

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

## PRAGMATIC MOVE?

**TNLA calls for peace talks  
with Myanmar junta**

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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.

# KEEPING INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION ON MYANMAR

With Russia's Vladimir Putin threatening the Ukraine war could go "global" and Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu focused on threatening Gaza and Iran, the Myanmar crisis arguably is suffering from limited international attention. So much so that AFP recently included Myanmar in a list of five "forgotten conflicts":

World instability is acute at the moment - not helped by the apparent vacuum in leadership in the United States with the transfer of power from Joe Biden to Donald Trump and the uncertainties this brings - positive or negative.

Amidst this instability, what can be done to help focus world attention on Myanmar?

This challenge sits on the shoulders of a number of existing key players including United Nations officials, ASEAN representatives, the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), the Myanmar diaspora, NGOs, and the media, including the work of the Myanmar independent media. And last week it was helped briefly by the International Criminal Court's prosecutor calling for an arrest warrant for Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

Over three years after the military coup, there is skepticism over how much can be achieved to bring real change. But it is important to try - not only for the people of Myanmar but cognizant of how the Myanmar crisis is damaging regionally as the country remains a den of criminality, as seen in the drug hauls and the horrors of scam centres.

When it comes to tackling the Myanmar crisis, top of the chain is the United Nations and the forums available. There is a need to continue to push for Special Sessions, despite the limits to what has been achieved so far. There is a need to advocate for periodic UN Security Council (UNSC) and General Assembly sessions on Myanmar, continuing to highlight such matters as crimes against humanity. It might help to encourage the extension of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) and call for stronger monitoring mechanisms within the UN system. In

addition, the international arms embargo needs to be stepped up and sympathetic countries need to propose and support a resolution in the UNSC.

Pushing for ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus might appear to be like flogging a dead horse, but there is a need for ASEAN to commit to the peace process and broaden the scope to include dialogue with opposition forces including the NUG. Advocacy for the inclusion of the NUG and other democratic forces needs to be pushed as an alternative to junta representation.

There is a need to continue to expand the involvement of Regional Multilateral Forums in the Myanmar issue. It would help to do more to encourage countries like India, Japan, and South Korea to champion Myanmar in forums such as BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative) or the East Asia Summit. Smaller political and media forums should be encouraged to tackle the Myanmar issue.

During global summits, such as the G20 summits, member states sympathetic to Myanmar's plight can draw attention to the conflict. Members of the European Union - and other key players like the UK and Canada - could expand their advocacy and involvement in the issue, with a push to increase targeted sanctions.

It is important to advocate for the World Bank and IMF to suspend cooperation with the junta while channeling humanitarian aid through NGOs and local democratic organizations.

And the media - including Myanmar independent media and international media - should be encouraged and supported to report on and highlight the key issues to keep Myanmar in the public eye, further leveraging social media options.

Much of this will be obvious to Myanmar watchers. But it needs to be reiterated. With no end to the Myanmar crisis in sight, the key players need to double-down to isolate the military junta and push for peace.

## EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of TNLA fighters in northern Shan State by AFP





Photo: AFP

# PRAGMATIC MOVE?

## TNLA CALLS FOR PEACE

## TALKS WITH MYANMAR

## JUNTA

The Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) announced on 25 November their willingness to engage in peace talks with Myanmar's military junta to end armed conflicts in the Ta'ang region. This move aligns with efforts by the Chinese government to mediate peace and ensure stability along the border.

The TNLA, in its statement, acknowledged the ongoing suffering of civilians affected by the conflict, particularly the devastating impact of junta airstrikes, and emphasized its readiness to negotiate while upholding the right to self-defence. It highlighted the severe hardships faced by locals during a year of clashes during Operation 1027, despite successfully clearing junta bases in the Ta'ang region.

The statement also underscored the TNLA's intent

to constructively cooperate with China's mediation, aiming to bring an end to the ongoing armed conflicts in Myanmar and foster a stable political environment.

Similarly, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) earlier announced its willingness to collaborate with China for political dialogue, asserting its right to self-defence.

Military and political analyst Than Soe Naing suggested that TNLA's latest announcement might be influenced by pressure from the Chinese government.

"It's likely due to pressure from China. By relying on China, the Military Council is putting pressure on ethnic armed groups. China's aim to reopen the Muse-Mandalay trade route may be the driving force behind the TNLA's negotiation statement today. I think the



TNLA will engage in negotiations, regarding these border gates," said Than Soe Naing.

During Operation 1027, the TNLA seized several townships, including Thibaw, Kyaukme, Namhsan, Monglon, Moemeik, Mogok, Mongton, Namtu, Kutkai, Naung Cho, Namkham, and Mongngaw, and is now taking charge of administrative activities in those townships. The junta has frequently conducted airstrikes on those townships.

Despite the TNLA's readiness for dialogue, criticism has arisen from some residents of northern Shan State.

"The people have a desire to end the military dictatorship. People will only suffer twice if they enter into negotiating again. Local people have already suffered and endured significant losses of property and belongings during the conflict. These sacrifices would be for nothing," said a resident from northern Shan State.

Residents interviewed by Mizzima expressed hope that TNLA will continue its fight to topple military rule rather than pursuing negotiations.

Meanwhile, the TNLA is engaged in active clashes with junta forces in Naung Cho Township and Mandalay Region's Thabeikkyin Township. TNLA's spokesperson, Lway Yay Oo, admitted to facing significant pressure from the Chinese government to agree to a ceasefire, following a warning letter issued by Chinese authorities in August.

On 9 November, Brigadier General Tar Naw Shean, Chief of Staff of the TNLA, urged the troops who completed the TNLA's Special Combat Training Course to keep defending and safeguarding the 12 townships that were taken during Operation 1027.

The junta leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, recently visited China from 4 to 10 November, a trip that junta officials described as successful.

Meanwhile, eleven people were killed when a teashop in Myanmar was hit by a military airstrike in the town of Naungcho in the northern Shan State last week, a spokeswoman for the TNLA said.

The attack, shortly before 3 pm (0830 GMT), comes as the junta battles widespread armed opposition to its 2021 coup and its soldiers accused of bloody rampages and using air and artillery strikes to punish civilian communities.

"They were civilians who came to drink tea and were sitting at the shop," Lway Yay Oo, a spokesperson for the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) said.

At least four civilians were wounded and were receiving treatment in a hospital, she said.

Local media also reported that 11 people had died, but said many were injured in an army air attack on Lansan tea shop.

*Reporting: Mizzima, AFP*



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Insein Prison, Yangon. Photo: AFP

# POLITICAL PRISONERS ENDURE BAD TREATMENT IN MYANMAR

Political prisoners in Myanmar continue to endure severe mistreatment, particularly within the prison healthcare system, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). The group reports that 21,122 political prisoners remain detained across the country.

Over the past 11 months, 20 political prisoners have died due to inadequate medical care in prison. Among those suffering from serious health conditions are top leaders of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party ousted in the 2021 military coup.

NLD Central Executive Committee member Kyaw Htwe expressed concerns to Radio Free Asia (RFA), stating, "All political prisoners do not receive adequate healthcare. We are especially worried about our senior members, who are in their seventies, as their endurance is declining. In particular, we are deeply concerned about our president, Aung San Suu Kyi's health condition."

The NLD has already lost several prominent members while they were incarcerated, including spokespersons Nyan Win and Aung Shin, as well as Dr. Zaw Myint Maung. Many other former government officials are reportedly in poor health.

## Healthcare as a Tool of Repression

Theik Tun Oo, a member of the Progressive Political Network of Myanmar (PPNM), told RFA that the junta deliberately denies healthcare to political prisoners as a form of repression.

"Restrictions are tightened, especially for prominent political prisoners, citing so-called security concerns. It can take up to nine months to get permission for outside medical care, and some prisoners have died while waiting," he said.

Even access to basic medical care inside the prison often requires bribes to prison authorities, making treatment inaccessible for many inmates. "Those who cannot afford to pay bribes do not receive adequate care and sometimes die as a result," Theik Tun Oo added.

## Recent Deaths Highlight Crisis

On November 20, political prisoner Sein Linn, detained at Obo Prison in Mandalay, was taken to Mandalay General Hospital after vomiting blood. He died the following day. Arrested in April 2022, his death underscores the systemic neglect faced by inmates.



Myanmar-China border crossing. Photo: AFP

## Thayarwaddy Prison: A Symbol of Abuse

Thayarwaddy Prison in Bago Region is notorious for mistreating political prisoners. One significant case involved 15 female political prisoners who were transferred from Yangon and Mandalay prisons and kept in solitary confinement for one year and eight months without justification.

Male prisoners transferred to Thayarwaddy also face abuse. New inmates reportedly must pay bribes of up to 250,000 MMK to avoid harsh treatment. Those who fail to pay face solitary confinement, torture, and physical abuse.

A source told Mizzima that new arrivals are beaten from the moment they enter the prison gates. "They are subjected to steel ankle braces, forced to stand under the burning sun, and beaten for 25 days. Family visits are only allowed after this initial period of abuse."

The deteriorating conditions in Myanmar's prisons reveal a deliberate policy of repression targeting political prisoners, adding another layer of suffering to their detention. Advocacy groups continue to call for international pressure on the junta to address these abuses.

## PARTIAL REOPENING OF CHINA-MYANMAR BORDER FAILS TO ALLEVIATE SHORTAGES

China has reopened several trade gates along the Myanmar border, but strict restrictions and one-sided trade policies have failed to ease the economic challenges faced by border area residents.

### Limited Reopening at Muse

China reopened the Muse border trade gate on November 21, allowing the import of maize and sugarcane into China. This partial reopening follows a four-month closure, as China had shut down trade gates from northern Shan State on July 9, 2024.

At the Sinbyu gate in the Muse trade zone, the Myanmar junta began allowing limited trade on November 30, with 50 lorries and 200 motorcycles permitted to cross into China daily. A lottery system determines which vehicles are allowed, with restrictions barring the trade of electrical goods and medicine. Only foodstuffs are permitted.

Before the restrictions, over 200 lorries used to facilitate trade daily between the two countries. A trader in Muse told Radio Free Asia (RFA), "Although



Bangladesh has been blocking Rohingya refugees from fleeing Rakhine State. Photo: AFP

they allow 200 motorcycles, many spots are reserved for people connected to the authorities, leaving very little opportunity for real traders like us.”

Traders also face the added burden of obtaining recommendation letters from both Chinese and Myanmar authorities, which slows down the process and increases costs.

## Challenges at Kanpaitee

The Kanpaitee trade gate reopened on November 24, but trade there remains one-sided. Chinese companies use their lorries to transport bananas grown in Myanmar into China, offering no reciprocal trade opportunities for Myanmar traders.

## Local Traders Struggle

The restrictive policies have severely impacted traders in Muse and other border areas. Goods that were once transported to central Myanmar are now sold locally due to the limitations. This has significantly reduced profits and forced many traders to struggle for survival.

One Muse trader expressed frustration over Myanmar authorities confiscating goods brought in from China, further complicating cross-border trade.

## Economic Impact

The limited reopening of border trade gates and restrictive policies have done little to address the shortages and economic challenges in Myanmar's border areas. The partial and selective nature of the trade agreements benefits China while leaving Myanmar's local traders with little relief.

Residents and traders are calling for more equitable trade policies to restore livelihoods and improve economic stability in the region.

## BANGLADESH CONTINUES TO BLOCK ROHINGYA AT BORDER

Bangladesh authorities continue to block Rohingya refugees fleeing conflict in Myanmar, while discussions on repatriation remain fraught with challenges, including the role of the Arakan Army (AA).

Md Touhid Hossain, a consultant with Bangladesh's Foreign Ministry, stated that ignoring the AA is impractical when addressing the Rohingya crisis. He emphasized that resolving the issue requires a collaborative approach involving Myanmar's State Administration Council (SAC) and the AA.

“Myanmar's central government cannot solve the Rohingya issue alone without involving the AA. Their role cannot be omitted,” Hossain said. Although direct communication with the AA is not feasible

for Bangladesh, he stressed the need for inclusive negotiations to move forward.

As fighting intensifies in Rakhine State, Bangladesh's Border Guard Police (BGB) have heightened security along the border, continuing to turn back Rohingya attempting to cross into Bangladesh.

On November 11, 81 Rohingya were intercepted while attempting to flee Myanmar. A Rohingya woman recounted her experience to Reuters, saying, “The Bangladesh border guards caught and detained us. After taking photographs, they brought us to the BGB camp. On August 7, we were put on two boats with about 100 people and pushed back to Myanmar. When we protested, the guards told us they wouldn't shoot if we returned to Bangladesh again.”

Another Rohingya woman described a similar pushback operation, stating that BGB officers denied their pleas for shelter. “There is no place here for you to live, even if you are dying in your country,” she quoted the guards as saying. Despite being injured and exhausted, they were sent back across the Naf River.

Meanwhile, reports estimate that 3,000 to 5,000 Rohingya from refugee camps in Bangladesh have joined militias fighting for Myanmar's military regime. The junta has admitted to providing basic military training to some members of the Rohingya community, allegedly for self-defense purposes.

The ongoing pushbacks and the refusal to provide shelter have drawn criticism from human rights advocates. The situation highlights the complex dynamics at play, including Bangladesh's strained capacity, Myanmar's escalating conflict, and the involvement of armed groups like the AA in Rakhine State.

Observers continue to call for international intervention to ensure the safety and dignity of the Rohingya community amid these worsening conditions.



Photo: AFP

## WHAT WOULD AN ICC ARREST WARRANT FOR MYANMAR'S JUNTA CHIEF MEAN?

**M**yanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing could be hit with an International Criminal Court arrest warrant, years after he led a deadly campaign against the Rohingya minority.

Min Aung Hlaing was head of Myanmar's armed forces when the military launched a crackdown in 2017 following what it said were attacks by Rohingya insurgents in Rakhine state.

Bringing harrowing tales of rape, arson and murder, around 750,000 Rohingya fled into neighbouring Bangladesh.

The ICC's chief prosecutor Karim Khan said Wednesday there were reasonable grounds to believe Min Aung Hlaing "bears criminal responsibility for crimes against humanity" committed during the crackdown.

Following Khan's request for judges to grant an arrest warrant for the junta chief, AFP looks at the ICC's case and what it may mean for Myanmar.

### Why now?

Khan said his request follows "renewed focus" on the court's investigation, which was launched in 2019.

Some analysts note the announcement comes days after the ICC issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his former defence minister, and Hamas's military chief.

"There is a whiff of political expediency in the prosecutor's decision, using the Rohingya to appear balanced," said independent Myanmar analyst David Mathieson.

Russian President Vladimir Putin--a junta ally--has been under an ICC arrest warrant since March 2023.

### Will Min Aung Hlaing be arrested?

If the warrant is granted, the 124 members of the ICC are obliged to arrest the junta chief if he travels to their country.

The junta says "the statements of the ICC have never been recognised" by Myanmar, which is not a member.

The general visited Indonesia for a regional summit shortly after the coup, but he rarely ventures abroad nowadays.

Since then his only reported foreign trips have been to close allies and arms suppliers China and Russia -- neither of which is an ICC member.

An ICC warrant in Russia can be seen as a badge of honour, said Richard Horsey of the International Crisis Group.

"With Putin in particular, it could boost their camaraderie."

Beijing on Thursday called on the ICC to maintain an "objective and impartial stance" and "exercise its authority prudently," regarding the requested warrant.

### What will it mean for Myanmar?

"The Rohingya were waiting for this," said Senoara Khatun, a community school teacher in a refugee camp in Bangladesh.

"I hope every criminal will be brought to justice by the ICC under the law."

As the junta has struggled to crush resistance to its rule, rights group say it has razed villages, carried out extrajudicial killings and has used attack jets and artillery to bombard communities suspected of opposition.

Any warrant "almost certainly won't alter the behaviour of their forces on the ground", said Horsey.

According to Mathieson, such a decision could actually have the effect of "raising his esteem amongst Rohingya haters and hardcore nationalists."

"It also comes as cold comfort to the rest of Myanmar where atrocity crimes are being perpetrated every day, and impunity abounds," he said.

"International accountability is sluggish."

AFP



Rohingya refugees. Photo: AFP

## ROHINGYA 'HAPPY' AT ICC REQUEST FOR MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF WARRANT

For Rohingya refugees who fled brutal violence in Myanmar, the announcement Wednesday that the International Criminal Court prosecutor was seeking an arrest warrant for the junta chief sparked celebrations.

"We are happy to hear about ICC issuing an arrest warrant against the Myanmar military commander Min Aung Hlaing," said Rohingya civil society leader Sayod Alam, living in the cramped refugee camps across the border in Bangladesh.

"It's a success for us."

Around a million members of the stateless and persecuted Muslim minority live in a sprawling patchwork of Bangladeshi relief camps of Cox's Bazar, after fleeing killings in their homeland next door in Myanmar.

Min Aung Hlaing -- who was head of the army during the 2017 crackdown, now the subject of a UN genocide investigation -- has dismissed the term Rohingya as "imaginary".

The Rohingya endured decades of discrimination in Myanmar, where successive governments classified them as illegal immigrants despite their long history in the country.

ICC chief prosecutor Karim Khan on Wednesday requested the court's Hague-based judges to grant an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing for alleged crimes against humanity committed against Rohingya.

Rohingya community school teacher Senoara Khatun said she was "happy".

"The Rohingya were waiting for this," she said. "I hope every criminal will be brought to justice by the

ICC under the law... to take more steps to make them accountable and punish them."

It is the first application for an arrest warrant against a high-level Myanmar government official in connection with abuses against the Rohingya people.

### 'Still not safe'

"Issuing an arrest warrant is good news for us," said Maung Sayodullah, leader of a civil rights organisation in Cox's Bazar. "He is the key perpetrator of the 2017 genocide against the Rohingya people."

But Sayodullah said the violence continued in his original home of Rakhine state, riven by war between Arakan Army (AA) forces and the junta troops.

The region is spiralling towards famine, according to the United Nations.

"We are still not safe in our homeland, Rakhine," he said, calling for action to stop fighting.

ICC judges must now decide whether to grant the arrest warrants.

If granted, the 124 members of the ICC would theoretically be obliged to arrest the junta chief if he travelled to their country.

Alam, the civil society activist has more immediate concerns than the slow grinding cogs of international justice.

"We want to go back home," he said. "The international community should work to return us to our home country, Myanmar... for our repatriation, security, and dignity."

AFP





International Criminal Court Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC speaks at the press conference. Photo: AFP

## BURMA CAMPAIGN UK WELCOMES ICC APPLICATION FOR MIN AUNG HLAING ARREST WARRANT

**B**urma Campaign UK has welcomed a statement by International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC that his office has applied for an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing, Head of the Burmese military, according to a press statement 27 November.

The ICC Prosecutor stated that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Min Aung Hlaing “bears criminal responsibility for the crimes against humanity of deportation and persecution of the Rohingya, committed in Myanmar, and in part in Bangladesh.”

The Prosecutor also stated that more applications for arrest warrants will follow.

The crimes relate to the Burmese military offensive against Rohingya civilians which began on 25th August 2017, which forced around 800,000 Rohingya to flee into neighbouring Bangladesh. Although Burma is not a signatory to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Bangladesh is, and the ICC ruled that it has jurisdiction relating to the crime of deportation as

this happened in an ICC member state.

Violations of international law being committed by the Burmese military in the rest of the country are not being investigated by the ICC.

Judges at the ICC will now have to assess the evidence and decide whether to issue an international arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing.

“The application for an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing is long overdue and will be celebrated across Burma”, said Anna Roberts, Executive Director of Burma Campaign UK. “For decades the Burmese military has been allowed to get away with violating international law without facing consequences. Justice is slowly closing in on the generals, but there is still a long way to go. We can expect bluster and defiance from the Burmese military in response to the application for an arrest warrant, but in truth it will send shockwaves through the military, because their sense of impunity is finally being eroded.”



Photo: Supplied

## PREGNANT WOMEN IN KARENNI STATE STRUGGLE WITH HEALTH CHALLENGES AMID CONFLICT

**A**round 3,000 pregnant women in Karenni State are facing significant challenges in accessing childbirth and postnatal healthcare, according to a report released on 25 November by the Women and Children's Affairs Department of the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC).

The report, based on data compiled on 1 October, highlights that 740 pregnant women are currently residing in IDP camps within Karenni State, out of an estimated 3,000 across the state.

Pregnant women in the region face severe obstacles, including inadequate nutrition, limited healthcare access, and difficulties in transportation and security due to ongoing conflict.

Maw Phray Myar, chairperson of the Karenni National Women's Organization (KNWO), noted that these challenges have, in some cases, resulted in the deaths of both mothers and newborns.

The report also identifies additional issues stemming from limited awareness of vaccinations, contraception, and reproductive health among women.

"Some babies are born with jaundice, but this often goes unnoticed until complications arise due to delayed treatment," said Maw Phray Myar.

She also pointed to a lack of access to contraceptives, which can lead to unplanned pregnancies, domestic conflicts, and instances of gender-based violence.

Although some healthcare services are provided by revolutionary forces and the IEC Health Department, the report acknowledges that the support is insufficient to meet the needs of the region's pregnant women.

In addition to the estimated 3,000 pregnant women, the IEC data indicates that there are approximately 20,000 displaced women across Karenni State. Many of these women face reproductive health issues related to early marriage, poor access to hygiene products, and limited financial resources.

The IEC report underscores the urgency of addressing these concerns by improving access to personal hygiene products and raising awareness of reproductive health, particularly for adolescent girls and women of reproductive age.

To address these pressing issues, the Women and Children's Affairs Department plans to develop initiatives to provide essential nutritional supplements and healthcare services to pregnant and breastfeeding women. The department is also calling on relevant stakeholders to collaborate in ensuring these women receive the necessary support.



Photo: AFP

## UN MYANMAR CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AS 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE BEGIN

On 25 November, the United Nations (UN) in Myanmar issued a statement for the “Unite to End Violence Against Women and Girls” campaign. This statement was released on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, in which the UN condemned all forms of gender-based violence.

The statement is as follows.

We recognize the resilience of Myanmar’s women and girls who face heightened risks of violence amid ongoing crises, and the local organisations—many led by women—which tirelessly continue to provide support and advocate for change in the face of insecurity and severely limited resources.

Today also marks the start of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, which we

are commemorating in Myanmar under the theme: #NoExcuse. UNiTE to End Violence Against Women and Girls, aligning with the UN Secretary General’s unite campaign. We call for urgent and intensified action to end violence against Myanmar’s women and girls, including increased and better-quality investment in local women’s rights organisations.

### Myanmar’s multiple crises put women and girls at greater risk of violence.

Women in conflict and humanitarian contexts are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence. In Myanmar, 9.7 million women and girls are in urgent humanitarian need[1] and marginalized due to multiple crises including armed conflict, severe and increasing levels of poverty and food insecurity, economic and political instability, and frequent natural disasters. These fragile conditions significantly increase the risk of

gender-based violence and create barriers for women and girls to access essential services, including multi-sectoral support and justice for gender-based violence survivors.

Child marriage rates also soar in conflict-affected areas, increasing by 20%. In Myanmar, more children are being pulled out of school and early, and child marriages are rising as families in crisis resort to forcing young girls to marry for perceived protection and survival. Women and girls with disabilities are even further marginalized as they are at least two to four times more likely than other women to experience violence. The risk is even higher during conflicts and crises.

### **Local women-led organisations are key, but low-quality funding is holding back change.**

Violence against women and girls is preventable, but funding for programming to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls is woefully inadequate—globally and in Myanmar. Less than 0.2% of global official development assistance is directed to preventing violence against women and girls.[4]

This must change. A comprehensive approach is the only sustainable option to address the root causes and prevent violence against women and girls.

Local organizations in Myanmar, including civil society and women-led organizations, play a critical role in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls, yet they face significant funding challenges. Many report that funding is sporadic, inflexible and short-term, which disrupts service continuity, erodes community engagement, and limits the impact of social norm interventions. This uncertainty also hinders strategic planning, partnership building and the ability to provide sustained support such as relocation or livelihood assistance for survivors of violence.

The UN in Myanmar works in partnership with local organizations to address violence against women and girls in all its forms, improve access to survivor-centred services and justice, and promote gender equality to stop gender-based violence from happening in the first place. We are therefore committed to continue finding flexible, longer-term, accessible funding mechanisms

that allow women's rights organizations and all partners to respond to the needs of survivors and communities and prioritise gender equality.

All women and girls have the right to live a life free of violence and full of dignity—it is a fundamental human right. To achieve this, the men and boys in Myanmar must stand as allies in ending gender-based violence. This begins with challenging harmful norms, speaking out against violence in all its forms, and promoting respect and equality in their families, communities, and workplaces. Only by fostering a culture of accountability and solidarity can we create a future where women and girls live free from fear and violence.

As we mark the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism campaign, the UN in Myanmar reaffirms its commitment to stay and deliver gender-based violence prevention, mitigation, and response services with local partners to end violence against women and girls. To echo the Secretary-General, "...it's beyond time to deliver."

### ***About the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based-Violence***

*The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, from 25 November to 10 December 2024, is a global campaign that highlights violence against women as a critical human rights issue. Through the UN Secretary General's UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence Against Women initiative, the UN in Myanmar joins global efforts to raise awareness, push for prevention, and demand accountability to end violence against women and girls.*



Photo: AFP

## KHRG CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SOUTHEAST MYANMAR

On 25 November, KHRG called on the international community and all relevant stakeholders to go beyond mere words of condemnation and take decisive action to put an end to abuses committed against women and girls. There is an urgent need for gender-specific protection and support that must be addressed.

The text of KHRG's statement is as follows.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) shines a spotlight on the devastating violence faced by women and girls in Southeast Burma, and the far-reaching impacts this violence has on their communities.

We stand in solidarity with survivors, their families, and all those working tirelessly to support them. Violence against women is not just a women's issue; it is a human rights issue. On this day, we reaffirm our commitment to amplifying the voices of women in Southeast Burma and advocating for a future where all can live free from violence, fear, and oppression. KHRG urges international stakeholders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and regional and foreign governments to:

Acknowledge that the SAC is the cause of the current human rights and humanitarian crisis, and refrain from giving any legitimacy to the junta.

Hold the perpetrators of violence against women and girls in Burma accountable for their actions through international mechanisms and investigations.

Implement further sanctions against SAC officials, aviation fuel and arms and ammunition suppliers to weaken the junta's ability to continue its attacks on villages and schools.

Provide the necessary resources to address women's specific needs, including healthcare, psychological and social support, safe shelters, and economic empowerment programs.

Coordinate with local civil society and community-based organizations (CSO/CBOs) to strengthen their capacity for humanitarian assistance and to implement local solutions in support of women and their communities.



## HURFOM REPORTS RISING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SINCE MYANMAR COUP

On 27 November, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) released its fourth and final report of the year in the Voice Up series, which focuses on the gendered impacts since the coup in the past year in southeast Myanmar.

The findings from September to November 2024 indicate an ongoing decline in women's rights and their fundamental freedoms. Attacks against innocent civilians continue with impunity and a lack of meaningful intervention by the international community. The first update was published at the beginning of March 2024, the second followed in June 2024, and the third most recently released in September 2024.

In targeted areas of Mon State, Karen State, and the Tanintharyi region, the military junta has killed 176 women since the coup on February 1, 2021, in addition to 370 women wounded and 196 individuals unlawfully arrested and detained. The military has also murdered 48 children and injured 80 others. These statistics include HURFOM's latest numbers, which found 15 women killed, 27 wounded, and 19 arbitrarily arrested. Additionally, seven were killed, and 13 suffered injuries ranging from minor to life-threatening. The military junta was the sole perpetrator of the crimes detailed in this report.

HURFOM's newest report coincides with the 16 Days of Activism, an annual campaign held from

November 25 to December 10 aimed at raising awareness to combat violence against women and girls. The crimes documented by HURFOM against women are part of a broader global crisis of violence faced by women and girls. During the reporting period, human rights violations included arbitrary arrests, indiscriminate gunfire, enforced disappearances, drone strikes, landmines, and persistent incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence.

Women have always been at the forefront of spirited calls for change, and the Spring Revolution in Burma is no exception. By transcending gender norms and challenging stereotypes, women continue to emerge as leaders. Despite facing many challenges, their strength and courage are evident in their pursuit of change for a democratic future.

The international community must heed the calls of women changemakers and their communities to end the decades of injustice they have faced. This includes a global arms embargo, sanctions on aviation fuel, and the necessary referral of the situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court. The military has evaded accountability for too long, and now it must confront the repercussions of its actions. Achieving justice is crucial for setting a new standard in the country, demonstrating that no one is above the law.



## PRIMARK BOSS DEFENDS PRACTICES AS BUDGET FASHION BRAND EYES EXPANSION

Ireland-based budget fashion chain Primark has been criticised for its record on workers' rights and the effect of its low-cost, high-volume model on the environment.

But its chief executive Paul Marchant does not agree. "I don't buy the story that we can't be ethical buying from Asia," he told AFP in an interview in Dublin.

In the world of low-cost fashion, Primark -- a fixture on the high street in the UK, Ireland and beyond -- is a one-off.

The brand produces its garments in Asia and sells them cheaply in Europe, but ships them by boat rather than by plane, does not sell online, prepares its collections more than a year in advance and does not build up stock.

It has been a lucrative formula, with Marchant boasting recently that the retailer had hit the billion-pound (\$1.3 billion) profit figure for the first time.

Primark, though, still has to bat back critics including environmental campaigners who argue that the brand's "throwaway" fashion is a drain on resources.

Human rights groups meanwhile accuse it of relying on suppliers in countries where workers are afforded little protection.

Primark maintains that it trains Indian farmers in regenerative agriculture and that it conducts regular audits of its suppliers to ensure workers and land are not exploited.

Nonetheless, its model relies on policing of regulations in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, where its garments are mainly produced.

"Providing you have the right partners... and have the right guards and measures and controls in place... I don't see any reason why you can't have a very robust ethical supply chain at source," said Marchant.

The company, he added, complies with the International Labour Organization's code of conduct.

## Humble roots

Primark published a report on its supply chain in 2018 but it only covered its own clothing factories, not its partners.

It admitted last year that previous partner SMART Myanmar had imposed excessive working time on its staff, and that they were not properly informed of their general leave entitlement.

However, it said there was no evidence to back up further claims that staff had limited toilet access and suffered verbal abuse from supervisors.

Primark claims to be making efforts to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions but acknowledges that 97.5 percent of its overall carbon footprint comes from the activities of its suppliers.

Asked about the sheer volume of clothing his company sells, Marchant is insistent.

"We're not flooding the market with unwanted goods," he said. "We sell everything that we buy."

He also claimed that his products are less sensitive than other brands to the whims of fashion, with half of its collections consisting of everyday clothing.

Primark launched in Ireland in 1969 under the name Penneys and has had only two bosses since: founder Arthur Ryan, then Marchant.

But the company, the top-selling budget-fashion flagship in both the UK and Ireland, is no longer a small family business.

It is now a thriving subsidiary of the agri-food giant Associated British Foods, and sells its clothes in 17 countries, employing 80,000 people.

## Expansion plans

On the back of this success, Primark intends to expand in the United States and Europe (France, Spain, Portugal and Italy), Marchant explained.

The brand has also signed with "a franchise partner" to open stores in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and "potentially" Bahrain and Qatar within "12 to 18 months", he added.

Primark's direct competitors include Europe's H&M and Zara, as well as Asian giants Shein and Temu, which follow a similar model of "low, low margins", he said.

The company also achieves economies of scale by purchasing larger volumes than its competitors and does not sell online.

Instead, it hopes to lure customers to stores by expanding partnerships with popular brands such as Netflix, Disney and Hello Kitty.

Its 453 stores sell clothes and accessories, but also stock decorations and host cafes, eyebrow bars and hairdressers.

The idea is that everyone can find something.

For instance, parents are tempted by "competitive" prices on children's clothing while women with special clothing requirements, such as those who are pregnant, who have suffered from breast cancer or who have disabilities, all have collections catering to them.

AFP





# ARAKAN ARMY COMPLETE CONTROL OF TAUNGUP TOWN, RAKHINE STATE

The Arakan Army (AA) has officially declared its complete control over Taungup town in Rakhine State. According to the announcement on 28 November, there are no remaining Military Council personnel within the area, solidifying the group's dominance in the region.

The AA has also declared the capture of 10 Military Council bases in Taungup Township, Rakhine State, and is actively targeting the remaining three. The group claims it is taking control of the town following a 17-day offensive carried out between 4 and 20 November.

Among the seized locations are Taungup University, Ar Lein Ngar Sint Pagoda hill, Phone Nyo village, the gate camp of Military Operations Commands No. 5, and camps at the Su Taung Pyae Pagoda Complex in Thein Taung Ward. Other captured sites include Kyoe Kyar Kwin Gate, a base near Kaine Shae bridge, Thiri Hospital, the base at Gone Nay Dout Kyin, and Taungup Police Station.

The AA stated that it is simultaneously attacking key military bases in Taungup, including Military Operations Commands No. 5 and its associated battalions, Light Infantry Battalion 346 and Light Infantry Battalion 544.

Prior to launching the offensive, Taungup was reportedly sealed off, with residents evacuated to safer areas. During the fighting, Military Council forces allegedly looted properties, and some areas of the town

suffered damage due to aerial bombardments.

The AA also revealed the arrest of nine individuals suspected of looting, sharing photos of them in its announcement.

With the capture of Taungup, the AA now controls 11 towns in Rakhine State and one in Paletwa, Chin State, bringing the total to 12 towns under its control.

Local sources reported that more than 30 civilians lost their lives due to airstrikes carried out by the Military Council during the Taungup battle.

The Arakan Army (AA) is nearing its objective of establishing control over all of Rakhine State.

For over a year, the AA, in collaboration with the Three Brotherhood Alliance, has been carrying out their arm of Operation 1027 across Rakhine State.

During this campaign, the group has captured 11 towns in Rakhine State and one in Paletwa, Chin State. Out of the 17 towns in Rakhine, the AA has successfully taken control of 11.

In addition to seizing Taungup, the AA has intensified its offensives against Military Council strongholds in Ann and Gwa, focusing on the Western Regional Command. The group is also targeting the No. 5 Border Guard Police Commanding Office, the final Military Council base in Maungdaw.



Damaged houses. Photo: Mizzima

## MYANMAR JUNTA INTENSIFIES DRONE, ARTILLERY ATTACKS IN EASTERN BAGO REGION, DISPLACING THOUSANDS

The Myanmar junta has escalated drone and artillery attacks in Nyaunglaebin District, eastern Bago Region, with military sources reporting frequent strikes since early November.

According to the People's Defense Force (PDF), the junta has advanced into areas including Kyaukyi, Mone, Kyauktaga, and Natthankwin. Artillery fire from military bases has become a near-daily occurrence, and drones are being used to attack villages inhabited by civilians.

"The fighting is happening every day. The junta is increasingly using drones and heavy weapons, especially between the Kyaukyi and Kanyinkyo areas," a PDF source said.

Drone strikes and artillery shelling have caused injuries among residents and damage to local buildings. On 28 November, drone attacks in Kyaukyi Township destroyed three buildings, including a monastery, while another monastery in Mone Township was also struck.

A resident from Kywetalin village said, "Before, we feared heavy weapons more than drones. Now, drones

are constantly flying. We can't stay in the villages anymore; we have to flee."

The Karen National Union (KNU) Central Committee reported on 27 November that six residents in Nyaunglaebin District were injured, and seven buildings, including two public structures, were damaged by junta drone and artillery strikes between 20 and 26 November.

Additionally, the increased use of landmines by military forces has led to more injuries, according to local sources.

Clashes between junta forces and combined revolutionary forces occur almost daily.

The Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN) reports that Nyaunglaebin District, under KNU Brigade 3, has the highest number of displaced people in areas affected by junta artillery and air strikes. Out of over one million displaced people across seven brigades, more than 430,000 are from this district.



Photo: Supplied

## INDIAN GOVERNMENT DELIVERS RICE AID FOR WAR REFUGEES IN MIZORAM, INCLUDING THOUSANDS FROM MYANMAR

The Indian central government has sent rice to assist war refugees, including Myanmar citizens, in Mizoram State, according to All India Radio's broadcast on 24 November, citing the Mizoram government's Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs (FCS&CA) department.

The first shipment, comprising 1,379.34 metric tonnes of rice valued at Rs 5 crore, has reached warehouses in 11 districts where displaced people are residing. This aid will be distributed by district administrators following orders from Mizoram's Ministry of Home Affairs. Each refugee is allocated 31.5 kilograms of rice as part of the initial distribution guidelines.

"The rice has arrived, and it has already been distributed in five districts. We are deeply grateful for the efforts of the state government and the support from the central government," said Pur Zoe War, representative of the Network for Unity Association Mizoram (NUA).

He expressed hope that such assistance would provide long-term relief to refugees. He also encouraged Myanmar refugees to respect local laws and live harmoniously with Mizoram's residents, highlighting the importance of upholding the government's recognition of their plight.

The NUA, established in June 2023, is a coalition of 13 organizations supporting displaced individuals

in Mizoram. It works alongside local social groups and government officials to provide assistance.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Mizoram is currently home to 43,788 displaced persons, including 33,764 from Myanmar, 2,014 from Bangladesh, and 8,010 from Manipur.

An in-charge from Tai Zol camp in Lunglei district, which houses approximately 800 people, confirmed they had yet to receive the rice.

"We are grateful for the generosity, regardless of the amount. This aid is a blessing," the camp in-charge said.

Camp residents survive on daily wage jobs, such as guarding and cleaning, while also relying on donations from volunteers.

The Indian central government initially refused to accept refugees and ordered four border states to return them following the military coup in Myanmar. However, analysts note a shift in India's stance. While India maintains ties with Myanmar's junta, it has also begun engaging with the National Unity Government (NUG) and other resistance forces, providing limited assistance to displaced persons along the Myanmar-India border.

This dual approach reflects India's attempt to balance regional security concerns with humanitarian considerations amid the ongoing conflict in Myanmar.



Min Aung Hlaing's family, including his daughter, Khin Thiri Thet.

## MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER'S DAUGHTER HOSTS EVENT IN BANGKOK AMID ONGOING BOYCOTTS

**K**hin Thiri Thet Mon, daughter of Myanmar's junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing, organized an event in Bangkok, Thailand, through her entertainment company.

The "Taste of Content Creation Event" took place on 24 November at Pratunam, in partnership with House of Myanmar and Thailand-based entertainment firm Kantana. House of Myanmar, one of Khin Thiri Thet Mon's several entertainment businesses, was founded on 30 September 2024.

The event focused on casting actors for two upcoming productions: the educational short film, *Hero Cane* and the horror film, *Ma Phae Wah*. It served as a platform to discover new talent for these projects.

Notable Myanmar artists, including singer Bunny Phyo and lifestyle vlogger HEYI, attended the event and shared their experiences in interactive sessions. A number of content creators and vloggers from Thailand and Myanmar, such as Yamin Paing, Phyu Sin Shin Thant, Zin Myint Mo, FoodBkk, and Zin Ei Ei Maung, also participated.

Khin Thiri Thet Mon and Myo Yadanar Htike, the junta leader's daughter-in-law, have been involved in various entertainment ventures under names such as Stellar Seven, JOOX Myanmar (music distribution),

7th Sense (film production), Hey Play, and SM Winner Entertainment.

However, businesses linked to the junta have faced public backlash in Myanmar. Since the military coup, citizens have launched widespread boycotts targeting junta-affiliated products and services. Items such as food, beverages, cosmetics, and household goods produced by companies tied to military conglomerates like Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) and Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) have seen plummeting sales.

Restaurants, retail chains, and entertainment ventures associated with the junta have also been blacklisted by consumers as part of a broader movement to undermine the military regime's financial power. The boycotts aim to show solidarity with revolutionary forces striving to overthrow the dictatorship and restore democracy in Myanmar.

This movement has gained momentum on social media, where activists share lists of junta-linked businesses to avoid, encouraging the public to support independent or resistance-friendly alternatives. Despite efforts by the junta to promote its ventures, public defiance remains strong.



U Kyaw Zaw

## NUG WARNS CHINA: MYANMAR'S JUNTA CANNOT SAFEGUARD INVESTMENTS

The Chinese government's collaboration with Myanmar's junta on security issues will fail to protect China's interests and citizens in Myanmar, U Kyaw Zaw, spokesperson for the National Unity Government (NUG) presidential office, warned during a public online press conference on 26 November.

The NUG criticized the junta's violent actions and alleged lobbying efforts, stating they pose direct threats to China's investments and the safety of its citizens.

"Min Aung Hlaing and the Military Council cannot safeguard China's interests or its people. Their violence undermines both," U Kyaw Zaw said.

The junta recently announced the formation of a committee, headed by the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, to examine a proposal for a joint security company with China.

According to a Myanmar Gazette report on 22 October, the committee will evaluate the import of weapons and communication equipment, ensuring compliance with existing laws and sovereignty concerns.

U Kyaw Zaw acknowledged China's concerns for its investments and citizens' security amidst Myanmar's instability. However, he reaffirmed the NUG's commitment to protecting Chinese investments on the ground, in line with its China Policy, Military Code of Conduct, and Investment Policy.

The NUG will not target Chinese economic or civilian facilities that are not militarily connected, he

assured and called on Beijing to engage with the NUG, which works closely with revolutionary forces.

"Only the National Unity Government, which stands united with the Myanmar people, and the revolutionary forces can effectively protect China's investments and interests," said U Kyaw Zaw.

China's stakes in Myanmar include several critical projects such as the 500-mile China-Myanmar oil and gas pipeline and the Takaung Nickel Factory in Sagaing Region, which has seen over \$850 million in investments. Both projects, along with the Alpha Cement Factory in Mandalay Region, are located in areas now controlled by revolutionary forces.

Myanmar also plays a key role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with planned projects like the Myitsone dam and the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port, according to the Institute for Strategy and Policy (ISP Myanmar).

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visited China from 5 to 10 November, where he reportedly sought Beijing's intervention to cease fighting in northern Shan State and ensure the safety of BRI-linked infrastructure, including the Muse-Mandalay-Kyaukphyu railway. The junta described the trip as a success.

Despite these efforts, the NUG warned that relying on the junta for security will only exacerbate instability, urging the Chinese government to reconsider its alliances in Myanmar.

# RUSSIA RELIEF SUPPLIES FOR FLOOD-HIT AREAS IN MYANMAR ARRIVE IN NAYPYIDAW



Bringing relief supplies. Photo: AFP

A transport aircraft carrying humanitarian aid supplies sent by State Atomic Energy Corporation-Rosatom and several other companies for the rehabilitation of areas of Myanmar affected by floods triggered by Typhon Yagi arrived at Naypyidaw Airport on the morning of 24 November, the state-run daily paper reported.

A total of 35 tonnes of humanitarian aid materials from ministries and companies of the Russian Federation will be delivered to the flood-affected areas as quickly as possible, the paper reported.

The plane brought foodstuffs, blankets, tents, and inflatable boats totalling about 30 tonnes.

The humanitarian aid supplies are donated by the Ministry of Civil Defence, Emergencies and Disaster Relief, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the State Atomic Energy Corporation-Rosatom and the Aquarius Group of Companies on behalf of the Russian Federation.

The Russian Nuclear Energy Corporation Rosatom plans to build a small modular nuclear reactor in Myanmar in collaboration with the junta. The Aquarius

group of companies is the first ever Russian information technology company.

The Russian Ambassador to Myanmar, Mr. Iskander Azizov, handed over these relief supplies to Myanmar officials on 24 November.

Russian humanitarian assistance arrived in Myanmar two months after typhoon Yagi hit the country and triggered the devastating flood.

Russia is a staunch supporter of the Myanmar junta and a major supplier of military equipment and weapons. Junta leaders Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has frequently visited Russia and built a stronger relationship since the 2021 military coup.

In the meantime, Russia, which is facing sanctions imposed by the EU for its invasion of Ukraine, is taking steps to develop a common currency among the BRICS nations. The Myanmar junta has expressed a desire to join BRICS as an observer. Two superpower neighbouring countries of Myanmar, India and China, are also members of this grouping.



India's Coast Guard with the drugs haul. Photo: AFP

## INDIA SEIZES 5.5 TONNES OF MYANMAR METH IN 'BIGGEST' DRUG BUST

India's coast guard said 26 November they had seized their biggest haul of illicit drugs when they stopped a fishing boat smuggling 5.5 tonnes of methamphetamine from war-torn Myanmar.

An Indian Coast Guard (ICG) reconnaissance air patrol spotted a small fishing boat in the Andaman Sea -- which lies between India and troubled Myanmar -- "operating in a suspicious manner".

A coastguard vessel was sent out, with officers boarding at dawn Sunday when the fishing boat with a crew of six Myanmar citizens entered Indian territorial waters, the coastguard statement added.

"The boarding party found approximately 5,500 kilogrammes of prohibited drug methamphetamine," it read.

"The seizure is the biggest-ever drug haul by ICG, highlighting its commitment to safeguarding Indian territorial waters."

The boat has since been taken to an Indian naval base.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military

deposed Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government in 2021 and launched a crackdown that sparked an armed uprising.

Myanmar's Shan state is a leading source of synthetic drugs, much of it produced in illegal laboratories hidden in rugged jungle regions controlled by armed groups near Thailand's border.

Drug producers have increasingly turned to smuggling by boats to avoid tighter patrols on land routes through China and Thailand.

A record 190 tonnes of methamphetamine were seized in East and Southeast Asia in 2023, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The seizure made by India could have been sold for millions of dollars on the street.

However, UN experts say mass manufacturing means the wholesale price of methamphetamine is as low as \$400 per kilogramme in production areas.

AFP

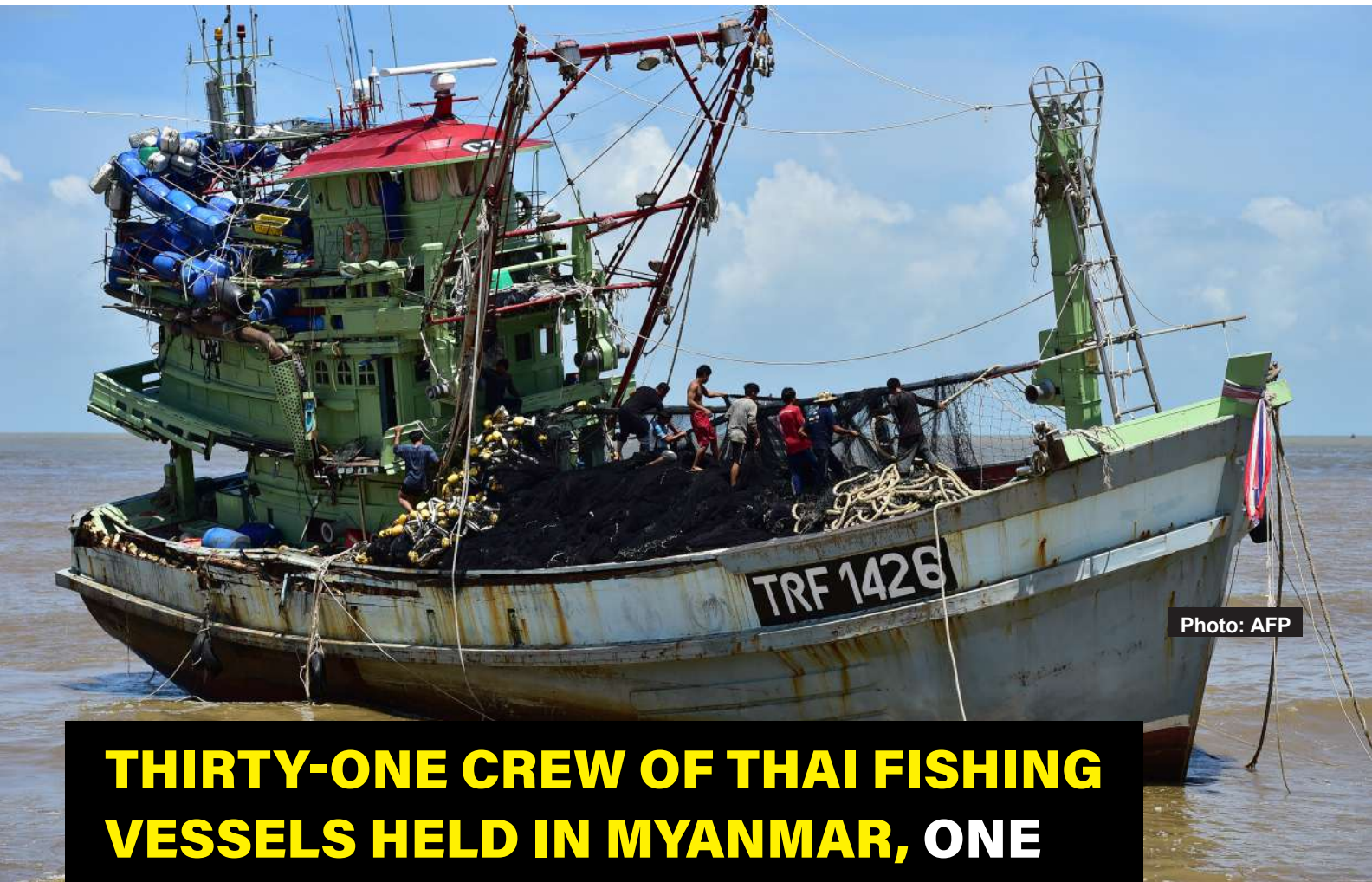


Photo: AFP

## THIRTY-ONE CREW OF THAI FISHING VESSELS HELD IN MYANMAR, ONE DEAD: NAVY

**M**ore than 30 crew members of Thai fishing boats were detained in Myanmar waters on Saturday after an encounter with other vessels which left one person dead, a navy commander said.

Suwat Donsakul, a naval commander in the southern province of Ranong, told AFP one Thai fisherman drowned and “31 people were taken into Myanmar”, without specifying who had detained them.

Suwat said several Thai fishing boats were operating within Myanmar’s waters at the time of the incident on Saturday.

The deceased “jumped into the water during the attack”, he said.

Suwat said he had instructed local authorities to negotiate with their Myanmar counterparts to secure the release of the fishermen.

A spokesperson for Thailand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs told AFP that they would also engage in negotiations with the Myanmar side to secure their release.

AFP has reached out to Myanmar’s junta government for comment.

The incident prompted the Ranong provincial fisheries department to issue a warning to fishers and boat owners to avoid areas near the Thai-Myanmar maritime border.

The fisheries department said in a statement that “Myanmar armed fishing boats” had attacked Thai fishing vessels around 20 kilometres (12 miles) west of Phayam island, off the Thai coast, without specifying the identity of the alleged attackers.

Its warning was to “all fishing operators and vessel owners to be cautious when navigating near the border”

Thailand and Myanmar share approximately 1,500 miles of land and maritime borders, including in the Andaman Sea.

According to a notice on the website of Thailand’s fisheries department, Thai fishing boats have been illegally operating in Myanmar waters, raising tensions between the two countries.

AFP





Photo: AFP

## MORE THAN 100 ROHINGYA REFUGEES RESCUED OFF INDONESIA: UN

**M**ore than 100 Rohingya refugees including women and children have been rescued after their boat sank off the coast of Indonesia, the United Nations refugee agency said 30 November.

The mostly Muslim ethnic Rohingya are heavily persecuted in Myanmar and thousands risk their lives each year on long and dangerous sea journeys to reach Malaysia or Indonesia.

"We received a report from the East Aceh government that there are 116 refugees in total," UNHCR's Faisal Rahman told AFP on Saturday.

"The refugees are still on the beach right now, it has not been decided where they would be taken."

He said the flimsy wooden boat carrying the Rohingyas was found half-submerged not far from the beach off the coast of northeastern Sumatra island.

A local fisherman, Saifudin Taher said the boat was first spotted entering East Aceh waters on Saturday morning, and a few hours later it nearly sank.

"All passengers survived, but one of them was ill and ...immediately received treatment," Saifudin told AFP, adding the boat was only 100 metres away from the beach, and the refugees could walk easily to safety.

Rohingya arrivals in Indonesia tend to follow a cyclical pattern, slowing during the stormy months and picking back up when sea conditions calm down.

Last month, 152 Rohingya refugees were finally brought ashore after being anchored for days off the coast of South Aceh district for days while officials decided whether to let them land.

Indonesia is not a signatory to the UN refugee convention and says it cannot be compelled to take in refugees from Myanmar, calling instead on neighbouring countries to share the burden and resettle Rohingya who arrives on its shores.

Many Acehnese, who have memories of decades of bloody conflict themselves, are sympathetic to the plight of their fellow Muslims.

But others say their patience has been tested, claiming the Rohingya consume scarce resources and occasionally come into conflict with locals.

In December 2023, hundreds of students forced the relocation of more than 100 Rohingya refugees, storming a community hall in Aceh where they were sheltering and vandalising their belongings.

AFP



Photo: AFP



# BEIJING'S ANTI-CORRUPTION DRIVE: A FLAWED CAMPAIGN OR A POLITICAL WEAPON?

SUN LEE

Recent news of the death sentence handed to a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) official for corruption has reignited debates on the efficacy and intentions of Beijing's much-publicized anti-corruption drive. While Chinese President Xi Jinping's crusade against corruption was initially seen as a promising step to clean up the Party, the increasing frequency of high-profile cases among the Party's own ranks suggests a deeper, systemic issue that cannot be eradicated simply by imposing harsher punishments. Instead, the anti-corruption campaign appears to be a double-edged sword used only to address cases that can consolidate political power and instil fear.

Since assuming power in 2012, Xi Jinping has been on aggressive anti-corruption campaign under the slogan of targeting both 'tigers' (high-ranking officials) and 'flies' (low-level bureaucrats). The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), the CCP's top anti-corruption watchdog, has investigated thousands of officials across different levels of government. The campaign has led to the downfall of numerous prominent figures, including Zhou Yongkang, a former security czar, and Bo Xilai, a once-powerful Politburo member.

On the surface, these actions have been framed as part of a broader effort to restore public trust in the CCP and enhance its legitimacy. However, the fact that even top Party officials are not immune to corruption charges raises questions about the internal dynamics of the Party. The execution order for a high-ranking official further highlights the campaign's severity, yet also exposes its limitations.

## An Inherent Contradiction: The Party Policing Itself

One of the most significant criticisms of the anti-corruption drive is that it remains fundamentally flawed because it lacks transparency and accountability. The CCP operates within a closed system where the same Party that polices corruption is also the one committing it. As a result, there is no independent judicial oversight, leaving room for selective targeting based on political motivations rather than genuine concerns over ethical governance.

The lack of independent checks and balances means that corruption investigations can be conveniently

weaponized to eliminate political rivals. This has led many analysts to argue that the anti-corruption campaign is not just a tool for governance reform but also a mechanism for Xi Jinping to consolidate power. For instance, many of those targeted in the early phases of the campaign were either part of opposing factions or seen as potential threats to Xi's leadership.

The recent death sentence of a CCP official underscores the extreme measures Beijing is willing to take to portray itself as tough on corruption. Yet, while high-profile cases create headlines, they do little to address the root causes of corruption which are deeply embedded in the Party's structure. The very nature of China's one-party system, characterized by a lack of political competition and judicial independence is somewhat a template where corruption can thrive.

For instance, the CCDI reported that over 1.5 million officials have been disciplined since the anti-corruption drive began, with more than 170,000 facing criminal charges. However, this has not deterred others from engaging in corrupt practices. The recurrence of such cases, even at the highest levels of the Party, suggests that corruption is not merely an anomaly but a feature of the system itself. The incentives for corruption remain too high, and the mechanisms for accountability are too weak to produce meaningful change.

## **The Impact on China's Global Perception**

The anti-corruption campaign has also had unintended consequences for China's business climate. The crackdown has created an atmosphere of uncertainty, where business leaders, both domestic and foreign, are wary of becoming collateral damage in the CCP's political manoeuvres. High-ranking officials in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have often been targets, leading to disruptions in critical sectors.

Internationally, China's anti-corruption drive has been met with scepticism. Critics argue that the campaign is part of a broader narrative that seeks to portray the CCP as the ultimate guardian of social and moral order, even as it quashes dissent and tightens its grip on power. The lack of transparency in how investigations are conducted, coupled with the absence of a fair judicial process, has led to accusations of human rights violations.

If the CCP is genuinely committed to combating corruption, it needs to move beyond the current model of selective targeting and secretive investigations. The focus should be on institutional reforms that increase transparency and accountability. This would include establishing an independent anti-corruption body that operates outside the influence of the CCP. However, given the Party's reluctance to cede any control, such changes seem unlikely in the near future. Moreover, the anti-corruption drive needs to be decoupled from the CCP's broader political agenda. By focusing solely on high-profile cases that serve political purposes, Beijing continues to risk alienating not only its officials but also its citizens, who may perceive the campaign as yet another form of authoritarian control.

Furthermore, the very fact that so many Party members are implicated in corruption cases underscores the need for a systemic overhaul, something that the CCP is unlikely to undertake as long as it remains focused on maintaining its grip on power. Ultimately, the anti-corruption campaign showcases the broader contradictions of China's political system: a People's Republic that claims to serve the public good but operates without the checks and balances that characterize a truly free and fair society.

*Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who covers Asia and geopolitics.*



Russian Defence Minister Andrei Belousov with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Photo: AFP

## NORTH KOREA'S KIM, RUSSIAN MINISTER AGREE TO BOOST MILITARY TIES

Russian Defence Minister Andrei Belousov met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and agreed to boost military cooperation between the two isolated nations, Pyongyang state media said 30 November.

The United States and South Korea have accused the nuclear-armed North of sending more than 10,000 soldiers to help Russia fight Ukraine, with experts saying Kim is eager to gain advanced technology, and battle experience for his troops, in return.

Kim, who met Belousov on Friday, blasted the recent decision by Western powers to permit Kyiv to strike inside Russia with their weapons, saying it constituted a "direct military intervention in the conflict", according to KCNA.

"It is an exercise of the right to self-defence for Russia to take resolute action to make the hostile forces pay the price," Kim was quoted as saying.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kim signed a strategic partnership treaty in June that obligates both states to provide military assistance "without delay" in the case of an attack on the other and jointly oppose Western sanctions.

KCNA said Saturday that Belousov's visit "would greatly contribute to bolstering up the defence capabilities of the two countries and... promoting the friendly, mutual cooperation and development of the relations between the two armies."

Belousov, in a statement, expressed gratitude for the two countries' deepening bonds and praised North Korea's "absolutely independent foreign policy"

Analysts have suggested Pyongyang could be using Ukraine as a means of realigning its foreign policy.

By sending soldiers, North Korea is positioning itself within the Russian war economy as a supplier of weapons, military support and labour — potentially even bypassing traditional ally, neighbor and main trading partner China, they say.

Russia also offers access to vast natural resources, such as oil and gas, they say.

Belousov is well-placed to help with such arrangements, Hong Min, a senior analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification, told AFP, calling the Russian "an economic expert without a military background".

As Russia's defense chief, he specialises in "long-term strategies for securing weapons and military supplies, evading sanctions, and overseeing post-war reconstruction," Hong said.

### Invariable support

Russia and North Korea have strengthened their military ties since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Both countries are under rafts of UN sanctions -- the former for its nuclear weapons programme and the latter for the Ukraine conflict.

Since US president-elect Donald Trump's victory earlier this month, the Joe Biden administration has stepped up its support for Kyiv, transferring more weapons and giving Ukraine permission to fire long-range missiles onto Russian territory.

Kim said Friday that his government, army and people would "invariably support the policy of the Russian Federation to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity".

Earlier this month, Pyongyang said it had ratified the landmark defence pact with Russia, after lawmakers in Moscow voted unanimously in favour of the deal, which Putin later signed.

South Korea and Ukraine said Wednesday they would deepen security cooperation in response to the "threat" posed by the deployment of North Korean troops, but there was no mention of potential arms shipments.

President Yoon Suk Yeol said earlier this month that Seoul was "not ruling out the possibility of providing weapons" to Ukraine, which would mark a major shift to a long-standing policy barring the sale of weapons to countries in active conflict.

AFP



## TWELVE YEARS IN BURMA

"I was happy in Burma, and it changed my life." These are some of the last words of Friedgard Lottermoser, who sadly passed away in August 2024 at the age of 82. As listeners to Insight Myanmar will learn, these words are also very much an understatement. Friedgard was a transformational figure who lived in Burma from 1959 to 1971, a period of time when very few foreigners were allowed to even visit the country.

In some ways, Friedgard's story is not so dissimilar to the famous Austrian mountaineer, Heinrich Harrer, whose story was captured in *Seven Years in Tibet*. He describes how he got rare permission to live for years in that very closed country, and how he became close to the Dalai Lama and embraced Tibetan culture. Yet unlike Harrer, Friedgard's story has never been told before now, for reasons that will be explained below.

Friedgard certainly made the very most of her "Twelve Years in Burma," as this and subsequent episodes will show. She practiced meditation under Sayagyi U Ba Khin and Webu Sayadaw, studied Buddhist scholarship with Maha Gandyone Sayadaw, and received degrees from universities in Rangoon and Mandalay. After leaving Burma, Friedgard became involved in the meditation movement just as it was taking root in the West, and regularly corresponded with and supported such figures as Ruth Dennison, John Coleman, and Robert Hover. Later in life, she became a passionate advocate for gender equality within the Sangha, hoping that a bhikkuni order could be re-established. And she ultimately became a strong

advocate for democracy and human rights in Myanmar, believing that the resistance must do whatever it takes to overthrow the military after 2021 coup.

Last year, Friedgard agreed to open up about her remarkable life to Insight Myanmar Podcast, which ultimately became nearly 40 hours of conversation. However, her openness came with one condition: that the interviews not be published during her lifetime. She insisted on this condition because she had been attending long courses in the vipassana tradition of S.N. Goenka since 1995, was deeply grateful for the opportunity, and did not want to jeopardize her ability to continue to take them. Although she viewed Goenka more as a "Dhamma brother" than a "Dhamma teacher," she felt his centers represented the nearest available equivalent to her time with U Ba Khin. Also, as Friedgard knew that she was nearing the end of her life, she wished to spend her remaining years seeking liberation. However, she was well aware that her personal recollections about the mission and even teachings of Sayagyi U Ba Khin contrasted somewhat with the narrative promoted by the Goenka Vipassana Organization, and was concerned that candid discussions on our platform might cause her to be blacklisted. For Friedgard, this was not just an idle fear: despite her background and experience, she had already been kept at arms' length at some Goenka centers. But because she had found a welcoming reception at centers in Sri Lanka, she did not want to do anything that could put that in jeopardy. That's why she would agree to speak with us only if we held off publishing these recordings until she had passed away.

It is a very special privilege to now, at long last, be able to start the process of bringing her voice to the greater public. At the same time, the release of this first episode is a bittersweet moment for our podcast team. We had hoped to have Friedgard with us for many more years yet. And we were looking forward to many more hours talking with her, as even these 40 hours of conversation were not nearly enough to cover the extraordinary depth and richness of her life.

### CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/11/5/episode-283-twelve-years-in-burma>



Photo: Dominic Kurniawan Suryaputra

## CHINA URGES 'JUST AND FAIR' ICC ACTION ON MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF'S ARREST WARRANT

China's foreign ministry called for the International Criminal Court (ICC) to be "just and fair" after the ICC prosecutor sought an arrest warrant for Myanmar's junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing for crimes against humanity against the Rohingya, reported Reuters.

The news sparked celebrations among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar camps, where around a million members of the persecuted Muslim minority live after fleeing violence in Myanmar.

"It's a success for us," said refugee leader Sayod Alam, living in a refugee camp in Bangladesh.

Min Aung Hlaing, who led the army during the 2017 crackdown now under UN genocide investigation, has dismissed the term Rohingya as "imaginary." The group has faced decades of discrimination in Myanmar, where they're considered illegal immigrants.

ICC prosecutor Karim Khan's request marks the first attempt to secure an arrest warrant against a high-level Myanmar officer for Rohingya persecution.

Refugee community members expressed hope that this would lead to justice and accountability for the crimes committed against their people.



Photo: onefc.com

## MYANMAR FIGHT FANS CALL FOR STRATEGY SHIFT AFTER TUN MIN AUNG'S LOSS

Social media users in Myanmar are urging local fighters to revamp their fighting approach following Tun Min Aung's knockout loss to Morocco's Abdelali Zahidi at ONE Friday Fights 88. Facebook users suggest that relying solely on punching power may no longer be sufficient in the competitive ONE Championship arena.

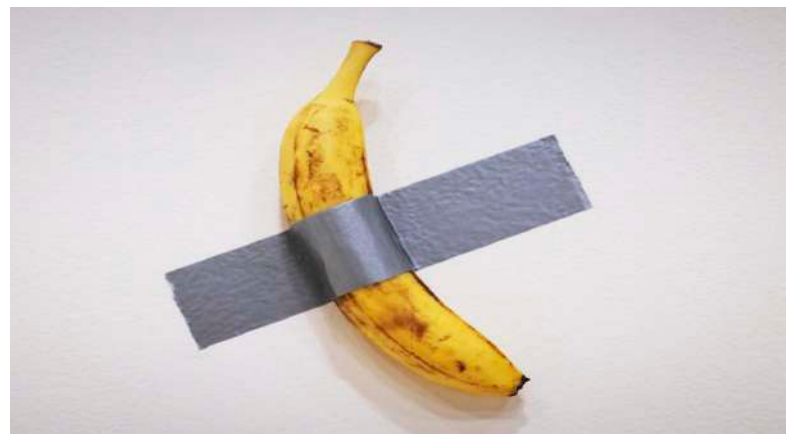
"Single punches won't work in ONE anymore," noted one Facebook user, reflecting a growing sentiment among Myanmar's fight enthusiasts. Other fans emphasized the need for more sophisticated game planning, with one commenter stating, "The strategic approach is too weak, please stop just pushing for these matches."

The criticism comes after Tun Min Aung's second-round knockout loss to Zahidi at Bangkok's Lumpinee Stadium. According to local language posts, Tun Min Aung had undergone a challenging weight cut for the bout, reportedly consuming only one boiled egg and a piece of skinless chicken daily during his preparation. This severe weight management appears to have significantly impacted his performance, with viewers noting his visible fatigue during the fight.

Despite showing resilience in the first round, Tun Min Aung struggled to maintain his energy against Zahidi's diverse striking arsenal. The Moroccan fighter, who secured his thirteenth consecutive victory, finished the fight with a decisive left high kick at 2:40 of the second round.

The defeat has sparked discussions about the importance of proper weight management and technical diversity in modern mixed martial arts. "Knowledge is still needed. It's not easy to succeed in ONE with just punches," another social media user commented.

The match ended with Zahidi receiving a performance bonus from ONE Chairman and CEO Chatri Sityodtong, while Myanmar fans called for better preparation and strategic planning for their fighters' future appearances.



## MYANMAR NETIZENS MOCK \$6.2M BANANA ART PURCHASE, CALL FOR CHARITABLE GIVING

Myanmar social media users have responded with a mix of disbelief and criticism to Chinese-born cryptocurrency mogul Justin Sun's consumption of a \$6.2 million artwork consisting of a banana taped to a wall, with many highlighting the stark contrast between the artwork's price and local banana costs.

"You can buy it for just 500 kyat on the streets in Myanmar," one Facebook user commented, emphasizing the absurdity of the multi-million-dollar purchase. Another user suggested the money could have been better spent on charitable causes, stating, "Not impressed. Imagine how much good that money could have done if donated to charity."

The commentary emerged after Sun, who acquired Maurizio Cattelan's "Comedian" artwork at a Sotheby's auction in New York, ate the banana during an event at a luxury Hong Kong hotel.

While some users criticized the extravagant purchase, others connected it to the nature of cryptocurrency wealth. "In crypto, money comes easily if you know what you're doing," one user noted, providing context to Sun's ability to spend such a sum on conceptual art.

The artwork's original banana was purchased for just 35 cents from Shah Alam, a 74-year-old fruit vendor in New York, who expressed his astonishment at the final selling price. The piece is widely regarded as a commentary on the art market's tendency to assign astronomical values to conceptual works.

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



# DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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