrary detention, and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary execution.

The following is an abridged version of the UN statement:

FAILING THE MYANMAR PEOPLE

“There are now 6,000 reminders that the international community is failing the people of Myanmar,” said the experts. “It is time for a change, starting with moving this disaster out of the shadows of international attention.

“We know that international action makes a difference. We have documented how it has reduced the junta’s access to weapons that it uses to attack civilians,” the experts said.

The junta’s procurement of weapons, dual-use technologies, and manufacturing equipment has declined by a third as Governments cracked down on networks supplying the junta and adopted impactful targeted sanctions. These actions followed the publication last year of a conference room paper by Tom Andrews, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, titled “The Billion Dollar Death Trade”.

“As welcome as these actions have been, they remain grossly inadequate and lack the coordination and strategic targeting necessary to deliver the support the people of Myanmar need and deserve. We can and must do better,” said the experts.

JUNTA BRUTALITY

“Thousands of lives have been cut short in indiscriminate attacks by the military, which often targets civilian homes and infrastructure. Unlawful killings by junta forces are common and are characterized by their



TNLA fighter examines an unexploded bomb. Photo: AFP

brutality and inhumanity. According to credible reports, nearly 2,000 individuals have been killed in the custody of junta forces, 365 have been shot in the head, and 215 burned alive. Many victims have been tortured to death. Others have been subjected to acts tantamount to enforced disappearance before execution. Beheadings, dismemberment, and the disfiguration of bodies are shockingly common," said the experts.

"We are also alarmed by the ongoing use of arbitrary detention and acts tantamount to enforced disappearance to silence those opposing the military junta," the experts said. "Over 21,000 of those arrested since the February 2021 military coup remain in detention, many held incommunicado, and in many instances with their families and lawyers having no information on their fates or whereabouts." Some of these acts are committed against civilians accused of breaking martial law or against villagers who are forced to act as human shields.

CALL TO DENY LEGITIMACY

In addition to denying the junta access to weapons, UN Member States should also deny it the legitimacy it seeks. This includes publicly rejecting the junta's plans

to hold what they are trying to define as "elections" next year.

"You cannot hold an election when you deposed a democratically elected Government in an unconstitutional coup, and continue to arbitrarily arrest, detain, disappear, torture and execute opposition leaders, nor when it is illegal for journalists to report the truth. We urge UN Member States to call this exercise what it is, a fraud," said the experts.

"Governments and donors also need to significantly step up assistance to civil society organisations documenting human rights abuses, protecting civilian populations, and delivering life-saving humanitarian aid. It would be unconscionable to allow thousands more innocent lives to be lost when options for effective action by the international community remain on the table."



People of different faiths and ethnicities are largely united in their rejection of junta rule and its brutal attack on civilians. Photo: AFP

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Food prices are going up and many families are struggling to make ends meet. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR PEOPLE WORRY ABOUT THE JUNTA'S HANDLING OF THE ECONOMY

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has publicly admitted for the first time that the country's economy has significantly deteriorated under his leadership. He acknowledged discrepancies between official economic statistics announced by government ministries and the actual on-ground situation.

An anonymous economic analyst highlighted that reports from international organizations such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB), alongside local data, confirm the sharp decline in Myanmar's economic indicators. The analyst noted that Min Aung Hlaing may focus on showcasing progress in agriculture and livestock sectors through state-controlled media to mask the lack of development in other industries.

Business leaders described the country's economy as being in crisis, pointing to skyrocketing prices of fuel and basic food, rising inflation, plummeting foreign investment, and a decline in both exports and imports. Myanmar's citizens are facing severe challenges, including widespread unemployment and soaring

living costs. According to a UNDP report, 70% of the population now lives below the poverty line, while the middle-class population has fallen by 50%. The World Bank's latest report also warns that poverty rates are expected to rise further by the end of the current fiscal year, deepening the crisis for Myanmar's already vulnerable population.

A businessman from Yangon observed, "Although many say the SAC's downfall will come through military failures, the real collapse of the regime is economic." A former Central Bank official also criticized the junta's controversial policy of confiscating US dollars from the market, exacerbating economic instability.

A prominent economist has raised concerns about worsening food insecurity among Myanmar's grassroots communities. He attributed this to the junta's policies of excessive currency printing, restrictions on border trade, and chronic electricity shortages. The introduction of the conscription law has further worsened the situation, with many workers leaving the country, causing significant disruptions in the garment sector, which contributes around 2% of Myanmar's GDP.



Many people in Rakhine State have been displaced by the fighting. Photo: AFP

Arakan Army on a roll in Rakhine

The Arakan Army (AA) seized the No. (5) Military Operations Command (MOC) in Taunggok, Rakhine State, on the afternoon of December 14. The fall of this headquarters marks a significant victory for the AA, which now controls the entire Taunggok Township. This achievement brings the total number of townships under AA control to 13 - 12 in Rakhine State and one in Chin State.

The AA launched its operation to capture Taunggok on November 4, culminating in success after a 40-day offensive.

In Ann City, home to the junta's Western Command Headquarters, the AA has seized most of the city, including all junta regiments and military bases. The AA now surrounds the Western Command Headquarters, cutting off supply routes. Junta troops trapped inside are unable to access food, weapons, and reinforcements, relying on airdropped supplies, many of which fail to reach them.

Local sources reported increasing defections among junta soldiers. A source told local media, "Soldiers are surrendering to the AA, raising white flags in groups due to food shortages and their commanders abandoning them. The unity among the trapped troops has collapsed as they argue about whether to surrender. We are just waiting for AA's official announcement."

In the southernmost township of Gwa, the AA began its offensive in late October. By December 13, the AA had penetrated junta defenses and launched an attack on No. (563) Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) in Gwa's urban area. Unconfirmed reports suggest the commander of No. (563) LIB was killed during the battle.

The AA also seized the No. (5) Border Guard Police headquarters in Maungdaw after a four-month assault. The base was commanded by the head of No. (15) MOC, who had been stationed there after the AA captured his previous base in Buthidaung in May. Despite extensive defensive preparations, including bunkers and trenches, the junta's reliance on parachuted supplies proved unsustainable. Many supply drops failed to



PDF fighters in Sagaing Region. Photo: AFP

reach troops on the ground. During the battle, AA used heavy weapons such as howitzers and artillery, which were seized from the junta.

Before the AA seized the headquarters, a video recorded by junta soldiers surfaced on social media, showing them visibly weak and lamenting their lack of supplies and abandonment by their commander crowding in a cramped room. Subsequently, the commander, along with his Rohingya allies, was captured by the AA.

On the night of December 13, pro-junta Rohingya militias attempted an incursion into Alethankyaw village. The junta's navy, positioned near the Bangladesh-Myanmar maritime border, supported ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) troops to land on strategic ground in Maungdaw, which they had relinquished to the AA. Observers suggest the junta is using Rohingya militias to create additional challenges for the AA.

The recent developments underscore the junta's diminishing control in Rakhine State, with the AA making significant territorial gains and further isolating junta forces.

Increased pressure on IDPs in Sagaing

Earlier, on December 4, junta drone attacks in Kalewa township in Sagaing killed three men and left five others injured, including a child. The victims were plowing their farmland when drones dropped bombs on them.

In the same Township, junta artillery fire claimed the life of an eight-year-old girl on December 9. The shelling, originating from a military base located two miles away, also seriously injured an 11-year-old girl and a woman, marking yet another incident of targeted attacks on civilians.

The revolutionary forces, led by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), have launched an offensive against the junta's last stronghold in Indaw town, located in northern Sagaing Region. The operation, which resumed on December 11, has escalated as junta forces rely heavily on air support to defend their position. The stronghold, a repurposed underground Japanese hospital from World War II, has been fortified with a year's worth of ammunition and food supplies,

making it difficult for the revolutionary forces to capture.

On the same day, the People's Defense Force (PDF) ambushed two junta motorboats in the Monywa area. The attack resulted in the deaths of three junta soldiers and left six others wounded.

In Monywa, the capital of Sagaing Region, a surge in crime has forced many residents to flee. Incidents of robberies and hostage-taking have increased dramatically in late November and early December. During the last week of November, an elderly man was taken hostage, and his family was forced to pay 100 million kyats to secure his release. Despite such incidents, the perpetrators remain unidentified.

Four cases of robberies and kidnappings occurred within a short period, triggering widespread fear. Approximately half of Monywa's population has left the city for safer areas, while those who remain avoid going outside after 6 pm due to safety concerns.

The combination of intensified military clashes and deteriorating security conditions has left the Sagaing Region in a state of turmoil, severely impacting civilians and driving displacement.



WORLD BANK SAYS COMPOUNDING CRISES CONTINUE TO PLAGUE MYANMAR'S ECONOMY

The World Bank released its periodic Myanmar Economic Monitor on 11 December. The report highlights the impacts of continuing manmade and natural crises in Myanmar on its deteriorating economic situation over the past six months. Flooding, armed conflicts, and junta economic controls have resulted in food insecurity, population displacement, unemployment, and rising poverty.

The text of the World Bank press release accompanying the report reads as follows.

Natural disasters, ongoing conflict, and widespread shortages of basic commodities have hit Myanmar's economy hard, while the economic outlook remains bleak. According to the World Bank Myanmar Economic Monitor, Myanmar's GDP is expected to contract by 1 percent in the fiscal year ending March 2025, a downward revision from the previous projection of modest growth.

The agriculture, manufacturing, and services sectors are projected to contract, with production constrained by ongoing shortages of raw materials, inadequate electricity supply, and weakness in domestic demand. Over half of Myanmar's townships are experiencing active conflict, which continues to disrupt supply chains and border trade. Macroeconomic volatility has persisted over the past six months. Adding to these compounding crises, recent Typhoon Yagi and heavy monsoon rains have caused severe flooding across Myanmar, affecting 2.4 million people in 192 townships. Floods damaged infrastructure and disrupted production, with over a third of all firms and more than half of agricultural firms reporting adverse

impacts. Food insecurity has increased because of these shocks, with food prices continuing to increase rapidly.

"The recent natural disasters and ongoing conflict have severely impacted Myanmar's economy, with households bearing the brunt of rising prices and labour market weakness," said Melinda Good, World Bank Country Director for Thailand and Myanmar. "It is urgent and critical to support recovery efforts to help the most vulnerable populations rebuild their lives and livelihoods."

Migration has served as a crucial coping mechanism in Myanmar, while also triggering domestic shortages of labour and human capital. Migrants to Thailand and Malaysia earn 2–3 times more than they would in Myanmar—and those in Japan and the Republic of Korea earn more than 10 times more—according to a recent survey by the World Bank and the International Labour Organization. The remittances these migrants send home provide the main source of income for 7.5 percent of Myanmar households.

"Recent migration flows highlight the precarious state of Myanmar's economy, as well as the pressures associated with conflict and conscription," said Kim Edwards, Senior Economist and Program Leader for Myanmar and Thailand. "Much of the recent out-migration has occurred under duress and via informal channels, reducing the gains from migration and increasing its costs. More can be done to facilitate migration through regular channels: this will ultimately benefit receiving countries as well as Myanmar workers and their families."

CORRUPTION HARMS THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF SAYS

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said in his speech at a ceremony observing International Anti-Corruption Day held at the Myanmar International Convention Centre I in Naypyidaw on 9 December that corruption not only hinders the achievement of national development goals but also harm rule of law, peace, and stability.

The junta chief said that corruption was a global problem harming the rule of law and democracy worldwide, with justice disappearing in society, and causing harm to the nation and the general public.

"Corruption not only hinder the achievement of national development goals but also harms the rule of law, peace, and stability," he added.

He continued that the government strives to combat corruption with goodwill for the State by implementing missions and visions to achieve a decline in corruption.

"The extortion, frauds, misappropriation of state finance and property, misuse of state property and finance for personal interests, and the seeking of personal benefits by using undue influence is corruption," he defined.

He noted that corruption is rooted in government bodies and the private sector, as well as in non-profit charity organizations in developed and developing countries worldwide.

He stressed that action will be taken against offenders in corruption cases in accordance with the

Anti-Corruption Law, and property received through corruption will be confiscated under the law.

The junta has taken action against some high-ranking military officers in its government due to corruption after they were exposed collaborating with some businessmen.

Home Minister Lt. Gen. Soe Htut was given a 5-year prison sentence last year and his son, Pol. Brig. Gen. Kyaw Thi Ha and other police officers were given prison sentences in connection with this case.

They were accused of committing corruption by issuing passports, taking bribes from business persons for getting titles and medals conferred by the State, and misappropriation of Police Special Branch funds etc.

Similarly, the junta sentenced Lt. Gen. Moe Myint Tun and Brig. Gen. Yan Naung Soe to 20 years' imprisonment in September 2023 for corruption.

Corruption is rampant among ward-level authorities who are take bribes from youths to evade conscription.

After the People's Military Service Law (conscription law) came into effect in February 2024, the junta's grassroots-level administration councils extorted money from youths in many areas to avoid conscription. Some administrators were arrested, threatened, and pressured into military service.



Overseas workers. Photo: Mizzima

JUNTA WARNS MYANMAR OVERSEAS WORKERS AGAIN REGARDING OFFICIAL TRANSFER OF REMITTANCES TO THEIR FAMILIES

The junta is putting pressure on Myanmar overseas workers continuously to transfer remittances to their families through the official banking system.

Private Overseas Employment Agencies (POEA) informed Myanmar workers working in South Korea to transfer remittances to their families through the official banking channels.

The workers in Korea need to transfer at least 25% of their salaries as remittances to their families either monthly or quarterly.

In October this year, Myanmar Union Minister of Labour told Myanmar workers during his visit to Laos that workers must transfer at least 25% of their salaries to their families in Myanmar through the official banking channels.

The Ministry of Labour has set a minimum for overseas workers' salaries of 25% as a mandatory remittance to their families through official banking channels since last year.

The POEA which sent these workers overseas for employment must send a report regarding remittances transferred by workers not within five days of the end of each month without fail, regardless of receiving remittance documents or not.

The Ministry of Labour warned these POEAs that they would be fined if they failed to send these reports. They would also be suspended from submitting Demand Letters received from foreign employers to recruit workers.

The Labour Ministry also warned Myanmar overseas workers that they would be banned from exiting the country for employment, refused issuance of the Overseas Worker Identity Cards (OWIC) required for foreign employment, and refused extensions to their passports if they failed to abide with this mandatory minimum remittance regulation.

The Labour Ministry issued warning letters to nearly 300 employment agencies imposing fines and suspension from submission of Demand Letters to recruit new workers as they failed to submit reports on remittances with supporting documents.

In October this year, the Ministry announced that they banned 26 employment agencies from sending workers for foreign employment.

The Ministry of Labour announced that nearly 600 POEAs were registered with them for sending workers to foreign countries. These agencies are sending over 1,000 workers every month to foreign countries for employment.



Photo: Mizzima

YANGON SEES INTENSIFIED MIDNIGHT JUNTA INSPECTIONS AMID RISING RESISTANCE ATTACKS

The Myanmar Military Council, in coordination with the police, conducted widespread midnight guest-list inspections across multiple townships in Yangon Region on 11 December, according to local residents.

The inspections targeted numerous locations, including North Dagon's 7/8 junction, Ward No. 9 in East Dagon, Ward No. 8 in Kamayut, Ward No. 10 in Hlaingthaya, Myothit wards (A) and (B) in Insein, Sin Min and Sak-Twin roads in Ahlone Township, as well as Wards 54 and 17 in South Dagon and Kyauk Myaung ward in Tamwe. These operations were confirmed through reports from local monitors and eyewitness accounts.

A Kamayut resident described the scene said, "There were many uniformed personnel on 11 December. They entered the neighbourhood, conducted searches, and even stopped vehicles. My flatmate was questioned while on the road."

In Hlaing Township, a woman says that while her apartment was not inspected, rented accommodations often face frequent checks.

"Our apartment wasn't inspected. They searched a nearby building on 11 and 12 December. They comb through entire complexes. These inspections frighten workers, many of whom are from other regions," she said.

Reports indicate that several young people were detained during the raids, though independent verification from Mizzima is still pending.

A local source suggested that the heightened inspections were in response to recent resistance group attacks in Yangon.

On 11 December, traffic police stationed at North Dagon's 7/8 junction were reportedly fired upon. The night before, the development office in Tamwe Township was attacked with grenades. Additionally, on 6 December, the Brave Warriors for Myanmar (BWM) coalition launched rocket attacks on the Hmawbi Air Force base.

The inspections, combined with ongoing attacks, have left residents uneasy as security measures tighten across Yangon.

OVERCROWDING AND WATER SHORTAGES WORSEN SKIN CONDITIONS AT MYANMAR'S PATHEIN PRISON

Inmates at Pathein Prison in Ayeyarwady Region, both men and women, are reportedly suffering from severe skin conditions such as itching due to inadequate access to water.

Families of political prisoners have raised concerns about worsening conditions, which they attribute to inconsistent electricity supply and deliberate power cuts by prison authorities.

According to a source close to the Correction Department, skin conditions have plagued inmates since 2022 and deteriorated further in recent months. The inability to operate water pumps due to power outages has prevented prisoners from maintaining basic hygiene.

"Prison authorities often cut electricity during the day, even when it's available. This leaves inmates, especially those in solitary confinement, struggling with unbearable itching," a source close to the prison said.

A relative of a political prisoner stated that inmates are not only deprived of medical care but are also confined to overcrowded cells, exacerbating their skin ailments.

"Inmates can only bathe when the water pump operates, which is just three times a week. Even then, water is rationed, and they must use a limited number of cups for bathing and laundry. With only two sets of clothes, they're often forced to wear unwashed garments," the family member said.

Relatives visiting inmates have attempted to provide medications, including ointments and oral treatments, but the overcrowded conditions and lack of medical care in the prison clinic hinders recovery.

Designed to house around 1,000 inmates, Pathein Prison now holds more than its capacity, forcing detainees into cramped sleeping arrangements. Former inmates and families report that even after some recover from skin infections, the diseases quickly spread again due to overcrowding and poor hygiene practices.

A political prisoner released in 2023 said, "During my time, we had access to baths, but that's no longer the case. Water is severely restricted, and skin conditions are much worse now due to overcrowding and mismanagement. Without proper treatment, these infections will persist."

Attempts by Mizzima to contact Pathein Prison for comments were unsuccessful.

Overcrowding has worsened following the transfer of political prisoners from Rakhine State and the increasing number of detainees arrested for pro-democracy activism.



Photo: AFP

NUCC WELCOMES ICC CHIEF PROSECUTOR'S APPLICATION FOR ARREST WARRANT AGAINST SENIOR GENERAL MIN AUNG HLAING

The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) released a statement on 10 December welcoming the ICC Chief Prosecutor's application for an arrest warrant against junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

The statement is as follows.

1. The National Unity Consultative Council NUCC welcomes the application submitted on November 27, 2024, by Karim A.A. Khan KC, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), requesting the issuance of an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing, the leader of the violent military junta, to be prosecuted before the ICC.

2. We strongly support the ICC's Pre-Trial Chamber I to confirm the arrest warrant. Min Aung Hlaing must be held accountable in accordance with international law.

3. In addition to committing genocide against the Rohingya, the Burmese military has systematically and extensively perpetrated widespread atrocities against the people across Myanmar, including ethnic people for decades. The NUCC finds that these atrocities qualify as "crimes against humanity" and "war crimes" under

the provisions of the Rome Statute. Therefore, the ICC's current investigation must be expanded to allow for the prosecution of the full range of crimes that have been committed by the Burmese military, even before its February 1, 2021 coup.

4. The NUCC urges all actors, including international organizations and governments worldwide, to actively support all efforts for justice and accountability in Myanmar, including by ceasing any form of collaboration with Min Aung Hlaing and the violent military junta that continues to flagrantly commit international crimes.

5. We strongly call for Governments and Multinational Corporations to heed the proceedings to penalize Min Aung Hlaing and his junta for their Criminal Actions by the ICC, the Black listing by the Financial Action Task Force FATF of Min Aung Hlaing and his junta on Money Laundering and Human Trafficking acts, the designation of Forced Labor by the International Labor Organization ILO on Min Aung Hlaing and his juntas Forced Military Conscriptations. There could be unavoidable consequences should governments and multinational companies continue working with Min Aung Hlaing and his junta who continue these heinous crimes.

TOTAL OF 475 MYANMAR JUNTA PERSONNEL JOIN NUG'S PEOPLE'S EMBRACE PROGRAMME IN 2024

A total of 475 individuals, including a lieutenant colonel, defected from the military regime to join the National Unity Government's (NUG) People's Embrace programme in 2024, according to U Nay Phone Latt, an NUG spokesperson.

Speaking at a press briefing on 10 December, U Nay Phone Latt provided details of the defections and called for continued international and public support.

From January to November 2024, a total of 475 individuals sought refuge through the program, which was established by the NUG to support defectors. This group included 302 soldiers from infantry units, 11 navy personnel, 11 air force members, 133 police officers, and five prison department officials. Notably, 191 of these defectors brought weapons with them, for which they received rewards based on the type of armament surrendered.

In addition, 33 individuals forcibly conscripted under the junta's military service law also joined the People's Embrace program, the spokesperson revealed.

Since its formation three years ago, the program has reportedly facilitated refuge for more than 3,700 soldiers, approximately 11,000 police officers, and their families totalling around 15,000 individuals.

"We are providing assistance and support to those who fled the military regime along with their families, in accordance with our procedures," said U Nay Phone Latt.

He added that while many have officially joined the NUG's initiative, others have chosen alternative ways to distance themselves from the junta. Some remain within the junta but covertly support the revolution through discreet actions.

"I want to emphasize that the National Unity Government acknowledges the efforts of these individuals also," he said.

The NUG has also invited "Pre CDMs" or "watermelons," who covertly gather and share intelligence on the regime, to cooperate with the People's Embrace program. These individuals, who cannot openly join the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) for various reasons, have been assured safety when the revolution succeeds.



IRC WATCHLIST 2025 SHOWS MYANMAR FACES CRISIS OF CONFLICT, DISPLACEMENT, AND HEALTH SYSTEM COLLAPSE

Myanmar ranks third on the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) Emergency Watchlist for 2025 released on 11 December. The report notes that armed groups in Myanmar have advanced rapidly across the country in the past year, forcing nearly 900,000 people to flee their homes, a 37% increase since 2023. The ongoing conflict is slated to continue to cause dire conditions for Myanmar's population.

The text of the press release accompanying the report continues as follows.

On 11 December, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) unveils its annual Emergency Watchlist, highlighting the 20 countries most likely to face escalating humanitarian crisis in 2025. The top five crises are Sudan, occupied Palestinian territory, Myanmar, Syria and South Sudan.

305 million people worldwide are in need of humanitarian support. Watchlist countries account for 82% of this figure, despite only comprising 11% of the global population. 77% of the world's displaced are due to crises in Watchlist countries. Watchlist countries account for over 30% and counting of the world's extreme poor.

This year's Emergency Watchlist speaks to "A World Out of Balance," as the catalyst for new crises and the obstacle in bringing them to heel. The four deep-seated imbalances in the international system that drive crisis are:

- More conflict and less diplomacy is the most obvious and most dangerous symptom of the world out of balance. There are now a record 59 conflicts in 2023, the highest since World War II.

- Attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure are increasingly central to battle strategy. The number of attacks on civilians by state and non-state armed groups around the globe has increased by 66% between 2013 and 2023, and 74% were in Watchlist countries.

- More carbon emissions and less support for people suffering from the climate crisis are the third imbalance. Watchlist countries contribute less than 4% of global CO2 emissions, but over one-third of all people made homeless or displaced by natural hazards over the past 5 years were in Watchlist countries.

- Finally, more wealth accumulation, less poverty alleviation. On average, poverty levels in Watchlist countries are now almost 85% higher than they were in the mid-2000s, whereas they have fallen 37% in the rest of the world over the same period.

The IRC suggests an agenda for action in six categories.

1. Reform the humanitarian aid system, using cost efficiency and cost effectiveness tools to drive value for money.
2. Relieve debt burdens, expand financing and

promote economic stability to address crisis drivers and promote shared prosperity.

3. Improve civilian protection by reforming the U.N. Security Council to increase representation, and suspend use of the veto in cases of mass atrocity.

4. Ease civilian suffering by protecting humanitarian access, ensuring aid can be safely delivered to those in need.

5. Invest in climate adaptation and resilience to mitigate the impacts of climate shocks.

6. Expand safe pathways and assistance for refugees to strengthen protection and inclusion.

David Miliband, President & CEO of the International Rescue Committee, said,

"It is clear that "the world is on fire" is a daily reality for 100s of millions of people. This is the result of a world fundamentally out of balance. As a humanitarian agency, IRC's job is to meet needs, but also call them out. This is the purpose of the Emergency Watchlist published today.

"The concentration of extreme poverty is remarkable. The world is being cleaved into two camps: between those born in unstable conflict states, and those with a chance to make it in stable states. This is a trend that needs to be addressed for moral and strategic reasons. The moral case is that with more resources than ever before, they need to be used to help the world's most vulnerable. The strategic case is that problems that start in Sudan or Syria do not stay there: instability spreads.

"Business as usual will not reverse this trend. Civilians will continue to suffer the worst impacts of burgeoning conflict and risk perilous journeys if we don't break with the status quo. The international community has both an incredible opportunity and responsibility to change the terms of humanitarian and diplomatic engagement in Watchlist countries. And while the challenges in these countries are complex, the IRC's experience shows that there are ways to save lives, build resilience, and preserve the livelihoods of the most vulnerable."

Notes to Editors:

For the past decade, The IRC's Emergency Watchlist report has helped the IRC determine where to focus our emergency preparedness efforts, successfully predicting on average 85-95% of the 20 countries facing the worst deteriorations. It is also where we share our analysis of how global humanitarian crisis is evolving, why, and what can be done to reduce the impact on

affected communities.

Now the largest humanitarian crisis ever recorded, the largest displacement crisis in the world, and heading towards one of the world's worst famines in decades, Sudan is at the top of the Emergency Watchlist for the second year running. The country's collapse is accelerating as a brutal civil war, fueled by outside powers, devastates the lives of civilians. Far from working towards a diplomatic resolution, leaders of both factions seem to believe that continued fighting best serves their interests, putting Sudan on course for devastating humanitarian collapse in 2025.

The occupied Palestinian territory remains second on the Watchlist after more than a year of conflict that has devastated Gaza and significantly worsened conditions in the West Bank. There is no safe place in Gaza: over 1 in 50 people in Gaza have been killed since October 2023, and without a lasting ceasefire and restrictions on imports being eased, casualties will increase and there will be a risk of famine in 2025.

Third on the list, Myanmar has seen armed groups unite and advance rapidly across the country, causing nearly 900,000 people to flee their homes - a 37% increase from 2023. The balance tilts firmly towards more war this year. Cholera and other diseases threaten to overwhelm Myanmar's health system, which has been decimated by conflict. Flooding, and other climate-induced disasters mean that the country's ability to cope with additional needs will be pushed to the brink in the year ahead.

Syria re-enters the Emergency Watchlist's top five for the first time since 2021 after nonstate armed groups launched a surprise offensive in late 2024, triggering a rapid collapse of government forces. As Watchlist goes to print, the situation is highly uncertain. Whether the latest shifts in the conflict will allow Syrians to start rebuilding their lives in 2025 or deepen the crisis remains an open question.

Ripple effects from the conflict in Sudan exposes South Sudan to a growing economic crisis, while the arrival of over 878,000 people fleeing Sudan's war adds to the challenges facing the country. The delivery of humanitarian aid is treacherous, with at least 28 attacks on aid workers over the course of 2024 highlighting the reality that South Sudan is one of the most dangerous places for aid workers. This will make efforts to respond to the deepening crisis even more treacherous in 2025.



FIERCE CLASHES BETWEEN MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES AND DPLA LEAVE OVER 50 SOLDIERS DEAD IN SOUTHERN SHAN STATE

Intense fighting between Myanmar junta forces and the Danu People's Liberation Army (DPLA) has been ongoing in the Kyaukgu area of Yatsauk Township, southern Shan State, since 30 November.

According to a DPLA statement released on 9 December, the clashes have resulted in over 50 junta troop fatalities and numerous injuries.

The DPLA's statement detailed the ten-days of conflict from 30 November to 9 December, during which their forces also seized weapons and ammunition. Accompanying photos displayed the bodies of at least five junta soldiers and over 20 captured firearms. However, Mizzima has not been able to independently confirm these casualty figures.

Kyaukgu, situated between Nawngkhio Township in northern Shan State and Yatsauk Township in southern Shan State, became a battleground after a joint junta column comprising Kyaukgu-based Field Artillery

Battalion 349 and Nawng Woe-based Infantry Battalion 292 moved through the area to reinforce positions in Taung Kham, Nawngkhio Township. This movement triggered the clashes, according to a DPLA official.

The DPLA alleged that junta forces employed chemical bombs during the fighting, causing seven DPLA members to experience nausea and dizziness.

In a public statement, the DPLA advised civilians in the combat area to relocate to safer places and avoid junta troops.

The DPLA, established after the military coup in 2021, operates in the Danu Self-Administered Zone of southern Shan State as part of a revolutionary alliance against the military dictatorship. They have collaborated with groups like the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in combat operations, including the first phase of Operation 1027.

Citizen photo supplied



MILITARY AIRSTRIKES KILL FOUR FAMILY MEMBERS IN CHIN STATE, DRAWING CONDEMNATION

Four family members were killed and nine others injured in airstrikes carried out by junta forces in Chun Kyong village, Hakha Township, Chin State, according to local sources.

The attack occurred at around 2 am on 10 December when a junta jet fighter dropped two bombs on the village, located approximately 10 miles from Hakha along the Falam-Hakha Union Road.

"A single bomb killed four individuals and injured one, while eight others were wounded," a local resident said.

Among the deceased were a 66-year-old man, his 65-year-old wife, their 47-year-old eldest daughter, and their 13-year-old youngest daughter. The airstrikes also destroyed several homes.

A local resident stated that the junta aircraft bombed Chun Kyong village without any provocation.

The Chin Human Rights Organization denounced the incident in a statement on 10 December, condemning it as a war crime, especially as it coincided with International Human Rights Day.

The Chinland Defence Force (Hakha) similarly criticized the bombing as a deliberate assault on civilians, rejecting such acts as clear war crimes.

The Institute of Chin Affairs Inc. disclosed that, as of February 2024, 582 Chin people have been killed by the junta across Myanmar since the February 2021 coup.

BANGLADESH WARNS FISHERMEN IN TEKNAF AS TENSIONS ESCALATE ON BORDER WITH MYANMAR

Photo: Kabir Rahman

Amid heightened tensions at the Myanmar border, authorities in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar, have issued a warning for navigation in the Naf River and adjoining sea areas.

Announcements were made via loudspeakers on 9-10 December by the upazila (sub-district) administration to alert residents, the Dhaka Tribune reported.

The Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO or Sub-District Chief Executive Officer) of Teknaf, said: "Due to ongoing conflicts and the tense situation in Myanmar's Rakhine State, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Coast Guard personnel have intensified patrols along the Naf River to prevent illegal crossings."

"Fishing trawler owners in Teknaf have also been instructed to ensure their vessels do not venture near Myanmar's territorial waters," he added.

The UNO further said: "The Naf River and border areas are currently extremely hazardous. Following a request from the BGB, the upazila administration has issued these public warnings."

The Arakan Army (AA) issued a similar announcement on 8 December which banned navigation on the Naf River indefinitely.

Junta troops are withdrawing and trying to flee to Bangladesh by crossing Naf River following the AA's capture of the No. 5 Border Police Force camp in Maungdaw. The AA has thus banned navigation on the Naf River in Myanmar waters and the Bangladesh government subsequently tightened security along the border with Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR DEPUTY JUNTA CHIEF ORDERS SEIZURE OF MORE ILLEGAL GOODS

Deputy junta chief Vice-Senior General Soe Win reportedly ordered a four-fold acceleration in efforts to suppress possession and smuggling of illegal goods.

He made the announcement in a speech delivered at the Work Coordination Meeting 5/2024 of the Illegal Trade Eradication Steering Committee at the Ministry of Commerce in Naypyidaw on 10 December.

Concerning seizures in Myanmar, Soe Win noted that the Customs Department and Mandalay Region ranked first in the seizure of smuggled and illegal commodities in September, October and November 2024, followed by Kayin Stat and Kachin State.

"Although the monthly seizures show an increase in 2024, the record of export and import data of the trading partner countries shows huge gaps in comparison with the export and import data of this country. Therefore, the steering committee and special task forces need to accelerate their actions four-fold," he said.

Smuggled and illegal commodities worth K379.247 billion were seized in 17,258 cases from January 2022 to November 2024.

He went on to say that the illicit trade used by armed groups for survival must be suppressed and eliminated, not only during transit, but also in field inspections at warehouses and storehouses, as well as through the seizure of goods in markets. Authorities

Authorities are raiding, inspecting and seizing goods allegedly importing illegally.

The prices of imported goods are currently rising in the market, and people are facing shortages of these goods in the market.

The junta is facing a crisis due to very low foreign exchange reserves and the loss of control of many major border trade posts along the Thailand and China borders. It is thus tightly restricting the import of most imported goods.

Merchants say these reasons are why the number of illicit goods imported is much higher than that of legally importing goods.

Photo: Ash Hayes

DISPLACED FISHERMEN IN AYEYARWADY STRUGGLE UNDER MYANMAR'S MILITARY-IMPOSED FISHING BAN

Fishermen who fled the conflict in Rakhine State and sought refuge in Patheingyi Township, Ayeyarwady Region, report severe hardships due to a military-imposed fishing ban. The displaced fishermen revealed to Mizzima that restrictions on their fishing activities have left them struggling to survive.

A fisherman from Gwa Township stated that district administrators banned displaced fishermen from fishing in Chaungtha and Shwe Thauk Yan towns since late November. Officials cited concerns that their activities might disrupt local peace.

"When we first arrived here with our boats, we were allowed to fish. Now, all fishing rights have been taken away. I'm not sure whether it was the regional commander, the administrator, or the military security authorities who imposed the ban. They're just giving vague explanations because they don't want to restore fishing rights," he said.

The displaced community consists of local fishermen from Gwa and Thandwe townships in Rakhine State. They fled the conflict in more than 70 boats, bringing with them approximately 1,000 fishermen and their family members.

These fishermen have been struggling to make ends meet since the ban. They report facing extortion by military subordinates and other authorities. Another fisherman explained that they are currently relying on advance payments from boat owners to cover basic expenses.

"In the long run, the boat owners won't be able to continue providing advances. This isn't our hometown, and we're already struggling with rent and food expenses," he said.

Efforts by boat owners to negotiate the restoration of fishing rights have so far been unsuccessful, leaving the ban firmly in place. The junta's restrictions have added to the economic woes of the displaced community.

In July, the junta issued a directive instructing police and local administrators to monitor displaced persons from Rakhine State entering the Ayeyarwady Region. This directive has further compounded the challenges faced by those fleeing the conflict.

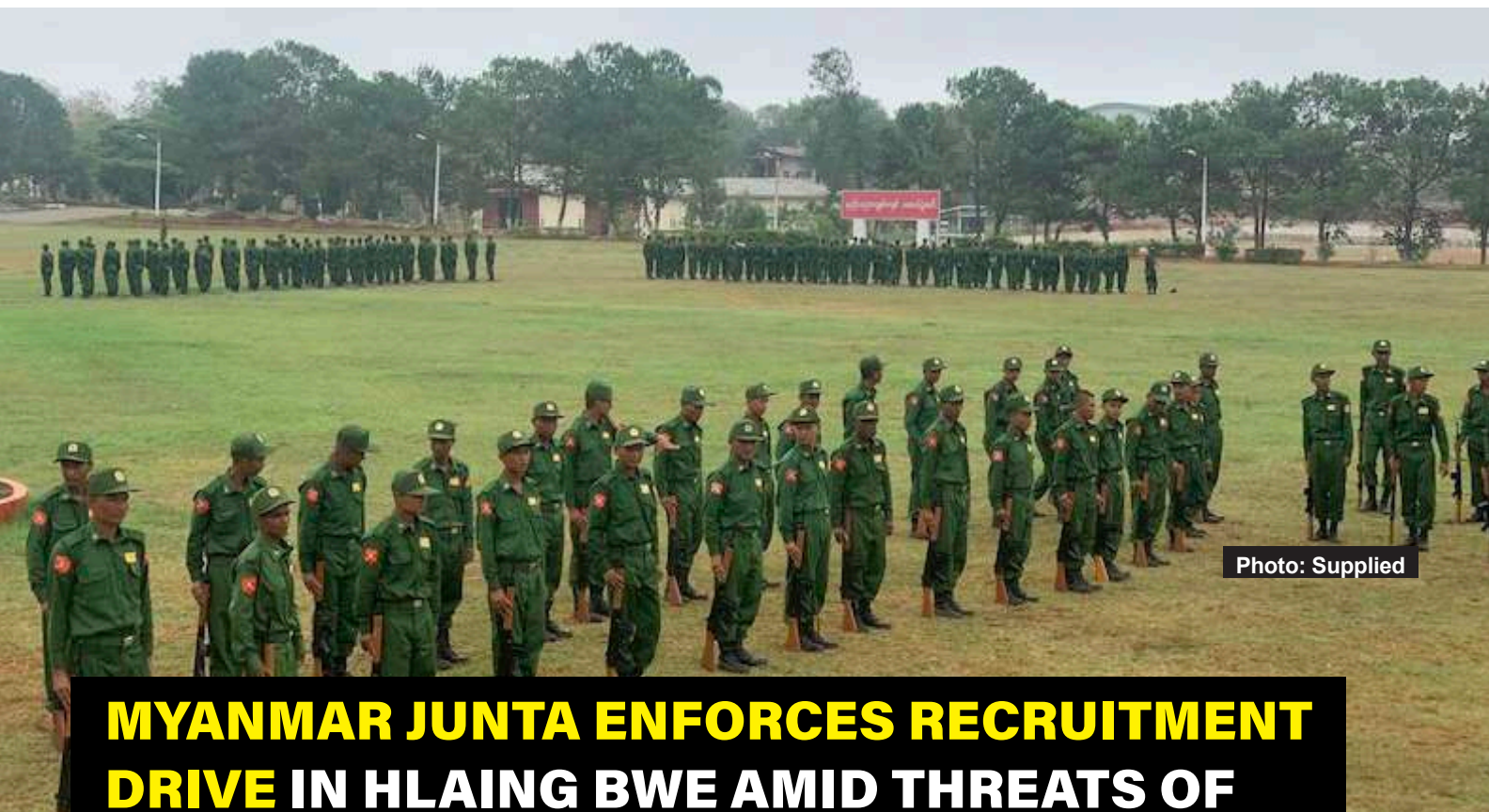


Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA ENFORCES RECRUITMENT DRIVE IN HLAING BWE AMID THREATS OF FORCED CONSCRIPTION

The junta has intensified its efforts to recruit new soldiers in Hlaing Bwe Township, Karen State, with the junta Tactical Operation Commander threatening forced conscription if recruitment targets are not met, according to a statement from the Karen National Union (KNU).

During a 10 December meeting with ward administrators in Hlaing Bwe Township, Hpa-an District, Tactical Operation Commander Colonel Soe Min Aung demanded that a list of trainees to be sent to the 8th military service intake be submitted to his office by 12 December.

The statement revealed that one recruit is required from each village tract, totalling 72 soldiers from Hlaing Bwe. Colonel Soe Min Aung warned that if the recruitment quota was not met, a fine of 3 million kyats per person would be imposed, and individuals could face arrest at the town gates.

The meeting was attended by administrators from Wards A and D of Hlaing Bwe Town and various village tracts, including Htaung Xue, Inn Nue Take Pan, Kamo Le, Ta Khat Po, No Kaw, Kwan Maung, Mya Lay, Thayar Kone, Jo Chaung, U Daung, Ta Wun Phan Ra, Kyong Pa Ko, and Takhin Lone.

While the location of the meeting was not specified in the statement, local sources close to the

administrators indicated that it was held at the Hlaing Bwe General Administration Office.

“That’s exactly what they said. If the villages near the town cannot provide recruits, they will come at night and forcibly take some men,” a resident of Hlaing Bwe said.

The commander emphasized that a previous call for military service in Hlaing Bwe for the seventh training course had been ignored by some village tracts, warning against similar non-compliance this time.

Hlaing Bwe lies in the operating area of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Brigade 7, the military wing of the Karen National Union (KNU), although the junta maintains administrative authority there.

In nearby rural areas, residents claim households unable to provide recruits are required to pay approximately 40,000 kyats each.

The junta has plans to recruit 60,000 men annually in areas under its control, with 5,000 recruits per training course. Each course consists of three months of military training at regional military headquarters. The military recently completed its sixth training course.



KNDF fighters

KNDF ACCUSES MYANMAR JUNTA OF DEPLOYING TOXIC GAS TABLETS IN DRONE ATTACKS

The Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) alleged on 13 December, supported by photographic evidence, that Myanmar's military junta used 560 S-PHOS tablets, which release toxic gas, in drone attacks on Moebye Township, southern Shan State.

According to the KNDF, the attacks were conducted by Light Infantry Battalion-422 on 7 and 8 December. The tablets, commonly used in agriculture but harmful to humans, were reportedly deployed during the drone strikes.

Witnesses reported significant smoke released near the drones, with those exposed experiencing symptoms such as dizziness, nausea, drowsiness, body aches and weakness.

"Affected individuals feel drowsy for hours and recover only after rest," a KNDF spokesperson explained, though the exact number of affected fighters remains unconfirmed.

A search of the bombed area uncovered 560 S-PHOS tablets, which are typically used for bug control but can harm humans if inhaled or ingested.

A CDM doctor said, "Inhalation can cause dizziness and vomiting, similar to motion sickness."

Another doctor noted that the tablets, also used in hospitals for disinfection, could cause severe respiratory irritation, convulsions, or even death in vulnerable individuals.

The KNDF emphasized that finding the tablets in a combat zone rather than agricultural fields indicates deliberate misuse by the junta.

This is not the first instance of such allegations. The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) have also accused the junta of deploying chemical weapons.

In July, the TNLA reported eight soldiers suffering symptoms from toxic gas exposure during attacks in Nawngkhio Township. Similar allegations arose during battles in Lashio and Namhkam townships in November.

The KNDF claims this pattern of chemical weapon use violates international norms and exacerbates the suffering caused by the ongoing conflict.



IDPs in need of food and shelter.
Photo: Supplied

COLD WEATHER AND HEALTH CONCERNS IMPACTING IDPS IN UPPER MYANMAR AND KARENNI AND KACHIN STATES

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in upper Myanmar as well as Karenni and Kachin States are suffering from illness due to harsh winter conditions, according to local aid workers. The cold temperatures have caused widespread health issues among the IDPs, including runny noses, coughing, and bronchitis.

An official from the Ayar Pyit Taing Htaung Lay Myar group reported that approximately two-thirds of displaced people in upper Myanmar, particularly in Sagaing, Sarlingyi, Yinmabin, Kani, Pale, and Budalin townships, are experiencing health problems.

"With the colder weather, many are suffering from colds, coughing, and bronchitis. Children are especially affected by fever and bronchitis, while older adults struggle with persistent coughs," the official said.

Karenni State has been facing similar challenges since October, with both children and adults frequently battling cold-related illnesses.

Sister Seint San Ye, a local volunteer said, "The cold is intense, and even the water in the region is freezing. It's a yearly struggle, and this year has been no different."

In addition to the cold, the region's arid conditions have led to a shortage of water, forcing displaced people to purchase water now that the rainy season is over.

Meanwhile, in Kachin State, displacement caused by ongoing fighting in Bhamo town has left many IDPs without adequate shelter, compounding the impact of the colder weather. Communication has been severed, with phone and internet connections down, leaving families in the dark about the well-being of their loved ones.

A Bhamo resident, currently in another town, expressed concern, saying, "I don't know what's happening to my family. I've heard that many displaced people are just scattered with no proper shelter, but I have no other information."

In response to the dire situation, aid workers highlight the urgent need for warm clothing, blankets, food, and medicine for the displaced populations in these regions. In Karenni State, access to water is also a critical concern.

The Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, under Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG), issued a warning on 9 December, predicting further temperature drops in upper Myanmar and Sagaing regions throughout December.



KIA SEIZES KEY AREAS IN BHAMO AMID INTENSIFYING CLASHES WITH MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES

Colonel Naw Bu, Press and Information Officer of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), confirmed to Mizzima on 11 December that KIA forces have captured significant territories in Bhamo Township, Kachin State, during ongoing battles that began on 4 December.

"We have been able to secure control of many areas in the town," Colonel Naw Bu said.

According to KIA military sources and local residents, the group has taken over junta camps, junta-controlled villages, and strategic strongholds.

The Banmaw Scout Team reported on 10 December that the KIA now controls most neighbourhoods in Bhamo, with heavy clashes continuing in locations such as Mile 2, Mile 6, Naung Kho, Nam Pha, Shwe Kyee Na, and Phang Kha Kone.

The fiercest fighting has been reported near the junta's Military Operation Command 21, while fires have reportedly destroyed homes in the Mile 2 and Mile 3 neighbourhoods and Bhamo Market.

As the battle enters its eighth day, Colonel Naw Bu states that the intensity of fighting has escalated significantly.

"The situation has intensified," he said. However, he declined to confirm the exact number of junta camps captured by KIA forces.

The Kachin Human Rights Watch (KHRW) highlighted the high toll on civilians, stating that the Bhamo conflict has resulted in the highest civilian casualties among all battles in Kachin State.

"The largest number of deaths occurred in Bhamo. Based on ground data, at least 20 civilians have died," a KHRW spokesperson said.

Local residents suggest the actual number of fatalities may be higher, but verification remains challenging due to restricted access to affected areas.

Bhamo, the second-largest city in Kachin State, holds strategic importance as a district headquarters and a key hub in the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, part of the broader China-Myanmar Ayeyarwady River Basin Economic Belt project connecting China to the Indian Ocean.

The town also hosts at least 17 junta military installations, including the Military Operation Command 21 headquarters.

Amid the ongoing fighting, KIO Chairman General N' Ban La led a delegation to China earlier this week at the invitation of the Chinese government for discussions. As of 11 December, the delegation had not returned, and the specifics of their discussions remain undisclosed, according to Colonel Naw Bu.



On guard in Kachin State. Photo: Supplied

CHINA DEMANDS PROTECTION FOR PROJECTS IN MYANMAR ECONOMIC CORRIDOR AMID ESCALATING CONFLICTS IN BHAMO

Amid fierce fighting in Bhamo, Kachin State, China is calling upon relevant parties in Myanmar to continue dialogue and consultations, realize a ceasefire as soon as possible, and prevent any damage to the security of China's borders and the safety of Chinese projects, businesses and personnel along the China-Myanmar economic corridor.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Ms. Mao Ning said, "China has been promoting dialogue and negotiations among the relevant parties in Myanmar to achieve a ceasefire as soon as possible to ensure safety along the border."

Ms. Mao Ning said this at the regular press briefing held in Beijing on 10 December in her reply to an AFP question regarding talks between a Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) delegation and Chinese officials.

She did not provide any details on the location or content of these talks.

"China is closely watching the situation in northern Myanmar. Conflict and chaos are the last thing we hope to see in Myanmar. We will continue to actively promote talks for peace and provide support and assistance to Myanmar's peace process to the best of our capability," she added.

The junta is strongly resisting in Bhamo where airstrikes and street fighting are taking place in the town. Junta troops are struggling hard to retain the strategic town.

The KIA is simultaneously launching offensives on eight strategic military camps and bases in the town such as Military Operation Command (MOC) 21 Headquarters, the Bhamo Police Station, Combined Government Offices, Engineering Garrison, Military Hospital, Supply and Logistics Battalion, University, airport, and other locations.

The KIA and allied forces have been carrying out offensives against Bhamo and Mansi since 4 December. Bhamo is a district-level town and the location of the Irrawaddy River Waterway Port Development project.

The KIA previously launched an offensive against Kanpaikti where a trade and economic zone is slated to be built as part of China-Myanmar economic corridor

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) recently announced a unilateral ceasefire with the junta soon after news appeared of Chinese pressure on ethnic armed groups based on the China-Myanmar border to stop fighting.

At the same time, a KIO delegation led by Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) Chairman General N' Ban La has been talking with Chinese officials in China since 8 December.

China is calling for a ceasefire and engagement in a dialogue for peace. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Ms. Mao Ning said at a regular press briefing held on 10 December that China would continue to actively promote talks for peace and provide support and assistance to Myanmar's peace process.

The spokeswoman urged all parties to realize a ceasefire and to provide security and not harm Chinese projects and Chinese nationals in Myanmar.



KIA fighter. Photo: AFP

KIA REOPENS MYANMAR BORDER GATES AMID ITS DELEGATION'S VISIT TO CHINA

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) reopened its border gates along the Kachin-China border on the morning of 13 December.

This move coincided with a visit by Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) Chairman General N'Ban La and his delegation to China, following an invitation from the Chinese government, according to video footage shared on social media and reports from Kachin news outlets.

"Yes, the border gates have reopened. The Laiza gate was opened this morning," a local source confirmed.

The KIA, which controls all major border trade gates in the region including Kanpaikti, Panwa, the Narpan gate in Laiza, Lweje, and Manweingyi was seen clearing the gates of barbed wire in video footage shared by Dr. Tu Hkawng, a Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation for the National Unity Government (NUG).

He announced the reopening on Facebook, stating, "All Chinese border gates in Kachin State have been opened this morning."

China initially closed these gates on 18 October, reportedly to pressure the KIA into halting attacks on Myanmar military junta bases along the border. In retaliation, the KIA imposed a counter-blockade, escalating tensions between the KIA and the Chinese government.

When questioned about the reopening, KIA spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu said, "I'll find out this," leaving uncertainty over whether the move is temporary or part of a negotiated agreement.

The KIO delegation, led by General N'Ban La, traveled to China on 9 December and reportedly held talks in Kunming on 12 December. While the meeting agenda remains undisclosed, Chinese representation included Wu Ken, a member of the Central Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), according to KIO sources.

The reopening coincides with intensified fighting in Bhamo, where China is developing the "China-Myanmar Ayeyarwady River Economic Belt" – part of the Belt and Road Initiative - to gain access to the Indian Ocean.

Colonel Naw Bu confirmed that the KIA has taken control of parts of urban Bhamo and other strategic locations, including Panwa, Chipwi, Tsawlaw, and Phimaw - areas rich in rare earth minerals.

Observers speculate that rare earth mining may have been a key topic in the discussions between the Chinese government and the KIO delegation.



MYANMAR'S ARAKAN ARMY CLAIMS CONTROL OF BORDER REGION



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A Myanmar ethnic armed group has claimed complete control of a key region along the Bangladesh border, piling further pressure on the junta battling opponents elsewhere across the country.

Fighting has rocked western Rakhine state since the Arakan Army (AA) attacked security forces in November last year, ending a ceasefire that had largely held since the junta's 2021 coup.

AA fighters have seized swathes of territory in the state that is home to China and India-backed port projects and all but cut off state capital Sittwe.

A statement released by the AA late Tuesday said the group had "completely controlled the whole region of Maungdaw" -- a district home to more than 110,000 people according to the last census -- since Sunday.

The last junta base near Maungdaw town had fallen early Sunday after almost two months of fighting, it said, adding it had arrested a number of junta soldiers including the base commander.

A video released by the group showed men appearing to be surrendered Myanmar security forces walking out of damaged buildings, holding white flags and white pieces of styrofoam.

AFP has not been able to independently confirm the information and has contacted an AA spokesperson for comment.

Maungdaw town lies on the Naf river which separates Myanmar from Bangladesh and is home to many members of the persecuted Rohingya minority.

The junta has not responded to request for comment on the Maungdaw fighting.

In May, the AA said it had seized the town of Buthidaung, 25 kilometres (15 miles) from Maungdaw.

Several Rohingya diaspora groups later accused the AA of forcing Rohingya to flee and then looting and burning their homes -- claims the AA called "propaganda".

Last month the UN warned Rakhine state was heading towards famine, as ongoing clashes squeeze commerce and agricultural production.

"Rakhine's economy has stopped functioning," the report from the UN Development Programme said, projecting "famine conditions by mid-2025" if current levels of food insecurity are left unaddressed.

AFP

UN CONCERNED OVER INCREASED FIGHTING IN MYANMAR

Photo: Nils Huernerfurst

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is concerned about an escalation of fighting in Myanmar, his spokesman said Thursday, amid clashes between security forces and ethnic armed groups.

Combat in western Rakhine state "has caused further civilian suffering and displacement," said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric, while also blaming "indiscriminate aerial attacks" for civilian casualties in many parts of the country.

Fighting has rocked Rakhine since the Arakan Army attacked security forces in November last year, ending a ceasefire that had largely held since the junta's 2021 coup.

This week the Arakan Army claimed complete control of a key region along the Bangladesh border, piling further pressure on the junta as it battles opponents elsewhere across the country.

"The secretary general reiterates his call on all parties to the conflict in Myanmar to end violence and recalls all of their obligations under international law to protect civilians," Dujarric said.

He called on all parties to avoid inciting intercommunal tensions.

AFP



David I. Steinberg

DAVID I. STEINBERG, ASIAN AND BURMA SCHOLAR, DIES AT THE AGE OF 96

David I. Steinberg, Distinguished Professor Emeritus and formerly Director of Asian Studies, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, has died 5 December at the age of 96 from cardio-vascular problems. He was active to the last.

Professor Steinberg was known as a prolific writer on the political economies of both Korea and Myanmar (Burma), as well as on economic development in Asia, and was the author of fifteen books and monographs, as well as over 150 articles or volume chapters on those subjects.

His latest edited book, Myanmar. The Dynamics of an Evolving Polity, appeared in 2015. Earlier volumes included Modern China-Myanmar Relations: Dilemmas of Mutual Dependence (with Hongwei Fan) in 2012, Turmoil in Burma: Contested Legitimacies in Myanmar, appeared in 2006. Earlier volumes included Stone Mirror. Rejections on Contemporary Korea (2003), and Burma: The State of Myanmar in 2001. He

was regarded as one of the few American specialists on contemporary Burmese political economy.

Before joining Georgetown as Distinguished Professor of Korean Studies in 1990, he was for sixteen years in the Senior Foreign Service, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of State, where he held various positions, such as Director of Technical Assistance for Asia, the Near East and South Asia, and the Near East, as well as Director for Philippines, Thailand, and Burmese Affairs. He was also a specialist on evaluation both in that Agency and to a variety of organizations after his retirement from USAID in 1986. In 1986-87, he was President of the Mansfield Center for Pacific Affairs, and prior to his USAID career, he has been with The Asia Foundation in New York, and was a representative of the Foundation in Burma, Hong Kong, Korea (twice), and opened its Washington office. He was also a visiting scholar for a number of years at the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

Born in Cambridge Massachusetts, Steinberg was educated at Dartmouth College, Lingnan University (China), Harvard University, and the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He became interested in China in high school at the Rivers School in the Boston area, and in 1948-49 in his junior year at Dartmouth was in the last group of American exchange students to China (and the first from Dartmouth) in the middle of the communist revolution. He served in the army during the Korean War.

Steinberg, whose career spanned the academic, public, and non-profits sectors, and who lectured internationally and extensively, viewed his activities as attempting to bridge the obvious gaps in Asian policy among these three fields. Although a specialist on political economies, he never neglected culture and its importance and influence on policies. He took an independent approach to foreign policy issues, which separated him from the official positions of many governments.

He received an honorary doctorate from Sungyungwan University in Seoul, a medal from the Korean government, and various awards, citations, and research grants. He lived for over seventeen years in Asia, including Korea, Burma, Thailand, Hong Kong, China, Singapore, and Japan, and did field

work in a variety of other countries in the region. After leaving Korea after his second period as Foundation representative, he continued to write his AStone Mirror@ op-ed column on all aspects of Korean life for the Korea Times, which published over 250 of them.

At various periods, he was a consultant to The Asia Foundation, and was a Director of the Korea Economic Institute of America, and on the Board of the Korea Society. He was a founding trustee of the Burma Studies Foundation, and was active in the Association for Asian Studies, The Asia Society, and other Asia-related groups. He was a member of the Cosmos Club and the Royal Bangkok Sports Club.

While teaching at Georgetown, he was working on a study of the role of South Korea in Southeast Asia and on China-Burma relations. He was the recipient of many research grants, including a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship at Bellagio, Italy and a Posco fellowship to the East-West Center in Honolulu.

David I. Steinberg is survived by his wife of 58 years, Ann Myongsook Lee, who is a retired professor of music at George Washington University, and two sons, Alexander Lee Steinberg of Minneapolis and his children Anya Steinberg and Ari Steinberg, and Eric David Steinberg of Los Angeles.

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MYANMAR WAS ONE OF THE DEADLIEST PLACES FOR JOURNALISTS IN 2024

According to the 2024 International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) report released on 11 December, 104 journalists were killed this year worldwide, and Myanmar remains one of the most dangerous countries for journalists, especially under the ongoing military regime.

The IFJ press release for IFJ's 2024 report reads as follows.

According to the annual report of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), 2024 was another particularly deadly year for journalists and media professionals. As of 10 December 2024, 104 journalists had been killed worldwide, more than half of them in Gaza, Palestine (55). The IFJ reaffirms its determination to see an International Convention for the Protection of Journalists adopted by the United Nations as a matter of urgency.

To mark International Human Rights Day on 10 December, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has published the initial findings of its 2024 annual report on journalists and media workers killed in the line of duty. According to the latest data, which is still

incomplete, 104 media professionals have been killed since 1 January, including 12 women, representing 11.5% of the Federation's total.

By 2023, the IFJ had documented 129 deaths, including 14 women, one of the deadliest years for journalists since the IFJ began publishing its list of journalists killed in 1990.

MIDDLE EAST AND ARAB WORLD: 66

For the second year running, it is the Middle East and Arab World region that holds the macabre record for the number of journalists killed: 66 deaths in 2024.

The war in Gaza and Lebanon once again highlights the massacre suffered by Palestinian (55), Lebanese (6) and Syrian (1) media professionals, representing 60% of all journalists killed in 2024. Since the start of the war on 7 October 2023, the number of Palestinian journalists killed has risen to at least 138, making this country one of the most dangerous in the history of modern journalism, behind Iraq, the Philippines and Mexico.

On 13 October 2023, the IFJ called on Unesco to protect journalists, establish a lasting ceasefire, open humanitarian corridors for civilians, and allow Gaza journalists to take refuge outside the enclave and foreign reporters to enter the enclave. All to no avail.

Elsewhere in the region, the Federation counts three media professionals murdered in Iraq this year, including two women on 23 August, and a photographer killed in Syria on 4 December.

ASIA-PACIFIC: 20

In Asia-Pacific, the IFJ's largest geographical region, the number of deaths in 2024 (20) was considerably higher than in 2023 (12) and 2022 (16), with an upsurge in violence in South Asia: the IFJ deplors 6 murders in Pakistan, 5 in Bangladesh and 3 in India, i.e. 70% of all deaths in the region. In addition, the military regime in Myanmar is continuing its hunt for journalists - 3 journalists have been killed this year - while Indonesia and Kazakhstan have each had one death.

AFRICA: 8

8 journalists were murdered in Africa in 2024 - 4 in 2022 and 9 in 2023 - but it was Sudan that paid the heaviest price with 5 deaths, as a result of the generals' war, which is particularly deadly. Two Somali journalists and a Chadian journalist also lost their lives, which also testifies to the fragile and violent political situations in these two countries.

AMERICAS: 6

Before the outbreak of the war in Gaza, Latin America, and Mexico in particular, was one of the most dangerous regions in the world for media professionals.

In 2024, the IFJ counts 6 deaths - compared to 30 in 2022 and 6 in 2023 - including five Mexicans and one Colombian. Once again, threats, intimidation, kidnappings and murders are due to reports on drug

trafficking, which has plagued Mexico for more than two decades.

EUROPE: 4

The war in Ukraine has again claimed victims on the continent, with 4 journalists killed in 2024, compared with 13 in 2022 and 4 in 2023. Despite this conflict, Europe remains the safest continent in the world.

JOURNALISTS IN PRISON: 520

On 10 December 2024, the IFJ counted 520 journalists in prison, representing a sharp increase compared with 2023 (427) and 2022 (375).

With 135 journalists behind bars, China - including Hong Kong - remains the world's biggest prison for media professionals, ahead of Israel (59 Palestinian journalists) and Myanmar (44).

The Asia-Pacific region alone has 254 journalists in prison, ahead of wider Europe (142), the Middle East and Arab world (101), Africa (17) and Latin America (6).

IFJ General Secretary Anthony Bellanger said: "These sad figures show once again how fragile is press freedom and how risky and dangerous is the profession of journalism. The public's need for information is very real at a time when authoritarian regimes are developing all over the world. Greater vigilance on the part of our profession is required. We urge the Member States of the United Nations to take action to ensure the adoption of a binding convention on the safety of journalists, so as to put an end to the deaths and injuries that occur every year".

TOTAL OF 260 CSOS SIGN POSITION PAPER ADDRESSING ASEAN'S GOAL OF A 'MYANMAR-OWNED AND -LED SOLUTION'

A total of 260 Civil Society Organizations have released a Civil Society Position Paper addressing ASEAN's goal of a "Myanmar-Owned and -Led Solution" to the Myanmar crisis.

The paper is released on 16 December 2024. It comes over three years after the Myanmar military coup and the failure of ASEAN'S Five-Point Consensus aimed to bring peace to the country.

Here is the full paper:

Civil Society Position Paper Addressing ASEAN's Goal of a "Myanmar-Owned and -Led Solution"

Summary of Recommendations

(1) Move beyond the Five-Point Consensus to achieve a Myanmar people-led and people-centered solution to the crisis in Myanmar. ASEAN's "Myanmar-owned and -led" approach must be backed by genuine political will that aligns with and supports the collective aspirations of the people of Myanmar.

(2) Cease all pressure on Myanmar's revolutionary forces and civil society to join any processes to engage or compromise with the illegitimate military junta, and support a locally led political consultation process that entirely excludes the junta.

(3) End all engagements, including economic and military engagements, with the military junta, and engage formally with the legitimate representatives of Myanmar.

(4) Publicly denounce and end all support for, or plans to support, the military junta's sham election.

(5) Provide humanitarian aid for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in collaboration with legitimate stakeholders and civil society groups through cross-border channels.

(6) Join the ongoing international and Myanmar people's efforts to hold the Myanmar military accountable under international law for its commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

Analysis of ASEAN Leaders' Recent Decision on the Five-Point Consensus

ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus (5PC) has proven extremely harmful to the Myanmar people in its futile attempt to address the junta-caused crisis in Myanmar. Nevertheless, on 9 October 2024, ASEAN leaders announced their decision to continue with this failed approach. This decision blatantly ignores the repeated and united calls of the Myanmar people for ASEAN to move beyond the 5PC and support the people's collective aspirations to fully dismantle the military and establish an inclusive federal democracy. Despite claims of "ASEAN's commitment to assisting Myanmar in finding a peaceful and durable solution to the ongoing crisis," ASEAN's decision to "[m]aintain the 5PC as the main reference to address the political crisis in Myanmar" will surely fail "to achieve an inclusive and durable peaceful resolution that is Myanmar-owned and -led" as long as the people's calls and aspirations go unsupported.

Since the creation of the 5PC, not only has ASEAN utterly failed to stop the military junta's violence and save people's lives, but it has also become complicit in the junta's crimes against the people. By reaffirming their sole reliance on the failed 5PC, in spite of the junta's blatant disregard thereof, ASEAN leaders are

fueling the junta's violence and further abandoning the Myanmar people to be terrorized, bombed, tortured, and murdered with complete impunity by the military junta.

Over the past year, the military junta has severely escalated its mass atrocity crimes in retaliation against the people's ongoing resolute and collective defiance against its illegal coup attempt and for its major territorial losses to the democratic resistance movement. In the first eight months of 2024, the military junta conducted an average of seven airstrikes per day—totaling at least 1,639, amounting to nearly 50% of its total airstrikes since the coup attempt. To this day, the military junta continues to conduct violent ground raids and an unprecedented number of aerial attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure—including schools, religious buildings, medical facilities, and internally displaced person camps—as a form of collective punishment. Since February 2024, the junta has further escalated its violence against civilians through forced conscription, driving mass displacement within Myanmar and across borders. According to the United Nations, as of 9 December 2024, the military's violence has internally displaced more than 3.4 million people in Myanmar—likely a gross underestimation of the actual magnitude of displacement. As of 31 October 2024, since the failed coup in February 2021, approximately 52,100 people have been displaced to Thailand, 12,200 to Malaysia, and 3,400 to Indonesia.

At present, the Myanmar military is facing allegations of atrocity crimes at the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and in Argentina. Furthermore, the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar “has collected significant volumes of credible evidence and information indicating the commission of war crimes in connection with armed conflict and crimes against humanity as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population” by the Myanmar military junta and affiliated militias since the failed coup.

Instead of acting to end the criminal junta's atrocity crimes as laid out in the 5PC, ASEAN has

only deepened its complicity therein, with some of its member states aiding and abetting these crimes by harboring the junta's financial assets and facilitating the supply of arms and aviation fuel—all while lending the junta false legitimacy through state and regional level engagements. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, from April 2023 to March 2024, the junta imported more than USD 120 million in weapons and military supplies from Thailand-registered suppliers—a 100% increase from the previous year—and more than USD 10 million from Singapore-based suppliers. In January 2024, Amnesty International reported that the junta has been importing aviation fuel through Vietnam, evading sanctions to continue its airstrikes on civilians.

ASEAN must take full responsibility for its role in exacerbating the crisis in Myanmar, particularly its complicity in—and its members' aiding and abetting of—the junta's atrocity crimes.

ASEAN puts its hypocrisy on full display by claiming that its goal is “to help the people of Myanmar to achieve an inclusive and durable peaceful resolution that is Myanmar-owned and -led.” In its recent decision, ASEAN once again failed to align its efforts with the Myanmar people's demands for ASEAN to cut all ties with the military junta. If ASEAN truly wants to pursue “a Myanmar-owned and-led solution” to “help the people” as it has repeatedly stated, ASEAN must ensure that the military junta is barred from representing Myanmar in any capacity across all platforms.

Any “Myanmar-owned and -led solution” that is also “inclusive and durable” must align with the will and aspirations of the Myanmar people and must only involve legitimate stakeholders working to dismantle the military junta. ASEAN's insistence on “inclusive national dialogue” that involves the junta blatantly ignores the will of the Myanmar people—who are fending for their lives, liberty, and democracy—by bringing to the table the very perpetrators of atrocity crimes against them and ignoring the military's undeniable role as the root cause and exacerbator of decades-long violence and instability in Myanmar.

ASEAN's engagements with the junta severely exacerbate Myanmar's crisis and contravene ASEAN's goals by emboldening the junta, not representing the Myanmar people, and eroding any trust thereof. By continuing to attend junta-hosted conferences, invite the junta to represent Myanmar, and hold talks with junta representatives, ASEAN emphasizes its own susceptibility to the military junta's political manipulation and propaganda. Furthermore, through these engagements, ASEAN is not only stroking the ego of and lending false legitimacy to the illegal, illegitimate, and criminal military junta—which weaponizes humanitarian aid and lacks any legal authority to hold an election in Myanmar—but ASEAN is also blatantly undermining the Myanmar people's immense sacrifices and efforts to build a peaceful Myanmar.

In October 2024, ASEAN welcomed the junta to represent Myanmar at its 44th and 45th Summits while only informally engaging with the people's legitimate representatives, such as the National Unity Government (NUG), the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), and Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs). Furthermore, ASEAN member states allowed the junta to host the 42nd ASEANAPOL Conference in Naypyidaw from 21–25 October, with officials from every member state in attendance. On 7 November 2024, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam allowed junta leader Min Aung Hlaing to assume the chairmanship of the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy.

ASEAN has an obligation to represent the Myanmar people and respect their sovereignty. The people have resoundingly rejected the illegal and illegitimate junta as their government. By allowing any junta personnel to represent Myanmar, ASEAN has clearly breached its duty to the Myanmar people and their well-being. ASEAN must remember: Without the people, there would be no Myanmar. Going forward, ASEAN must stand with the Myanmar people and support—through its decisions and its platforms—their political aspirations for federal democracy and protection of human rights.

Moreover, ASEAN's engagements with the junta can never and will never serve as “a crucial step to

building trust and bridging differences among different stakeholders.” Letting the junta take Myanmar's seat has only caused further loss of the Myanmar people's trust in ASEAN. With a massive trust deficit between ASEAN and the Myanmar people, ASEAN—because of its own failure—cannot and should not expect any tangible or sustainable outcomes from its so-called “Myanmar-owned and-led” approach.

ASEAN's decision to “[e]xpeditate” its misguided approach through “informal consultation[s]” clearly aims to impose quick-fix solutions for its state-centric approach to stability, which will only keep Myanmar trapped in a cycle of violence and military tyranny. It is of grave concern that, with this decision, ASEAN is likely to put pressure on revolutionary forces and civil society to engage or compromise with the military junta, with the alleged goal of “restoring peace, stability, [and] democracy.” But this rush to stability—without the protection of human rights and without justice and accountability—will only enable the recurrence of military dictatorship in Myanmar, precluding any hope for a durable peace and genuine stability.

“An inclusive and durable peaceful resolution” can only be achieved in Myanmar by completely dismantling the criminal military institution and establishing a civilian-led federal democracy that guarantees human rights for all communities in Myanmar. Thus, for regional peace, security, and stability, it is in ASEAN's best interest to fully support the establishment of a federal democratic Myanmar free from military tyranny. ASEAN's idea of peace—defined by returning to “business as usual”—ignores the lessons from Myanmar's past decade. ASEAN must learn those lessons and change its approach accordingly: During the previous so-called “peace process” resulting in the failed “Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement,” the rush to negotiate with the Myanmar military prevented the process from being genuinely democratic and inclusive, and eroded trust among those in opposition to the military. That process kicked off with a one-sided agenda framed and dominated by the military, denying other stakeholders any safe and meaningful opportunities to participate equally in the development of the process, much less be involved in

decision-making therein.

Furthermore, bringing the “conflicting parties” together—with Myanmar military on one side and revolutionary forces on the other—cements a problematic assumption that the Myanmar military will be a part of the power structure going forward. This assumption also contravenes the reality on the ground and undermines the people’s tireless efforts to build a new, peaceful federal democratic Myanmar, free from military tyranny. Townships covering 86% of the country’s territory and including 67% of the national population are not under stable junta control. Moreover, as the military junta suffers major losses and teeters on the brink of collapse, the Myanmar people’s revolution continues to gain more effective control and establish and strengthen people-led governance through civilian administrations, law enforcement, and the provision of public services, such as in Karenni State—with the Federal Democracy Charter as the guiding framework for a new Myanmar.

Despite ASEAN’s decision to “[a]dvance the safe, effective, and transparent delivery of ASEAN humanitarian assistance without discrimination,” any continued efforts to provide aid through the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) will only further exacerbate humanitarian needs on the ground. This is because, firstly, the AHA Centre lacks the mandate and capacities to address the junta-caused crisis in Myanmar, and, secondly, ASEAN continues to engage with the military junta—the very perpetrator of the humanitarian crisis—through the AHA Centre to deliver aid. In particular, the ongoing presence of the junta-controlled Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement on the AHA Centre’s Governing Board allows the military junta to “exercise the overall direction [and] control” of any aid distributed through the AHA Centre. Ultimately, any partnership between the AHA Centre and the military junta will continue not only to enable the junta’s terror campaign, including its weaponization of aid, but also to deepen ASEAN’s complicity in the junta’s ongoing atrocity crimes.

Recommendations to ASEAN and its Member States

(1) Move beyond the dead-on-arrival 5PC to achieve a solution that is truly Myanmar-owned and -led. Since the birth of the 5PC, the junta has actively disregarded the 5PC through its repeated commission of atrocity crimes. Meanwhile, the people have lost all trust in ASEAN because of its horrific failure to address Myanmar’s crisis and save lives. As a result, it is beyond clear that the 5PC can never “be implemented in its entirety,” making ASEAN’s decision void of meaning. Going forward, any efforts by ASEAN “to help the people of Myanmar to achieve an inclusive and durable peaceful resolution that is Myanmar-owned and -led” must not be empty rhetoric or lip service to the Myanmar people. These efforts must be truly meaningful and driven by genuine political will to support the vision, aspirations, and well-being of the Myanmar people. ASEAN must unequivocally support the Myanmar people’s goals to fully dismantle the military and establish an inclusive federal democracy.

(2) Cease all pressure on Myanmar’s revolutionary forces and civil society to join any processes to engage or compromise with the illegitimate military junta, and support a locally led political consultation process that entirely excludes the junta. For a truly “Myanmar-owned and -led” solution, ASEAN must not exert any pressure on Myanmar’s revolutionary forces and civil society to take part in processes to engage or compromise with the military junta. Instead, ASEAN must support the revolutionary forces and civil society, including the people’s legitimate representatives, to lead the way and shape the process towards “an inclusive and durable peaceful resolution” and the rebuilding of Myanmar. ASEAN must follow and support the Myanmar people’s leadership and provide a safe and enabling platform and environment for Myanmar’s legitimate democracy stakeholders to talk—without any involvement of the junta. The complete exclusion of the junta is the only way to ensure robust and meaningful consultation and participation of Myanmar’s civil society and legitimate democracy stakeholders in this process.

(3) End all engagements with the military junta immediately and engage formally with the legitimate representatives of Myanmar. If ASEAN genuinely wishes to help the Myanmar people achieve sustainable “peace, stability, [and] democracy,” ASEAN and its member states must cease all engagements with and support of the military junta, as any engagement only enables the junta to continue its violence against the people and deepens ASEAN’s complicity in the junta’s international crimes. ASEAN must also completely ban all junta representatives from and disallow the junta any access to ASEAN’s platforms. ASEAN must instead align with the Myanmar people’s efforts to build a new, inclusive federal democratic Myanmar. In this regard, Malaysia—as the incoming Chair of ASEAN for 2025—must invite the NUG to take Myanmar’s seat.

In tandem, ASEAN must ensure that it is formally engaging—on equal terms—with Myanmar’s democracy stakeholders and legitimate representatives, including the NUG, the NUCC, EROs, and federal units, including but not limited to the Interim Executive Council of Karenni State (IEC), the Chinland Council, and the Mon State Federal Council (MSFC).

(4) Publicly denounce and end all support for, or plans to support, the junta’s planned sham election. The junta has no mandate nor legitimacy to conduct any election: Firstly, the people of Myanmar nationwide have categorically rejected, and continued to reject, the junta since its illegal coup attempt. Secondly, the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw—Myanmar’s elected representatives from the 2020 general election—has already declared the 2008 constitution null and void following the junta’s illegal coup attempt. In addition, throughout 2024 the junta has lost substantial territorial and effective control across the country. Furthermore, in October 2024, groups of junta personnel—including soldiers, police, and militia armed with guns—intimidated locals into participating in its sham census in areas under its control.

ASEAN must prove that it is capable of and committed to abiding by its own Charter by adhering

to the principles of democracy and rule of law by publicly denouncing the junta’s planned sham election. If ASEAN fails to do so, ASEAN will have to take full responsibility for the military junta’s continued violence and atrocity crimes against the Myanmar people.

(5) Provide humanitarian aid for IDPs in collaboration with legitimate stakeholders and civil society through cross-border channels. The cross-border provision of humanitarian aid must not involve the military junta or any of its auxiliaries, including the Myanmar Red Cross Society. ASEAN must finally accept the reality that aid through or in collaboration with the junta cannot and will not reach the communities in direst need, but aid reaching these communities has been, and continues to be, possible through locally led cross-border channels. Therefore, to reach IDPs and save lives, aid must be provided through cross-border channels, in collaboration with Myanmar’s legitimate stakeholders, and directed to local civil society organizations, community-based organizations, and other trusted local frontline responders. This humanitarian assistance must also be gender responsive.

(6) Join the ongoing international and Myanmar people’s efforts to hold the Myanmar military accountable under international law for its commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. In fulfillment of ASEAN’s international obligations, ASEAN and its member states must put an end to the Myanmar military’s mass atrocities and other international crimes. Accordingly, we call on the Philippines and other member states to assume universal jurisdiction, without further delay, over cases submitted by victims and survivors of the Myanmar military’s crimes, as a concrete step towards justice and accountability.



Ruins in Syria. Photo: AFP

SYRIA'S DRUZE HOPE FOR BETTER FUTURE WITHOUT ASSAD

Bayan al-Hinnawi, who spent years behind bars in Bashar al-Assad's Syria, joined crowds in the heartland of the Druze minority on Friday last week to celebrate the president's fall, "a dream" come true for the former prisoner.

Hundreds of people descended on Sweida's main square, singing and clapping in jubilation, just days after Islamist-led rebels took the capital Damascus, sending Assad fleeing.

The Druze-majority city in Syria's south has been a focal point of renewed anti-government demonstrations over the past year and a half.

On Friday, residents waved Syria's pre-Assad flag of white, green and black with three stars, and raised olive branches in a sign of peace.

Some of them have lost family members during the anti-government uprising that began in 2011 and spiralled into civil war. Others, like Hinnawi, had languished in prison under the Assad family's five-decade rule.

"It was a dream," said 77-year-old Hinnawi of Assad's ouster.

Decades ago, a few years after Hafez al-Assad seized power -- which he later handed over to his son Bashar -- a 23-year-old Hinnawi was jailed.

He was released 17 years later.

The grey-haired man said he had "dreamed that one day the regime would fall", but did not believe that he would live to see the day.

"It's a wonderful sight. Nobody could have imagined that this could happen", he said.

'Dignity'

But his joy was incomplete, remembering the many who have died in jail.

"I wish that those who died when I was imprisoned in Mazzeh or Saydnaya could see this scene," said Hinnawi.

Since Assad's fall, rebel forces and residents have broken into both detention centres, freeing political prisoners and searching for long-missing loved ones.

Activists and rights groups say the Assad government tortured and abused inmates at both facilities.

"I got out when I was 40, I missed out of my whole life," said Hinnawi, who served in the Syrian army before being jailed.

Recalling torture behind bars, he said that "no oppressor in history has done what they did to us."

Since Sunday, the ousted government's security forces were nowhere to be seen in Sweida, and the office of Assad's Baath party has been abandoned, as have army checkpoints on the road to Damascus.

Local armed men are present, but not the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham which spearheaded the rebel offensive against Assad.

Siham Zein al-Din, who lost her son in 2014 after he defected from the national army to join rebel fighters, said he had "sacrificed his life... for freedom, for dignity".

The family was still searching for Khaldun's remains, said his 60-year-old mother.

Like her son, some members of the Druze community took up arms against Assad's forces during the war.

A brother's congratulations

The Druze, who also live in Lebanon, Israel and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, make up about three percent of Syria's population, around 700,000 people.

Beyond defending themselves from attacks in the areas where they live, Syria's Druze largely stayed on the sidelines of the civil war.

Many managed to avoid compulsory conscription since 2011.

Residents of Sweida have long complained of discrimination and the lack of basic services.

Many buildings in the city are constructed from black volcanic stone that can be found in the area, and its roads have fallen into disrepair.

Sheikh Marwan Hussein Rizk, a religious leader, said that "Sweida province has been marginalised" for decades, with most of its residents living in poverty.

But, surrounded by the joyful protesters, Rizk said better days may be coming.

"Today, we look to the future and ask for a helping hand... Our hand is extended to all Syrians."

Next to him, resident Hussein Bondok held up a poster of his brother Nasser, a journalist and opposition activist who was last heard from in 2014 when he was arrested.

Bondok, 54, said he believes his brother was likely killed under torture in one of Damascus's prisons.

Nasser struggled for freedom, Bondok said.

"I want to congratulate him now, because the seeds he had planted with his brothers-in-arms has become a tree."

AFP



KREMLIN SAYS 'FULLY' AGREES WITH TRUMP'S OPPOSITION TO UKRAINE FIRING US MISSILES

The Kremlin said 13 December that US President-elect Donald Trump's opposition to Ukraine firing US-supplied weapons deep into Russia "fully aligned" with Moscow's position.

Trump said in an interview published Thursday that he disagreed "very vehemently" with Ukraine's use of American-supplied missiles to strike Russian territory.

The comments were warmly welcomed in the Kremlin, which on Friday said it had launched a massive aerial attack on Ukraine's energy grid as a response to Kyiv striking an airfield with US-supplied weapons this week.

"The statement fully aligns with our position, with our view on the reasons for escalation. That impresses us. It is obvious that Trump understands exactly what is escalating the situation," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Trump had told Time Magazine: "I disagree very vehemently with sending missiles hundreds of miles into Russia. Why are we doing that? I think it's a foolish decision."

Moscow has repeatedly raged against the supply of Western arms to Ukraine and said the use of the weapons makes NATO countries direct participants in the nearly three-year conflict.

Trump claimed on the campaign trail that he could strike a deal to end the fighting in 24 hours, and speculation over a possible ceasefire is ramping up ahead of his inauguration in January.

But the Kremlin said Friday that its "prerequisites" for holding peace talks with Ukraine had not yet been met.

"We don't want a ceasefire, we want peace, after our conditions are met and all our goals are achieved," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, adding that the "prerequisites" needed to open negotiations were not in place.

Trump's interview was conducted before the November 27 Thanksgiving holiday and before his meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on the sidelines of the reopening of Notre Dame cathedral, a meeting brokered by French President Emmanuel Macron.

MYSTERY DRONES STILL CAUSING CONCERN OVER US NORTHEAST



Citizen's photo of one of a variety of unidentified flying objects seen in the sky over New Jersey and Idaho in the USA.

Unidentified drones were stoking security and safety fears over the US Northeast at the weekend, prompting New York's governor to seek federal help, as President-elect Donald Trump weighed in to suggest the devices be shot down.

"This has gone too far," New York Governor Kathy Hochul said Saturday, lamenting in a statement that "drone activity in the airspace" forced a one-hour shutdown of the runways Friday night at Stewart Airfield, a smaller regional airport in the state.

New York's port authority confirmed the temporary closure to AFP, saying the halt was taken at Stewart "following a report from the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) about a drone sighting at the airport." Flight traffic was not affected.

For weeks now residents of New York and neighboring New Jersey, both on the US East Coast have been reporting flights of large unidentified drones, a phenomenon that has only fueled concerns -- especially since local and national authorities have provided no answers as to the origins of the devices.

Video footage of mysterious airborne devices has clogged social media platforms, and some elected officials have taken to criticizing President Joe Biden's administration for its supposed inaction.

On Thursday a spokesman for the White House's National Security Council, John Kirby, sought to reassure that there was "no evidence" of a threat, saying they may be manned aircraft including lawfully-operated small planes or helicopters.

Some lawmakers like Republican congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey have raised the prospect of threats from a foreign state such as Russia or China, without citing evidence to back the claim.

On Friday Trump jumped provocatively into the fray.

"Mystery Drone sightings all over the Country. Can this really be happening without our government's knowledge," he posed on his Truth Social media platform. "I don't think so! Let the public know, and now. Otherwise, shoot them down!!!"

Governor Hochul for her part is calling on Congress to pass legislation that would bolster the ability to counter so-called unmanned aircraft systems and "strengthen the FAA's oversight of drones."

AFP



SURVIVING SCORCHED EARTH

Nyo Mar was born in Myanmar, a country she has always called home. Yet – as she tells in this Insight Myanmar Podcast – her life has been marked by discrimination, which has made her feel like an outsider since her childhood years. As an ethnic Indian Muslim in a largely Buddhist land, she grew up in a community that faced constant prejudice and exclusion. From an early age, she understood that her identity would set her apart. The prejudices she endured went beyond whispers and glances—they were an inseparable part of her daily life, woven into her interactions at school, in her neighborhood, and in society-at-large.

While growing up, Nyo Mar watched her father, a health supervisor working for the government, come home visibly shaken and humiliated by the discrimination he faced at his workplace. He would be called derogatory names like “kala,” a racially charged slur against those perceived to be foreigners, particularly darker-skinned Indians. She remembers asking her father why people would treat him that way; his helplessness in the face of that hatred made her realize that prejudice was not something that could easily be explained away or resolved.

Nyo Mar often began to question why she was also treated differently from her peers. “I asked my mom, ‘Why they call me kala? Why they call us a bad name?’ My mom really didn’t want to explain it. She said, ‘This is our fate! You cannot change it. You have to live with it.’” This realization was painful. She learned to accept the prejudice, but she never stopped dreaming of a different future, one where her children would not have to endure what she had gone through.

When she was in high school, she had an unfortunate encounter that solidified her understanding of her

place in Myanmar. Students were required to apply for citizenship cards, a simple enough procedure for most of her peers. But when her turn came, the officer in charge erupted in anger, accused her of being a “mix-blood person,” and claimed that she could not enroll in the school because she was Muslim. “The officer shouted at me, ‘You cannot apply! You have to go to the township immigration office!’ He shouted at me in front of my friends. So at the time I feel really angry and I didn’t want to go the next day. I felt really ashamed, and also I couldn’t express this feeling.” The shame of that moment stayed with her, and she felt she could no longer attend school with the same sense of belonging. For most of her peers, citizenship was an entitlement; for Nyo Mar, it was something she had to fight for, but something just out of reach.

Even in her pursuit of higher education, barriers remained. Despite her determination and hard work, Nyo Mar faced significant obstacles at the university. Although she completed a master’s degree, her professor contemptuously dismissed her aspirations to become a lecturer, telling her that she would never be fit for such a position. Her academic ambitions in Myanmar were crushed by the prejudice that shadowed every step of her journey.

Determined to make a difference in spite of all the barriers, Nyo Mar began working for NGOs that focused on community engagement. She joined an HIV/AIDS prevention program targeting Muslim youth. However, discrimination dogged her even in this work. Authorities harassed her and her colleagues, questioning their right to provide aid simply because they were Muslim. “The administration officer tried to arrest us, because we are doing awareness raising and sharing information about HIV/AIDS through our communities. I explained to them about our organization, and that we have to focus on these young generations to prevent the HIV and AIDS. He said, ‘This is not your job.’” The officer went on to question Nyo Mar about her salary amount as well as who funded the organization, along with other such uncomfortable questions.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/11/26/episode-290-surviving-scorched-earth>



MYANMAR JUNTA SUPPRESSES DATA ON NATIONAL FOOD CRISIS

Reuters investigation reveals Myanmar's junta is actively suppressing critical information about a severe nationwide food crisis by intimidating researchers and aid workers. The military regime has pressured organizations not to collect or publish hunger data.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) recently removed Myanmar from its global hunger assessment map and withheld three detailed analyses showing the country faces one of the world's worst food crises. According to a confidential IPC report from November, approximately 14.4 million people (25% of the population) experienced acute food insecurity in September-October this year.

Currently, aid organizations are forced to collect data clandestinely, hampering their ability to raise funds for humanitarian assistance. The UN's Myanmar aid response has received only 34% of its \$1 billion funding goal.

In Rakhine State, where fighting between the Arakan Army and junta army had intensified, the junta blocked food and medicine delivery to malnourished children amid a cholera outbreak. This crisis has driven 70,000 refugees to flee to Bangladesh this year. Food prices in Rakhine have surged 154% over the past year, with rice costs increasing tenfold in some areas since early 2021.

The junta has rejected evidence of the crisis, claiming there are no food security issues, while systematically restricting humanitarian access and contributing to widespread malnutrition and disease outbreaks.

SHADOW GOVERNMENT NUG ANNOUNCES ONLINE REPORTING SYSTEM FOR GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE CASES

The shadow National Unity Government's (NUG's) Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs (MOWYCA) has established an online channel for reporting gender-based violence cases. The ministry announced that due to challenges with existing Facebook messenger communications, citizens can now report gender-based violence incidents through not only the official MOWYCA Facebook page but also email at gbvcm@mowyca.nugmyanmar.org.

This announcement comes amid ongoing concerns about gender-based violence during the Spring Revolution, including a recent incident in Sagaing Region's Ayadaw Township involving female journalists. According to reports, the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) Battalion 8 has publicly condemned the alleged assault by a male activist against the two female journalists, stating they will take legal and social action against such violations.

The development of these reporting channels reflects the shadow government's commitment to addressing gender-based violence issues within resistance forces and broader society. Public response to these incidents has shown strong support for survivors, with social media users expressing solidarity and encouraging victims to seek justice to prevent future occurrences.

One Facebook user commented, "I feel deeply saddened hearing about this (Ayadaw case), sisters. Please continue to stand up for justice, so others won't have to face similar abuse."



EXILED MYANMAR SINGER ADDRESSES HUMAN RIGHTS DAY EVENT IN PARIS

Myanmar singer Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein shared on social media that she was invited as a special speaker at the Human Rights Day ceremony hosted by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on December 10.

During her visit to Paris, she had private meetings with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk and French Human Rights Ambassador Madame Isabelle Rome.

In her update, the singer mentioned discussing crucial humanitarian issues with the UN High Commissioner, particularly highlighting that millions of children in Myanmar's conflict zones have had no access to vaccinations for over three years. The High Commissioner reportedly expressed commitment to increasing international attention on Myanmar's situation.

The singer, who fled Myanmar following her participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement, delivered a five-minute speech in French at the event.

The post generated supportive responses from her followers. One fan suggested a musical collaboration with another exiled Myanmar male singer Kyar Pauk, who is also in France, writing: "Since both you and Kyar Pauk are in France, why not create a new song together, in any language?" Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein responded that while such plans are in the works, they need more time as they're still adjusting to their new daily lives.

Another supporter wrote, "She's the artist we support... now receiving invitations to prestigious events with distinguished guests and shining on the international stage!"

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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.