

SEASON'S GREETINGS

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



'LAST FLAME OF HOPE'

A call for Aung San Suu Kyi's release from prison

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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.

MYANMAR SPRING REVOLUTION

CHALLENGES FOR 2025

The year 2025 looks set to be a crucial one for the Spring Revolutionary forces taking on Myanmar's entrenched military junta. Despite the resilience displayed by the National Unity Government (NUG), the People's Defense Forces (PDFs), and the allied ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), their path is fraught with obstacles that will test their metal.

While the Myanmar military or Tatmadaw has been suffering a number of significant defeats at the hands of the opposition, they still have advanced weaponry and substantial resources that give them an edge. Backed by international allies Russia and China, the military benefits from arms, technology, and diplomatic protection. In contrast, resistance groups rely on smuggled weapons, improvised supplies and very limited outside support, often operating under constant threat of interception.

Although the NUG stands as the de facto civilian government-in-exile, unifying diverse groups remains a challenge, as does their limited "on-the-ground" presence. Historical mistrust and differing political goals among ethnic organizations hinder cohesive action. Some EAOs prioritize their autonomy over aligning with the NUG, while others maintain neutrality to preserve their positions in the ongoing conflict.

While Western nations have voiced strong moral and political backing, tangible military aid remains limited. Despite talk of bringing in "humanitarian corridors", neighbouring countries Thailand and India prioritize regional stability and economic interests, often engaging with the junta despite its widespread human rights abuses. This geopolitical pragmatism leaves the resistance isolated and underfunded.

Resistance groups depend on donations from the diaspora and sympathizers, but these resources are insufficient to match the junta's control over lucrative industries and the main arms of the economy. Additionally, the

cross-border supply chains that do exist suffer from disruption, further straining the movement's logistics.

The junta's brutal repression has created a humanitarian crisis, displacing over 2 million people. Airstrikes, mass arrests, and indiscriminate violence have not only devastated civilian communities but also placed immense pressure on the resistance to provide protection and aid. In addition, the junta's propaganda machine wages an information war, leveraging internet blackouts and surveillance to crush dissent while spreading misinformation to undermine the opposition's credibility.

Diplomatic deadlock has stalled efforts to bring peace and bring back some form of "democracy". Work by ASEAN and the UN to mediate the crisis have been largely ineffective, as the junta continues to ignore international pressure and make a mockery of the Five-Point Consensus that they signed. Some nations still engage with the junta as the de facto government, undercutting the resistance's diplomatic efforts.

An important element in 2025 will be the junta's efforts to hold a national election to try to place a "democratic fig-leaf" over their rule. While the NUG states forcefully their stance that the poll should have no standing, a lot will depend on whether ASEAN and international bodies like the UN accept the junta's push for a diplomatic solution which is "sold" as a way to bring peace and harmony to their shattered land. Accepting this "election solution" would be a "trap" - allowing the military to maintain a stranglehold on the country.

Ultimate success for the Spring Revolution lies in greater unity, increased regional and global support, and sustained pressure on the junta in an attempt to end - once and for all - the decades of military control. This will be a tough nut to crack. But as many resistance fighters have said - this is a do-or-die struggle for the heart of Myanmar.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of a protester with a picture of Aung San Suu Kyi by AFP





Photo: AFP

'LAST FLAME OF HOPE'

A CALL FOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S RELEASE FROM PRISON

This is an opportune time to call for the release of Myanmar's democratically-elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi. As we enter a new year and approach the fourth anniversary of the 2021 military coup, it is important to keep the Nobel Peace Laureate – and the many other political prisoners – in mind.

As it happens, The Independent newspaper in the UK has launched a campaign calling for the release of Myanmar's former leader, a call backed by three former UK foreign secretaries and the publication of a TV documentary on her life.

William Hague, Sir Malcolm Rifkind and Jack Straw warned that Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi was jailed on trumped-up charges and that she deserves the chance to lead her country democratically, according to the newspaper in a report on 21 December.

Aung San Suu Kyi, 79, is believed to have spent long periods in solitary confinement since her arrest in February 2021. She faces 27 years in prison for crimes ranging from treason and bribery to violations of telecommunications and disaster management laws, which she denied.

Lord Hague, who welcomed her to London in 2012 when he was foreign secretary, told The Independent it was possible to be critical of the country's former leader, "but also say we should be campaigning for her release".

The newspaper has released a 56-minute documentary entitled: "Cancelled: The Rise and Fall of Aung San Suu Kyi" that examines her rise to power and the troubles she has faced, with commentary from an array of players including her son Kim Aris, Australian economist Sean Turnell, and human rights activist Ben Rogers. Turnell, in particular, is well acquainted with the incarceration of Suu Kyi and President Win Myint as he himself was caught up in the "mock trials" and held in Myanmar prisons for close to two years. He recognizes Suu Kyi was forced to walk a tightrope over

the Rohingya crisis and her stepping up to defend the military when she was in power – a move that damaged her international status.

Concerns have been expressed about the welfare of Suu Kyi who is currently held in solitary confinement in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw. It was reported earlier that she had been experiencing severe dental and gum issues, leading to an inability to eat properly. Additionally, she was said to have suffered from vomiting, dizziness, and low blood pressure, which left her unable to stand or walk.

Despite her worsening condition, the military junta has reportedly denied her requests for medical care, including visits to a dental surgeon. This lack of access to adequate medical treatment has raised serious concerns among her family and the international community.

Kim Aris has expressed deep worry about her health, fearing that without proper medical attention, her life could be at risk, according to independent media reports. He has called on the junta to allow her to receive necessary medical assistance and to consider moving her to house arrest, where her health conditions could be better managed. It is unclear what the conditions of her captivity are.

The United Nations, various human rights organizations, and the Pope have also voiced their concerns, urging the Myanmar authorities to ensure Suu Kyi's well-being and to provide her with immediate access to medical care. Pope Francis called for the liberation of Myanmar's detained former leader and offered the Vatican as a safe haven, the pontiff said in a conversation with Jesuits in Asia in September.

"I asked for the Ms Aung San Suu Kyi's release and received her son in Rome. I offered the Vatican to receive her in our territory," he said in a private conversation during a recent 12-day tour across Southeast Asia, Reuters reported.





Protecting the Karen base.
Photo: KNU

TENSIONS RISE IN KAREN STATE AFTER MANERPLAW BASE RECAPTURED

Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)-led resistance forces captured the historic Manerplaw post on December 16, marking a significant victory in the decades-long struggle against the Myanmar junta. The base, lost by the Karen National Union (KNU) 30 years ago, once served as a critical headquarters for the KNU, other resistance groups, and pro-democracy organizations.

During the operation, resistance forces took five prisoners of war (POWs), including a commander, and seized weapons from the junta troops. However, the KNLA suffered a loss of one of its commanders during the intense fighting. Following the seizure of the post, clashes continued with retreating junta soldiers, resulting in the deaths of 20 fleeing troops. Despite this major setback, the State Administration Council (SAC) has not initiated any counteroffensive to reclaim Manerplaw.

In December, approximately 20 junta soldiers defected to the KNLA as the junta's Aung Zeya military operation faced significant setbacks. The operation, deployed between Kawkareik and Myawaddy along

the Asia Highway, has been effectively stalled due to encirclement by KNLA-led resistance forces. The 400-strong junta column is reportedly suffering from severe supply shortages, with many soldiers afflicted by malaria and diarrhea.

Resistance forces have intensified efforts to cut off supplies to the Anankwin strategic post, the last remaining stronghold in Kyainseikgyi Township. KNLA and People's Defense Force (PDF) alliance troops are actively intercepting junta reinforcements, leaving the post increasingly isolated.

On December 30, the SAC launched airstrikes on Karen New Year ceremonies in Thaton and Hpapun districts. The attacks occurred during civilian celebrations following the official programs, causing widespread panic. While the KNU Central Committee issued a statement condemning the strikes, it did not provide details on casualties or damage caused by the attacks.

These developments highlight the escalating tensions in Karen State, as resistance forces gain



New military conscripts in training.
Photo: Supplied

ground and the junta faces growing challenges in maintaining control over key areas.

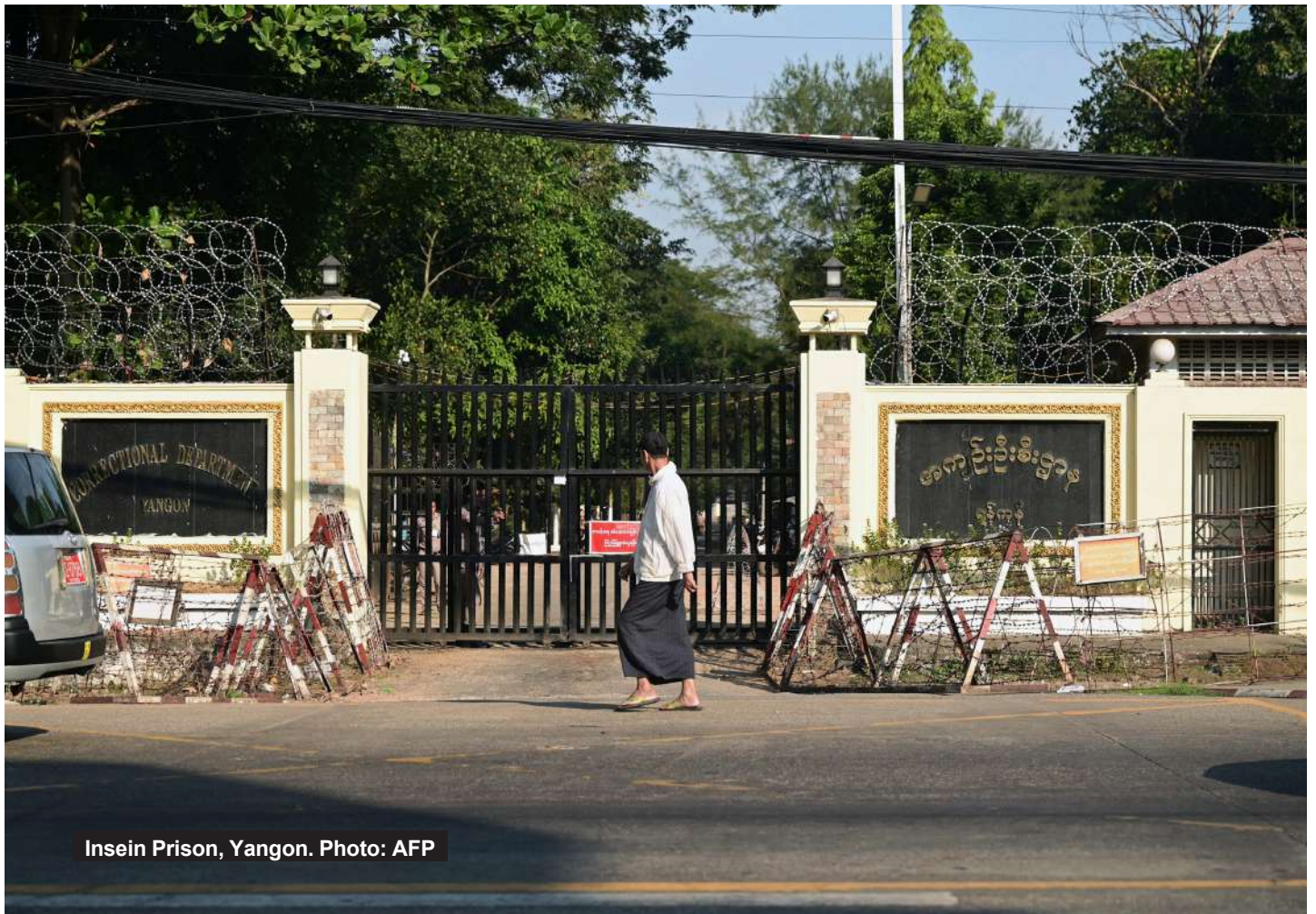
JUNTA STEPS UP ARRESTS IN CONSCRIPTION DRIVE

The Myanmar military junta, known as the State Administrative Council (SAC) has been forcibly recruiting the civilians who are not physically strong and mentally stable. Previously, with the help of the local administrative chiefs of the junta, some civilians were paid to take the military service training. According to a person affiliated with SAC, now that new recruits are not available, the locals who break the regulations of the local communities have been arrested to have their personal information looked through and have been sent to military training schools if they meet the requirements of the conscription law.

The local rules including the prohibition against riding a motorbike by two men have been promulgated in certain cities and towns of Mon State such as Kyaikto, Bilin (also spelt Beelin), Thaton. A SAC affiliate said that

local rules have been issued in eight townships of Mon State except Chaungzon and Kyaikmaraw while the curfew has been imposed in Re, a town in the same state. If two men are caught riding a motorbike together or the men are caught drinking outdoors after 12 a.m., they are arrested by the local security forces and taken to the local general administration office. Following the inspection of their personal profiles, those who meet the requirements of military service are sent to military training schools.

Moreover, it is heard that those who come home from the late-night parties have been arrested. Although the city residents who can afford to bribe the local police have been released, there have been more military recruitments in the non-central regions of Myanmar. Some local residents said that over 20 local young people were arrested by the local police forces and the members of SAC in Paung, a town in Mon State, and were recruited for military service by force in the third week of November. The number of the recruited has amounted to 1,400 in Mon State from the 1st intake to the 6th intake of the military combat training for the civilians run by the SAC.



Insein Prison, Yangon. Photo: AFP

TWENTY-TWO PRISONERS DIE IN MYANMAR PRISONS IN 2024 DUE TO INADEQUATE HEALTHCARE

The Political Prisoners Network - Myanmar (PPNM) reported on 31 December that 22 political prisoners died in 2024 due to insufficient healthcare and medical treatment in Myanmar's prisons.

A human rights report examining 41 prisons nationwide revealed that the deceased included 18 male political prisoners, three women, and one transgender individual. The report attributed the deaths to the lack of access to proper healthcare and medication.

"The Prisons Act mandates that inmates receive adequate healthcare, including timely medical treatment and specialized care in external hospitals, when necessary," said Ko Thaik Htun Oo, a member of PPNM's steering committee, in an interview with Mizzima.

He added that those who perished included individuals denied nutritious food, detainees with injuries sustained during interrogations, and prisoners suffering from illnesses such as kidney disease caused by unclean drinking water and lack of adequate medical care.

The report also highlighted issues such as delays in obtaining emergency treatment, substandard care by government-appointed medical officers, and prolonged delays in granting hospital transfers due to security concerns.

In addition to the deaths, prison officials and other inmates unlawfully tortured and assaulted 148 political prisoners, both male and female. Among these, 76 were sentenced to solitary confinement, according to the report.

Of the 3,054 prisoners transferred to different facilities, 1,883 political prisoners were moved to prisons far from their families, while 35 women were detained along with their children.

Ko Thaik Htun Oo urged prison authorities to provide timely treatment for ill prisoners and facilitate hospital transfers for those with conditions that cannot be treated within prison facilities.

The report emphasized the need for at least one full-time doctor in smaller prisons and called for reforms to ensure foreign medicines sent by families reach prisoners without interference. It also stressed improving conditions related to food, accommodation, and clean drinking water.

Since the military coup in February 2021, PPNM noted that the junta has continued to commit human rights violations against political prisoners, activists, students, workers, farmers, and ethnic minorities during arrests, interrogations, and detentions.



CHINA-MYANMAR RELATIONS SINCE THE COUP AND FUTURE OUTLOOK FOR 2025

Nearly four years after the military coup in February 2021, China, a major neighbouring power, has deepened its ties with Myanmar's internationally isolated junta while ramping up efforts to fast-track Chinese-backed projects within the country.

The junta lost control of 93 towns nationwide in the wake of Operation 1027 by the united Three Brotherhood Alliance in northern Shan State.

Additionally, the collapse of the Northeastern Regional Command (NRC) in Lashio dealt a severe blow to the morale of military supporters and shook confidence in the junta's leadership.

The junta faced another significant defeat in December 2024, losing control of the Western Regional Command headquartered in Ann Township, Rakhine State.

Political analysts suggest that the junta in Myanmar may be nearing its end, citing its significant losses on the Kachin State frontlines, the successes of resistance forces in Chin State, and its weakening grip over Karenni State, Karen State, as well as Mandalay and Sagaing Regions.

Despite experiencing major military defeats, Myanmar and China bilateral ties were strengthened when the junta leadership received an invitation from the Chinese government in November 2024. The

following December, China took part in informal talks in Thailand addressing Myanmar's ongoing crisis.

China- Myanmar junta relations since the 2021 coup

According to a report on China-Myanmar relations released by the International Crisis Group (ICG) on 27 March 2024, China expressed disappointment over Myanmar's 2021 military coup.

Since the coup, China has dispatched high-level envoys to engage with the junta on matters of mutual interest but has not reinstated diplomatic relations to their pre-coup status, according to the ICG report. The report also highlighted that China has refrained from officially recognizing Senior General Min Aung Hlaing as Myanmar's head of state.

However, China began improving its relations with the State Administration Council (SAC) in 2023, more than two years after the coup. This shift was marked by multiple visits to Naypyidaw by Chinese Special Representative Deng Xijun. Topics discussed during these visits included border stability, bilateral economic cooperation, combating online gambling, and eliminating fraud, according to SAC statements.

Observers believe that bilateral relations further improved after Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Naypyidaw on 14 August 2024, just 11 days

after the junta lost control of its Northeastern Regional Command (NRC) in Lashio, northern Shan State, on 3 August 2024.

China initially did not object to Operation 1027 upon its launch by the Three Brotherhood Alliance in northern Shan State. However, after the Alliance cleared out the Kyar Phyant online gambling operations in the Laukkai region and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) took over Laukkai town, China pushed for the signing of the Haigeng Agreement and demanded a ceasefire.

In January 2024, the Haigeng Agreement was established after negotiations between the junta, the Northern Alliance, and China, bringing a temporary halt to fighting in northern Shan State. However, in June 2024, the allied forces launched Operation 1027 (Part 2), reigniting and escalating clashes in the region.

The MNDAA captured Lashio town and the junta's NRC headquarters two months after the initiation of the second phase of Operation 1027. China was reportedly not satisfied with the capture of Lashio, according to leaked minutes from a meeting between China's representatives and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) in September.

Junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visited China in November 2024 after Wang Yi's visit the previous August. While the visit was not described

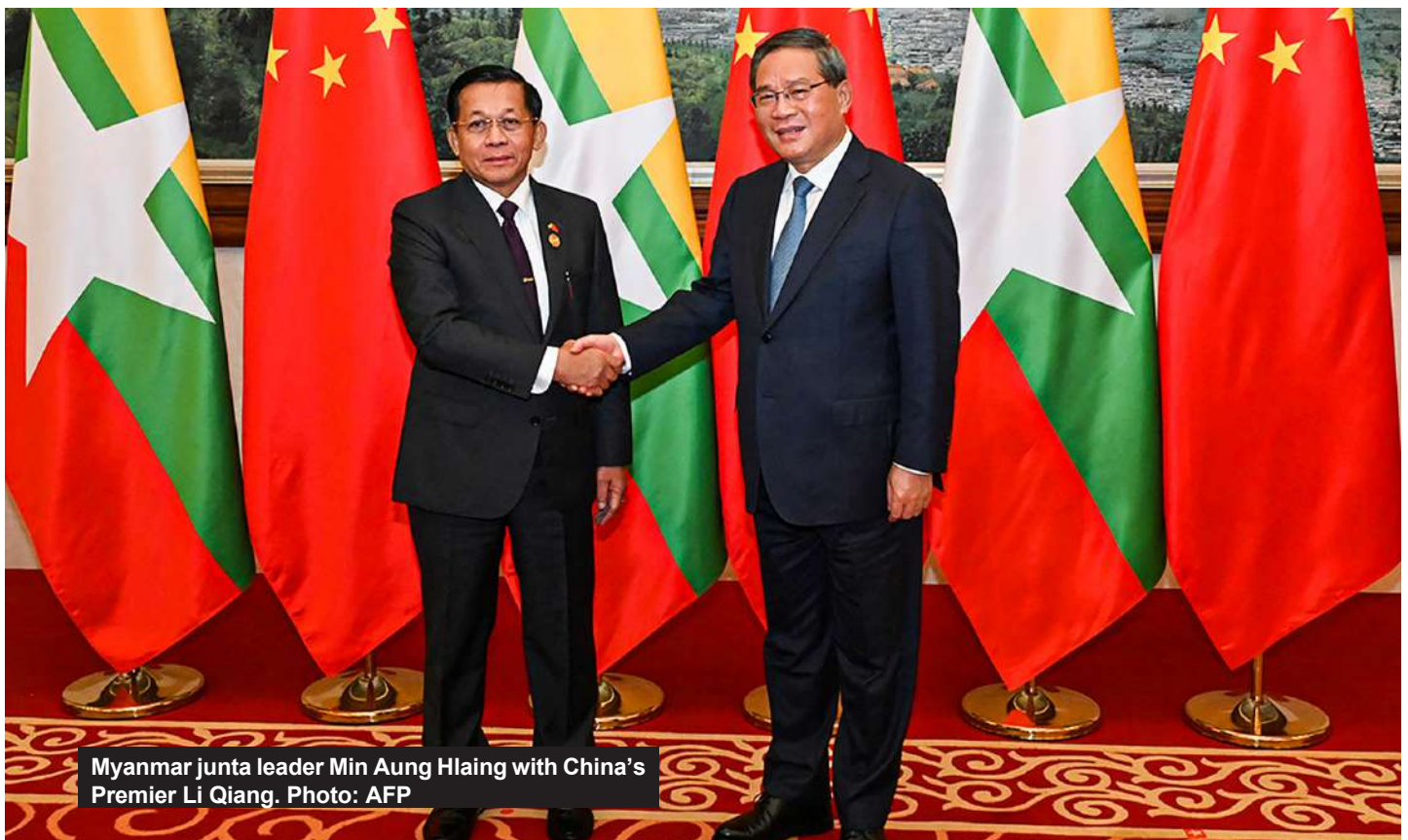
as a goodwill mission, it was the first trip made by the junta leader to China since the coup.

"China is concerned that without a dominant armed group like the junta in Myanmar, Western powers might intervene, and countries like India could compete with China for influence. To counter this, China has chosen to back the junta to maintain its hold over Myanmar and safeguard its interests," said U Than Soe Naing, a Myanmar military and political analyst.

At a meeting in Naypyidaw on 19 November 2024, the junta leader described his trip to Kunming as a "successful visit," claiming that China firmly supports Myanmar's sovereignty and the junta's actions. The Burma Affairs and Conflict Studies (BACS) group stated on 17 November 2024, that propaganda among pro-military lobby channels surged following the trip, with claims such as "the junta has gained external support" and "is gaining international recognition."

Chinese investments amid military conflicts

According to a report by the Institute for Strategic and Policy Studies-Myanmar (ISP Myanmar) dated 19 August 2024, areas in Rakhine State and northern Shan State through which China's oil and gas pipelines passes are now controlled by the Arakan Army (AA), the MNDAA, and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). Furthermore, military conflicts persist in the



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing with China's Premier Li Qiang. Photo: AFP

Magway and Mandalay Regions along the pipeline route. The report also revealed that 10 out of 19 Chinese investment projects in northern Shan and central Myanmar regions are now fully under the control of ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and People's Defence Forces (PDF).

Clashes are currently ongoing between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the junta forces in Kachin State, where the Myitsone Dam project is located. This controversial project, halted previously due to public protests, was revived by the junta following the 2021 coup.

China has shown a keen interest in accelerating cooperation under the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), a key component of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2013. The BRI seeks to attract investments from more than 150 countries and international organizations.

CMEC is part of the BRI and was formalized with a memorandum of understanding in 2018. The corridor encompasses projects such as railways, highways, special economic zones, ports, and new urban development projects across Yangon, Mandalay, Kachin State, Shan State, Rakhine State, and along the Ayeyarwady and Chindwin Rivers, as per data from ISP Myanmar.

Although the exact terms of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) agreements remain undisclosed, key projects include the Kyaukphyu Deep Sea Port and Special Economic Zone, the Muse-Mandalay Railway, and border economic cooperation zones. Spanning 1,700 kilometres, the CMEC aims to link Kunming in China's Yunnan Province with Mandalay and Kyaukphyu in Rakhine State. The Kyaukphyu deep-sea port is of particular strategic importance, granting China direct access to the Indian Ocean. According to ISP-Myanmar, this development is a critical regional initiative.

Chinese security company

In a statement released on 8 November, the junta revealed that China has proposed the creation of a Joint Venture Security Company to safeguard its investment projects in Myanmar. To facilitate this, the junta established a working committee on 22 October to prepare for the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the company's formation.

U Kyaw Zaw, spokesperson for the National Unity Government (NUG), said during a press briefing on 26 November that the joint security initiative between

the Chinese government and the junta will not protect Chinese interests or Chinese nationals in Myanmar, but will instead result in a situation where they face threats from the junta and its supporters, who are engaging in violent activities.

U Kyaw Zaw said, "Only by working together with the National Unity Government and the revolutionary forces that stand united with the Myanmar people can China's investments and interests be effectively protected.

Prospects for China-Myanmar relations in 2025

Since late August 2024, the Chinese government has applied considerable pressure on Myanmar's ethnic armed groups, including the TNLA and MNDAA, to cease hostilities and participate in peace talks, following the second phase of Operation 1027. This has resulted in frequent statements from the TNLA, emphasizing China's significant role in mediating the ceasefire process.

Reports emerged in November that the leader of the MNDAA, Peng Daxun, was detained in China for medical treatment, despite claims that it was not a form of detention but rather a health-related visit. The MNDAA also issued a statement confirming its willingness to negotiate with the junta, mediated by China, while committing to not launching military actions against Mandalay and Taunggyi and that it would not engage in political or military cooperation with the NUG.

In December 2024, the MNDAA and Myanmar's military junta held unsuccessful peace talks in Kunming, China. VOA Myanmar, citing a source in the MNDAA, said a follow-up round of talks is scheduled for January 2025. Similarly, the TNLA announced in November its intention to initiate a ceasefire and engage in negotiations with the junta under China's mediation to resolve the difficulties faced by the local population. However, TNLA said it would retain the right to self-defence.

"There has been no meeting with the junta since the announcement. However, with the mediation of the Chinese government, there may be a meeting later," Lway Ye Oo, spokesperson for the TNLA said.

However, she could not specify when the talks would take place. Lway Ye Oo added that fighting between the TNLA and the junta continued in Taung Hkham village in Nawngkhio township after the announcement.

“These talks will be similar to the Haigeng Agreement. China has not taken any action regarding the junta’s daily airstrikes and violence against civilians. However, China put pressure on the revolutionary forces, warning that if they did not leave Lashio punishment would be imposed. The ethnic forces do not trust the Chinese-led talks. They are not convinced, and they are only participating because they have no other option,” U Than Soe Naing said.

China invited N’Ban La, Chairman of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and his team to Kunming in December. This coincided with the KIA’s operation to capture Bhamo township, where a Chinese project is located.

Although China and the KIO have been meeting nearly every month, this time the KIO delegation met with Wu Ken, a member of the Central Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

During the meeting, discussions centred on border stability, a ceasefire, and negotiations with the junta, as reported by KIA spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu. However, despite the KIO’s visit to China, the fighting for Bhamo township has continued to intensify.

While China continues to keep most border gates along the China-Myanmar border closed, it reopened the gates controlled by the KIA in December.

Political analysts believe that China is likely to maintain a cooperative and friendly relationship with the KIO/KIA, rather than seeking to dominate, due to the presence of valuable rare earth minerals crucial to China’s needs and located in Kachin-controlled areas. Meanwhile, KIA press officer Colonel Naw Bu previously told Mizzima that despite border gate closures, the Kachin people, along with the KIA, would find ways to persevere.

Similarly, with the AA now controlling nearly all of Rakhine State, China’s relationship with the AA has reached a critical point where negotiations are inevitable to safeguard its interests, according to Rakhine politician U Pe Than and Myanmar political analyst U Than Soe Naing, who shared their observations.

“China’s approach will depend on who holds the authority to make the final decisions,” U Than Soe Naing said.

Also relevant is whether the International Criminal Court (ICC) will issue a warrant for the arrest of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. If the ICC issues the warrant,

it could have repercussions for the junta’s planned 2025 elections and potentially alter how Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries interact with the military regime, U Aung Htoo added.

“If the ICC issues an arrest warrant, it could alter the dynamics of the relationship between the junta and China. On the other hand, China has many positive endeavours to pursue. It can’t engage in blind conflict. We need to approach it in a way that is both acceptable and reasonable,” U Aung Htoo said.

The NUG issued its official stance on China on 17 February 2024, in a statement comprising 10 key points. Among them, the NUG reiterated its continued support for the One-China policy, expressed its commitment to fostering a genuine brotherly relationship between Myanmar and China, and emphasized Myanmar’s dedication to being a consistently good neighbour to China.

At a press conference on 5 November 2024, Daw Zin Mar Aung, the NUG’s foreign minister, stated, “If you ask whether the NUG has communication channels with China, I can confirm that we do. However, the extent to which Beijing listens to these channels remains a significant challenge for us.”



Photo: Mizzima

MYANMAR-CHINA GAS PIPELINE LINKING KYAUKPHYU WITH KUNMING TO BE EXTENDED TO CHONGQING

The Myanmar-China natural gas pipeline linking Kunming city with Kyaukphyu town in Rakhine State will be extended to Chongqing city, according to the Myanmar junta's news reports.

On December 23, a delegation led by the junta-appointed Energy Minister, U Ko Ko Lwin, met with a group led by Mr. Wang Qiang of the South-East Asia Crude Oil Pipeline (SEAOP) and the Gas Pipeline Company (SEAGP), and discussed that issue.

According to the junta, the Myanmar-China natural gas pipeline currently runs to Kunming, the capital city of China's Yunnan Province, and work is being done to upgrade the pipeline so that gas can be transported on to Chongqing.

According to reports, preparations are also underway to build a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in Myanmar so that natural gas can be extracted and shared between the two nations.

The junta's Energy Minister also discussed with the SEAOP's chairman the starting of feasibility studies to expedite the project's implementation.

Additionally, the junta's minister discussed the upgrading of domestic oil refineries to process crude oil from the SEAOP-run Myanmar-China crude oil pipeline.

According to reports up to December 2022, the Myanmar-China natural gas pipeline started operations in July 2013 and has since generated a return on investment for its shareholders of 165 percent.

The Myanmar-China natural gas pipeline is 793 kilometres long and has an annual capacity to transport up to 5.2 billion cubic meters of natural gas.

In their first Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) report, SEAOP and SEAGP declared that the Myanmar-China oil and natural gas pipeline project is operating safely and efficiently.

The Myanmar-China natural gas pipeline starts from Ramree Island in Rakhine State and passes through Rakhine State, Magway Region, Mandalay Region and Shan State, before entering China near Ruili city and continues from there to Kunming.

Only over 2,400 megawatts of electricity are currently produced on average daily, which is only 55% of the demand for electricity, according to the junta's Electric Power Ministry.

Currently, Yangon and other major cities in Myanmar are facing ever worsening power shortages.

In order to meet short-term demand for electricity, the junta stated that it intends to implement LNG power plant projects.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR GARMENT WORKERS IN CHINESE FACTORIES FACE EXPLOITATION AND HARSH CONDITIONS

Thousands of Myanmar garment workers employed in Chinese-owned factories in Ruili, Yunnan Province, China, are facing severe wage exploitation, according to workers who spoke to Mizzima.

The workers report that their wages lack a standardized baseline and are arbitrarily determined based on rankings assigned by Chinese factory managers. Myanmar workers are required to endure grueling 11-hour shifts from 7 am to 7 pm, with additional unpaid overtime often extending to 9 pm or later. In some factories, shifts stretch until 11 pm.

Labour brokers recruit workers from garment factories in Yangon, transporting them to Ruili through the Muse-Ruili border using a loan-based system. Until recently, workers could cross the border with weekly passes, but new regulations now require factory work permits. These changes have left many workers stranded on the Myanmar side in Muse, enduring long waiting periods under harsh conditions.

“Some workers are stuck for three to four months in warehouses. The brokers provide lunch, but the cost is deducted from their wages. Workers are charged 30 to 35 yuan or more per day for meals, which adds to their debts,” said a Myanmar worker in Ruili.

To expedite entry into Ruili, some workers opt for a

costly fast-pass system at the Muse Palace gate, paying 1,800 to 2,000 yuan. Despite this, jobs often fail to meet expectations, with wages being particularly low.

“The factory categorizes workers into grades A, B, C, and D and also without a consistent system. Most workers fall into the lower grades, with only a few receiving better pay. The rankings are entirely at the discretion of Chinese managers,” said another worker.

Migrant workers in Ruili face threats of deportation if they protest against low wages or refuse to work. Many who previously held weekly border passes have fled.

The political instability in Myanmar following the military coup has driven many young people to seek jobs abroad. However, border cities like Ruili, Yincheng, and Mansi offer limited opportunities and are rife with exploitation.

The shortage of jobs in Myanmar, compounded by international investors pulling out, has worsened the plight of these workers.

Mizzima is seeking a response from the Chinese Embassy in Yangon regarding the allegations of worker exploitation in factories along the border.



Duwa Lashi La
Acting President

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi
State Counsellor

U Win Myint
President

Mahn Winn Khaing Thann
Prime Minister

MYANMAR'S NUG AND NUCC ANNOUNCE SPRING REVOLUTION UNSTOPPABLE DESPITE FAKE ELECTION OF JUNTA

The National Unity Government (NUG) and the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) issued a joint statement on 24 December 2024 asserting that the country's Spring Revolution will not be derailed by what they described as the "fake election" planned by the military junta, and it is not a political exit for Myanmar's crisis.

According to the statement, the junta's proposed 2025 election is designed solely to perpetuate military control and cannot resolve Myanmar's political crisis. The NUG and NUCC emphasized their continued resistance to the election, calling it illegitimate and reiterating that the 2008 Constitution, under which the election would be held, has already been abolished.

"The people's aspiration for a federal democratic union remains unattainable as long as the military participates in politics. The revolution will only intensify," the statement declared.

The NUG and NUCC reaffirmed the legitimacy of the 2020 general election results, recognized by the people, and dismissed any attempts by the junta or external forces to manipulate Myanmar's political future.

They vowed to pursue the revolution in ways aligned with the will of the people, aiming to fundamentally transform the country's system and era.

The statement also highlighted the worsening humanitarian crisis, pointing to increasing numbers of displaced persons due to junta-led raids and attacks. Additionally, the military was accused of forcibly conscripting youth into its ranks.

The NUG and NUCC condemned the junta's planned election as a coercive process where citizens would be forced to vote under threats of violence, with voter rolls and results predetermined. They pledged to work toward sustainable peace and the eradication of military dictatorship.

Meanwhile, the junta has begun preparations for the 2025 general election, with support from China. The junta's Foreign Minister recently announced during informal talks in Thailand last week, plans to invite international election observers.



NUG ACTING PRESIDENT HAILS AA'S CAPTURE OF WESTERN MILITARY COMMAND AS A MAJOR REVOLUTIONARY VICTORY

Duwa Lashi La, the Acting President of the National Unity Government (NUG), praised the Arakan Army (AA) for its recent victory in capturing the Western Regional Military Command Headquarters, describing it as a milestone that has greatly boosted the revolutionary spirit of both the people and the revolutionary forces.

In a message to the AA, Duwa Lashi La commended the leadership of AA commanders, the courage of their fighters, the strength of their naval capabilities, and the resilience of the Arakan people. He highlighted the hardships endured by the people of Rakhine and their unity in the face of adversity, offering his heartfelt tribute to their efforts.

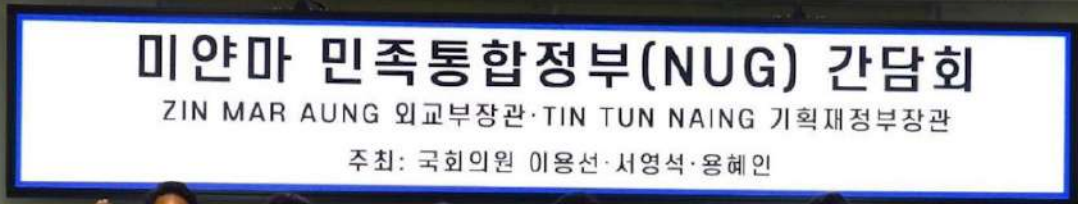
The Acting President expressed optimism that, under the AA's leadership, Rakhine State would soon be fully liberated from junta control. He emphasized that the victory was not just a triumph for the people of

Arakan but a significant achievement for all citizens of Myanmar and revolutionary groups striving for federal democracy.

Duwa Lashi La noted that the capture of two regional military headquarters in 2024 demonstrates that the junta's influence is waning. He called the victories a signal of the junta's impending collapse.

Reaffirming the NUG's commitment, he vowed to collaborate with all revolutionary forces to end the military dictatorship and liberate the entire nation.

Meanwhile, the Arakan Army announced on 22 December that it is engaged in intense combat to seize control of Gwa Township. Reports indicate that junta forces are retreating toward the Ayeyarwady Region, and the AA anticipates the junta will abandon Gwa Town in Rakhine State soon.



NUG OFFICE IN SOUTH KOREA SECURES RELEASE OF 14 MYANMAR NATIONALS DETAINED OVER VISA ISSUES

The National Unity Government (NUG) Representative Office in South Korea has successfully facilitated the release of 14 Myanmar nationals detained in December due to visa-related complications.

In an announcement on 22 December, the office explained that the arrests included one individual apprehended for working without a contract while holding a G1-99 visa. Additionally, three individuals with temporary resident visas (deportation orders) were detained for unauthorized work and fined 2 million won each, equivalent to approximately 2.9 million kyats.

The G1-99 visa, a humanitarian permit for those unable to return to their home countries due to political or other reasons, allows temporary residency in South Korea. Visa holders must renew the permit before expiration and secure prior approval from South Korean immigration authorities to work legally.

The NUG Representative Office also supported another individual whose request to extend a temporary residence permit had been denied. Beyond this, the office has assisted Myanmar nationals with services such as childbirth registration, ID card applications, and citizenship renunciation.

Since mid-2024, the NUG Representative Office in South Korea has been handling passport renewals for

Myanmar citizens.

However, on 9 November, the junta-controlled Myanmar Embassy in Seoul claimed to have identified counterfeit stamps on passports issued by the NUG office, declaring these passports invalid and blacklisting their holders. Following this, the South Korean government announced on 18 December that it would no longer accept passport renewal applications submitted via the NUG office.

Despite these developments, Myanmar nationals in South Korea confirmed that previously extended passports remain valid.

The NUG Representative Office continues to provide protection, particularly for Myanmar nationals involved in the pro-democracy movement, urging those arrested to contact the office or its labour affairs officer. The NUG clarified that release is only possible if no criminal charges are substantiated at the time of arrest.

According to the Anti-Coup Committee (Korea), there are over 50,000 Myanmar nationals in South Korea, many of whom are migrant workers.

In addition to its South Korea office, the NUG has established representative offices in several countries, including Japan, Australia, the Czech Republic, France, the United Kingdom, Norway, and the United States.



JUNTA FORCES ARE MOBILIZING IN CENTRAL MYANMAR AMID SHAN STATE CEASEFIRE, REBELS SAY

Myanmar's junta has mobilized forces for offensives in the Mandalay, Sagaing and Magway regions at the same time that it has significantly reduced attacks in northern Shan state following a recent ceasefire there, members of the rebel People's Defense Forces told Radio Free Asia 20 December.

Between Dec. 2 and Dec. 6, junta airstrikes and artillery killed 19 people and wounded at least 10 others in three townships in Mandalay region's Myingyan district, according to an official from a pro-democracy paramilitary People's Defense Force, or PDF, who requested anonymity for security reasons.

Among the dead were four rebel paramilitary fighters, the PDF official said.

The attacks are likely inspired by the junta's larger aim of regaining control of Myanmar's central plain heartland, according to the PDF official. The central plains -- home to the country's majority ethnic Bamar peoples -- has seen fierce fighting since the military's Feb. 1, 2021, coup.

PDF units are made up of ordinary civilians who took up arms against the junta following the coup, and in many areas they have pushed junta troops back from territory the controlled.

The offensives also coincide with the recent ceasefire agreed to by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, or MNDAA, and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, or TNLA, after pressure from neighboring China.

"China's interference has played a significant role in Myanmar's overall military situation," a PDF member in Magway region's Pakokku township said.

"While the TNLA and MNDAA in northern Myanmar are facing pressure from China, the junta has reduced its airstrikes, and battles have decreased in these areas," he said. "This has led the junta to focus more on the plains."

The attacks have notably increased in Mandalay, Sagaing, and Magway regions since just after junta chief Min Aung Hlaing returned from his early November trip to China, according to local rebel fighters.

Resistance forces have abandoned some road sections between Myingyan and Taungthar townships in Mandalay due to the junta's intensive ground and air attacks, according to the PDF official in Mandalay region's Myingyan district.

The junta has also moved forces into Sagaing region's Pinlebu township, and have also sent troops along the Ann-Padan route, which is the only connection between Ann town in Rakhine state and Padan in Magway region, the official said.

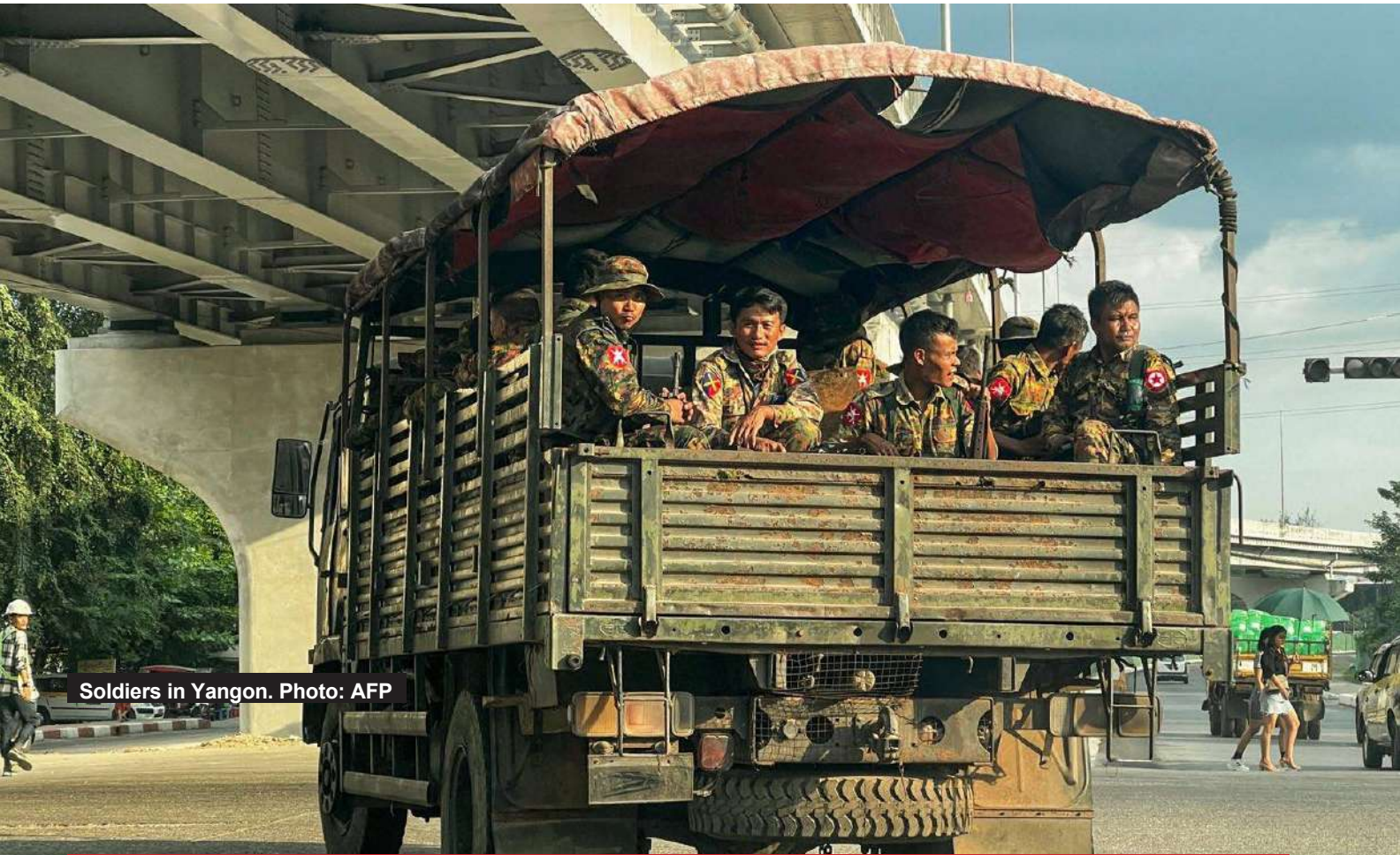
"They are likely preparing to control the central plain areas of Myanmar through a defensive war strategy," the PDF official said.

Political analyst Than Soe Naing said the last few weeks have again highlighted how anti-junta forces need to improve on their military strategy and coordination in central Myanmar.

"Without a united front in the plain areas, their offensives have slowed, and they still require more weapons and ammunition," he said.

RFA attempted to contact junta spokesperson Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun to ask about the military offensive in the central plains region, but received no response.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



Soldiers in Yangon. Photo: AFP

JUNTA FORCES DEMAND RANSOMS FOR ARRESTED YOUTHS IN YANGON

Military junta officials have been detaining young men in Hlaing Township, Yangon Region, and demanding ransoms of up to 2 million Kyats per individual for their release, according to local residents who spoke to Mizzima.

In recent incidents, two young men detained by the junta were released after their families paid a total of 4 million Kyats in ransom.

“The families had to pay 2 million Kyats each to secure the release of the detained young men,” said a resident of Hlaing Township familiar with the situation.

The arrests occurred in Ward 9 of Hlaing Township around 9:00 pm during the first week of December. The detained individuals were later released after payments were made to a junta unit stationed on Ywama School Street in Ward 2.

Residents report that the junta has been increasingly targeting young men during nighttime raids in major cities under its control, such as Yangon and Mandalay. Those unable to pay the demanded ransom are allegedly transferred to military training camps or forcibly conscripted into the armed forces.

Monika, head of a department under the National Unity Government’s (NUG) Ministry of Women, Youth, and Children Affairs, revealed in an exclusive interview with Mizzima that since the military coup, the junta has killed nearly 1,000 children and forcibly drafted over 1,000 minors into military service.

The growing pattern of abductions and extortion has alarmed residents, who continue to fear for the safety of their loved ones under the military junta’s rule.



People flee the fighting.
Photo: Mizzima

MYANMAR JUNTA INTENSIFIES CRACKDOWN ON RAKHINE IDPS IN AYEYARWADY REGION

At least 10 Rakhine internally displaced persons (IDPs) were arrested by the junta in Ye Kyi town, Ayeyarwady Region, on 22 December, according to local sources.

A resident of Ye Kyi said, "Interrogations and arbitrary arrests targeting IDPs continue in areas connecting Rakhine and Ayeyarwady. The number of affected individuals could be between 15 and 20."

The arrests reportedly stem from suspicions that the IDPs may provide information to the Arakan Army (AA) about military activities in Ayeyarwady Region.

Adding to their plight, Rakhine IDPs residing west of Nga Thaing Chaung, including those in Ye Kyi, have been ordered to evacuate within three days, from 22 to 25 December, according to the Ye Kyi People's Defence Force (PDF) and local residents.

In a statement, the Ye Kyi PDF urged the public to remain cautious, citing ongoing arrests, physical assaults, and extortion by the junta under various pretexts.

"Local reports indicate that all Rakhine IDPs in Ye Kyi Township have been ordered to leave. Meanwhile, field artillery units have been conducting heavy weapon

drills in recent days," a Ye Kyi township resident said.

Residents of Ye Kyi also states that the junta has recently fortified its defences, expanded troop deployments, and constructed an airfield at the Field Artillery Battalion 344 camp in Ye Kyi.

The military has been tightening restrictions on IDPs fleeing conflict in Rakhine State, blocking border crossings, imposing strict security checks at town entrances and exits, and pressuring monasteries and locals in Ayeyarwady Region towns like Ye Kyi and Nga Thaing Chaung, which connect to Gwa, a hotspot for ongoing clashes.

Furthermore, Rakhine IDPs in Shwe Thaug Yan and Chaung Thar towns have reportedly been ordered to evacuate within seven days.

Ye Kyi is the hometown of the military-appointed Chief Minister of Ayeyarwady Region, who, according to local sources, has instructed officials not to accommodate IDPs.

The crackdown comes as the military faces significant setbacks in Gwa Township, where airstrikes are being deployed, forcing many residents to seek refuge in Ayeyarwady Region.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA TORCHES 41 HOUSES IN YESAGYO TOWNSHIP AMID RENEWED CLASHES

Junta troops raided villages in the Yay Lal Kyun area of Yesagyo Township, Magway Region, on 19 December, burning down 41 houses across five villages, according to the Yesagyo Township Info Committee.

A local resident reported that around 50 troops entered the area via the Ayeyarwady River from Myingyan Township, armed with heavy weapons.

“Before setting the houses on fire, they looted public property from the homes,” the resident said.

The arson attacks resulted in the destruction of 19 houses in Nwe Ni main village, 15 in Kyun Nyo village, 2 in Chan Ya village, 3 in Nat Pay village, and 2 in Mauk Ywa village, in the Yay Lal Kyun area of Yesagyo Township, Magway Region.

An official from the Yesagyo Township People’s Defence Force (PDF) stated that the junta forces were en route to Min Ywa, a Pyu Saw Htee-controlled village, to deliver supplies and carry out personnel transfers.

Local defence forces blocked their advance, leading to clashes.

“The People’s Defence Forces in the Yay Lal Kyun area confronted the junta column, but the military continued its mission,” the PDF official said.

The junta troops left the Yay Lal Kyun area for Myingyan town on the evening of 20 December, according to the Yesagyo Township Info Committee.

This is not the first instance of such brutality in the region. In October 2023, a column of approximately 250 junta troops entered Yay Lal Kyun, setting fire to hundreds of houses. During that assault, two local women were killed, and public property was seized, according to defence forces.

The junta’s repeated attacks have left residents in constant fear, with villages devastated by arson and looting, further exacerbating the region’s humanitarian crisis.



MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES DAMAGE SCHOOLS, INJURE CIVILIANS IN TAUNGTHA TOWNSHIP

Myanmar’s junta conducted an airstrike on Zarat Gyi village in Taungtha Township, Myingyan District, Mandalay Region, damaging a school and injuring two women, according to the Taungtha Township People’s Defence Force (PDF).

On the afternoon of 25 December, two bombs were dropped from a jet fighter, severely damaging school buildings.

“Fortunately, no children were present at the school, and revolutionary forces were not sheltering there. Two women nearby sustained minor injuries, but there were no fatalities,” a Taungtha Township PDF official said.

Hours after the initial airstrike, a parachute-mounted glider-like object from the Mahlaing area dropped another bomb on the same school, the official added. Mizzima has not yet been able to independently verify these incidents.

This attack is part of an ongoing series of airstrikes by the junta targeting townships in Myingyan District.

Local organizations reported that an airstrike on Daung Boe village in Natogyi Township on 23 December killed two people. On 24 December, another airstrike destroyed a school in Myaing Thar village.

Earlier this month, an airstrike on Moe Naung Khin village in Taungtha Township on 10 December killed one woman, injured five others, and destroyed five houses, according to the Taungtha Community Action Committee.

The intensifying air campaign by the junta has raised concerns over civilian safety and the destruction of essential infrastructure, including schools and homes.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS DETAIN CIVILIANS IN SAGAING REGION, FACE LANDMINE ATTACK

Troops from the junta’s Northwestern Command, based in Monywa, Sagaing Region, entered Kanthit village in Budalin Township on 25 December and detained civilians who were heading out to cultivate onions, according to local sources.

In the early hours of the day, three military vehicles arrived in Zeetaw village, located in the southern part of Budalin Township. The troops reportedly stopped a truck carrying residents from Kanthit village who were enroute to cultivate onions and took them into custody, said a source close to revolutionary forces.

“The arrested group filled an entire truck, likely exceeding 50 people, although the exact number of men and women is still unclear. Since they were going to plant onions, there are probably more women among them,” the source said.

The troops faced landmine attacks as they attempted to advance on foot toward Budalin town, which left them stranded mid-journey. Vehicles from the Northwestern Command later arrived to extract the column and transport them to Budalin.

“The command sent three vehicles to rescue the stranded troops and took them to Budalin town,” the source added around 5:50 pm on 25 December.

Upon reaching Budalin, the military column, estimated to include over 100 soldiers appeared poised for further offensive operations in the area. Local revolutionary groups, including the Budalin Mobile Team, are closely monitoring their movements.

“We are keeping a close watch to see if the troops stay in Budalin or proceed to Kutaw Police Station,” said Sayar Zaw of the Budalin Mobile Team.

This recent incident follows a violent campaign by junta forces in Budalin Township earlier in October, during which over 20 civilians were killed, six were mutilated, and hundreds of homes were set on fire in Sipar village.

Revolutionary forces have urged local residents to remain vigilant and stay informed about military activities, recommending that they go into hiding if junta columns approach.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA RECEIVES NEW PLANES FROM AIRBUS CLOSE PARTNER AVIC

On 23 December, Justice for Myanmar released a statement indicating that the Myanmar military junta has commissioned eight new aircraft supplied by the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC). AVIC is a close partner and investee of the European aerospace giant Airbus.

The statement reads as follows.

An examination of junta-controlled media from the anniversary of the Myanmar Air Force, held on 15 December 2024, shows one Hongdu K-8 light attack aircraft (tail number MAF/3941), up to six FTC-2000G light combat aircraft (which include tail numbers MAF/1407, MAF/1411, MAF/1412 and MAF/1413) and one Shaanxi Y-8 military transport plane (tail number MAF/5922).

These types of aircraft are regularly used by the military junta in its indiscriminate airstrikes on

the civilian population. Between February 2021 and August 2024, the junta has killed at least 1749 civilians in thousands of airstrikes with total impunity.

The latest transfer of new AVIC aircraft shows that the company is continuing to aid and abet the junta's ongoing war crimes.

Despite growing public scrutiny and evidence of the serious human rights implications of its investment in AVIC, Airbus has publicly denied any wrongdoing.

An investigation by Justice For Myanmar and Info Birmanie has linked Airbus to AVIC, while it has delivered multiple aircraft to the Myanmar military, including since its 2021 coup attempt and despite European Council Regulation (EU) No 401/2013 concerning restrictive measures on Myanmar.

This has led to protests that demand Airbus use its leverage over AVIC to stop its continued supplies of military aircraft, arms and maintenance, repair and overhaul of aircraft to the Myanmar junta.

In a recent public statement, Airbus defended its relationship with AVIC, which it describes as “a Chinese state-owned group of civil aviation, aerospace and defence companies” and confirmed that it holds a 5% stake in AviChina Industry & Technology Company Limited (AviChina). This makes Airbus the biggest international shareholder of this key subsidiary of AVIC.

While Airbus insists its financial stake and ongoing business dealings with AVIC “are exclusively focused on civil aviation and services”, AVIC’s business activities are inseparable from its military applications, particularly given China’s policy of military-civil fusion which integrates civilian research and military industries.

In this context, we fail to see how Airbus can guarantee its business with AVIC is limited to civil aviation. We note that Airbus has failed to take this situation into account in its duty of vigilance plan.

As a shareholder in AviChina, Airbus is accountable to international standards on business and human rights, including the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, which require companies to conduct thorough human rights due diligence on their business relationships.

Airbus’ stance contrasts sharply with the actions of other institutional investors, including the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund and prominent Dutch investors and pension funds that have all divested from AviChina over ethical concerns and the human rights risks posed by AVIC’s transfer of military goods to Myanmar.

Airbus’ defense of its partnership with AVIC raises serious questions about its commitment to mitigate the risk that its investments contribute to human rights harms.

Airbus’ public denial of any ethical responsibility has only escalated calls for accountability, including protests in Myanmar and London, and an open letter to the CEO of Airbus, Guillaume Faury, from over 300 international and local civil society organisations including Justice For Myanmar and Info Birmanie, to end all investments in companies that enable the war crimes committed by the criminal Myanmar military junta.

The letter calls on Mr. Faury to take “responsibility to ensure that you do not enable atrocity crimes through financial and strategic links to AVIC and directly associated companies such as AviChina.”

If Airbus were to comply with international standards of human rights, it must use its leverage over AVIC to stop the continued flow of arms, military aircraft and maintenance supplied to the Myanmar military by AVIC and AVIC subsidiaries.



Photo: AFP

JUNTA MAKES CHANGES IN GAZETTED AND PUBLIC HOLIDAYS FOR 2025

The junta issued a press statement on 21 December 2024 announcing a change in public holidays. The announcement declares, "The government has designated select working days between gazetted holidays and public holidays in the 2024 and 2025 calendars as continuous public days to facilitate easier travel and extended leisure periods for people and government employees."

Under this announcement, the Tabaung full moon day holiday will continue for five days as a public holiday. The day before and the day after the Tabaung full moon (13 March 2025), together with the following Saturday and Sunday (15 and 16 March), are designated as public holidays, making a total of five days.

Similarly, the Tazaungmone full moon day holiday will be changed to continuous 4-day holiday. As the full moon day of Tazaungmone is a Tuesday (4 November 2025), the Monday will be a designated holiday too. Together with the previous Saturday and Sunday (1 and 2 November 2025) this will make a four-day public holiday.

The Christmas holiday in 2025 will also be a 4-day holiday. As Christmas (25 December 2025) falls on a

Thursday, the Friday will also be a designated public holiday. With the 27 and 28 December (Saturday and Sunday) this makes for a 4-day public holiday.

The Saturdays closest to the above extended holidays will be substitute working days, the announcement says.

For the first five-day holidays, 4 January 2025, Saturday is a substitute working day, but it is Independence Day. Therefore, 11 January (Saturday) will be a substitute working day, it says. Other substitute working days on Saturdays are 22 March, 29 March, 8 November in 2025 and 3 January in 2026.

The Chinese lunar new year day will be a public holiday in Myanmar for the first time in 2025.

The junta announced on 8 July that 1 January would be a public holiday as the international new year day and also the Chinese lunar new year day will be a public holiday starting from 2025.

MYANMAR CORN GETS HIGH PRICES UNDER HIGH FOREIGN DEMAND

Myanmar corn kernel is getting high prices in the domestic market as the demands from foreign countries such as India, Philippines, and Vietnam are rising.

The zero-tariff period granted by the major buyer of Myanmar corn, Thailand, is over but the price of Myanmar corn is still in a rising trend, and many predict that the price will rise higher.

In the domestic market, the price of corn kernels was 1,350 Kyats per viss (approx. 1.6 Kg) in October and rose to 1,550 Kyats per viss in November. The price of corn on 23 December was 1,670 Kyats per viss.

A Chinese company reportedly sent an offer to buy non-genetically modified organism (non-GMO) corn grown in Myanmar.

According to data released by the Myanmar Corn Industry Association (MCIA), Myanmar exported about

1.7 million tonnes of corn kernel in the first eight months of this fiscal year ending March 31 next year.

The freight on board (FOB) price of Myanmar corn kernel is around US\$255-265 per tonne. Myanmar earns about US\$700 million every year from corn exports.

Myanmar exports corn mainly by maritime trade. In border trade, corn is exported through the Tachilek border trade post in Shan State (East).

Among the exports of agricultural produce from Myanmar, pulses and beans get the largest foreign exchange earnings followed by rice and corn exports in second and third places respectively.



Shwedagon Pagoda. Photo: AFP

TOURIST ARRIVALS IN MYANMAR DECREASED BY MORE THAN HALF DUE TO CONFLICT

While the tourist sector has rebounded globally and in neighbouring countries since the Covid-19 pandemic, foreign tourist arrivals in military-ruled Myanmar have been falling year after year due to domestic political instability.

More than 470,000 foreign tourists visited Myanmar in the nine months from January to September 2024, dropped from almost 900,000 in the same period in 2023, according to data from the junta's Ministry of Hotels and Tourism.

Currently, the number of tourists entering the country through border gates is still low due to the civil war. International tourist arrivals through airports are still declining due to high airfares and domestic political and security concerns.

Political unrest and ongoing armed conflicts across the country since the coup have led to numerous nations issuing travel advisories to their citizens to not visit Myanmar, resulting in a decline in international tourist arrivals year after year.

The British Foreign Office issued a travel alert warning on 7 December, advising its citizens not to travel to 68 countries, including Myanmar.

Similarly, the Nepalese government also issued travel advisories in recent days for its people planning to travel to Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos due to the human trafficking crisis.

The junta has been trying to revive foreign tourism by attracting tourists from countries with which it has good relations, such as China, Russia, and Thailand, in various ways including relaxed visa requirements.

This year, some Chinese and Thai tourists have entered Myanmar, while the number of tourists from other countries has been minimal, according to the tourism industry.



MINDAT DECLARED JUNTA-FREE ZONE AS CHIN BROTHERHOOD ALLIANCE GAINS FULL CONTROL

The Chin Brotherhood Alliance (CBA) has declared the southern Chin State town of Mindat a junta-free zone following the rescue of 13 political prisoners, according to a statement released on 22 December.

The announcement came after a 42-day military campaign dubbed “Operation Chin Brotherhood,” which began on 9 November.

The operation culminated in the complete takeover of Mindat on 21 December, according to Salai Thang Chawn Phe, Commander-in-Chief of the Chinland Defence Force-Mindat (CDF-Mindat).

“We were able to clear all junta troops and control the entire town,” he said.

Thirteen political prisoners, arbitrarily detained since the 2021 military coup, were successfully rescued during the operation. The military campaign was conducted by the CBA in collaboration with allied forces, including the Yaw Defence Force (YDF), People’s Defence Army, Yaw Army, and Battalion No. 3 of the Monywa District People’s Defence Force. The Arakan Army (AA) provided arms, ammunition, and reinforcements.

Photos released by the CBA on 22 December show numerous prisoners of war and a substantial cache of seized weapons and ammunition, including howitzers. However, the number of casualties among revolutionary

fighters has not been disclosed.

During the operation, the CBA seized key locations in Mindat, including San Min Thiri Sati Gone, Staff Housing Street (San Pya Ward), the District Construction Compound, Tower Tite Gone, Mindat Hotel, Mya Lay Pwint Sati Gone, and the Four-Mile Gone. These areas were previously held by junta troops and police.

On 15 December, as the alliance targeted the remaining Mindat Police Station and Infantry Battalion 274 camp, 123 junta troops and police officers, along with their families, surrendered. Weapons and ammunition were also confiscated. The final stronghold, the Infantry Battalion 274 camp, has since been fully captured, solidifying CBA’s control over Mindat town.

The CBA, comprising multiple ethnic armed groups including the Chin National Defence Force, Chinland Defence Force-Kanpetlet, Chinland Defence Force-Matupi (Brigade 1), Chinland Defence Force-Mindat, Maraland Defence Force, and Zoland Defence Force has also expanded its influence to Kyin Dwe town in Kanpetlet Township and Matupi Township.

The alliance expressed its respect and honour for the fighters who sacrificed their lives during the operation. While exact casualty numbers have not been revealed, the success marks a significant milestone in their resistance against the military regime.



Photo: Supplied

KSCC URGES GLOBAL ACTION AGAINST JUNTA'S GENOCIDE AMID RISING VIOLENCE IN KARENNI STATE

The Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC) has called on the international community to cease any support for Myanmar's military regime, condemning its ongoing acts of genocide and war crimes. The junta is accused of targeting displaced Karenni people with airstrikes and artillery attacks, rendering their daily lives increasingly unbearable.

The appeal was made in a statement marking the third anniversary of the Mo So village massacre in Hpruso Township, where, on 24 December 2021, junta forces killed at least 35 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and four members of the No. 1004 Border Guard Force. The atrocity was carried out by Light Infantry Battalion 108 under the Light Infantry Division 66.

In its message of condolence, the KSCC reaffirmed its commitment to remembering the victims and supporting their families.

"The military regime continues to target displaced individuals in Karenni State, aiming to commit genocide through relentless airstrikes and artillery bombardments," the statement read.

The KSCC also urged the public to remain vigilant and avoid confrontations with junta forces, while calling on international organizations to take decisive action. The global community must end all forms of support for the military's heinous acts, ensure accountability for war crimes, and prevent further atrocities.

The KSCC emphasized its efforts to collaborate with revolutionary groups to establish a federal union

in Karenni State, safeguard civilians, and formulate key policies for the Karenni people. It also reiterated its determination to seek justice at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for the military's crimes.

According to the Karenni Interim Executive Council (IEC), Karenni State hosts over 250,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) across 420 camps, with others sheltering in nearby villages.

Despite their vulnerable conditions, the junta continues its airstrikes not only in Karenni State but also in Northern Shan, Kachin, Sagaing, and Rakhine, prompting urgent calls from civil society and resistance forces for international action.

These groups have demanded an immediate halt to the sale of jet fuel and ammunition to the military junta and called for practical steps to prevent further violence.

Military tensions in Karenni State remain high, with continuous clashes reported between revolutionary forces and junta troops. Since November, the junta has advanced toward Moebye and Loikaw, intensifying its attacks.

Locals report heavy weapon fire from Light Infantry Battalion 336, based in Pekon town, Shan State, targeting villages along Pekon Lake's eastern shore, resulting in civilian casualties.

Photo: AFP

CHRISTIAN PRISONERS IN MYANMAR ALLOWED CHRISTMAS WORSHIP AMID STRICT LIMITATIONS

Christian prisoners across Myanmar were allowed to pray and worship on Christmas Day, 25 December, according to Ko Thaik Htun Oo, a senior member of the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM).

“Christian prisoners in every prison were permitted to pray and worship on Christmas Day, but it is unclear if they were allowed to sing hymns or participate in other celebratory activities,” Ko Thaik Htun Oo told Mizzima.

Traditionally, Christian prisoners, including those detained for political reasons, observe Christmas with worship, thanksgiving, and hymn-singing within prison walls. However, such activities are often subject to stringent restrictions imposed by prison authorities, he explained.

“Permission varies depending on the individual prison’s administration. While most allow limited worship, activities like hymn-singing may be restricted. During my time in prison, we moved between cells and dormitories to offer prayers and blessings. Hymn-singers would also share gifts with fellow inmates who lacked external support,” he said.

A former political prisoner from the 1988 generation shared a contrasting experience. “When I was in prison,

Christian prisoners had to pray secretly within their cells as such activities were not officially permitted,” he recalled.

As a gesture of support, the PPNM launched a special program to provide Christmas gifts to over 20,000 political prisoners detained across Myanmar. Each prisoner will receive 5,000 kyats as part of a distribution initiative that includes parcels, books, medicines, and essential supplies.

“This initiative reminds prisoners that they are not forgotten, especially on such a meaningful day. So far, we have raised nearly one million kyats, along with additional contributions in Thai baht,” said Ko Thaik Htun Oo.

The PPNM expressed hope that all political prisoners, including Christians, would be able to celebrate next Christmas with their families in freedom and warmth.

Since the military coup on 1 February 2021, 28,011 people have been arrested for opposing the junta, with 21,441 still in detention, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).



Photo: Supplied

UN CALLS FOR PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS AS RAKHINE CONFLICT ESCALATES

On 23 December 2024, UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric issued a statement during the Daily Press Briefing, calling for the protection of civilians as the Rakhine conflict has displaced over 570,000 people, worsening the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar.

The security situation in Rakhine is rapidly worsening, with escalating conflict between the Myanmar Armed Forces and Arakan Army in several townships in southern Rakhine.

Since November 2023, the conflict has persisted and is now affecting 16 out of 17 townships where people are facing severe humanitarian challenges, including severely limited access to essential services.

According to partners, the ongoing conflict has driven an estimated 360,000 people out of their homes

in Rakhine and neighbouring Paletwa Township in southern Chin, bringing the total number of displaced in Rakhine to nearly 570,000.

The escalating conflict in Rakhine is part of a broader crisis, unfolding in multiple regions and states across Myanmar, including the Northwest and Southeast, displacing more than 3.5 million people – a staggering increase of 1.5 million compared to a year ago.

The UN reiterates its calls on all parties to the conflict to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law, to ensure the protection of civilians, humanitarian workers and supplies, and to guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access.



Photo: Supplied

ROHINGYA ORGANIZATIONS URGE ARAKAN ARMY TO ENSURE JUSTICE, EQUALITY, AND INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE IN ARAKAN STATE

On 23 December, 31 Rohingya organizations released a joint statement requesting that the Arakan Army (AA) promote justice, equality, peaceful coexistence, and inclusive governance in Arakan State.

The statement is as follows.

The Arakan Army (AA) has taken control of Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships in Northern Arakan/Rakhine State. The majority of the remaining 500,000 Rohingya are still living in the territory controlled by the AA. The AA controls the entire border with Bangladesh.

During decades of military rule, the people of Arakan State, including the Rohingya, have yearned for freedom. With the Arakan Army now in control of the territory, it bears the responsibility to fulfill that aspiration. We urge the Arakan Army and its political wing, the United League of Arakan, to uphold and respect the rights of the Rohingya and all ethnic and religious minorities in Arakan State.

This moment offers an opportunity to transform the future of Arakan State—one rooted in respect for human rights, justice, and equality for all. It is a chance to move beyond the divisions sown by the military junta and rebuild a prosperous Arakan State where peace and coexistence are the foundations of governance.

For decades, the people of Arakan State, Rakhine, Rohingya and others, have experienced immense suffering under successive regimes, including military and civilian-led administrations. The Burmese military's policy of divide and rule has been devastating. Regimes

tactfully used the IDENTITY as a weapon to create mistrust and hatred among communities. These tactics were designed to destabilise communities, prolong conflict, and weaken resistance to military rule.

Undoubtedly, the Burmese military is our common enemy. Its ultimate aim has always been to destroy both the Rakhine and Rohingya communities and to keep Arakan State in a perpetual state of poverty and division, exploiting our land and resources.

The leadership of the Arakan Army and United League of Arakan (ULA) now have to make decisions which will determine whether Arakan State remains locked in conflict, division and poverty, or whether all the people of Arakan State, regardless of race or religion, work together for a better future.

The imminent famine in Arakan State could mean the starvation of two million people as famine does not distinguish race or religion. All communities must work together to prevent ongoing tragedies, and to help build a better future where no one dies of starvation, lives without shelter, healthcare and employment.

Arakan Army has been actively carrying out human rights violations including widespread arson attacks, forceful displacement and expulsion, looting, extrajudicial killings, forceful disappearances, forced labours, forced conscriptions, mass detention, sexual violence and extortions. Even in the past weeks, according to credible ground reports, the Arakan Army has deliberately burned down hundreds of Rohingya houses in Buthidaung and Maungdaw towns.

We, the Rohingya, are equal stakeholders and an

integral part of Arakan State. We urge the Arakan Army to view us not as adversaries, but as partners in shaping a shared and prosperous future for Arakan State.

We call on the Arakan Army to issue clear directives to all fighters under its command, as well as allied armed forces, to immediately cease any human rights violations against the Rohingya or any other ethnic or religious group in Rakhine State.

Evidently, Arakan State needs international support to prevent famine, to address other humanitarian challenges, and for its sustainable development. The world is watching closely to see how AA/ULA respect human rights, equality, justice and freedom of expression. Assurance is needed that the AA/ULA will bring freedom to the people of Arakan State and work together with all communities. Support from the international community hinges on how effectively and wisely the AA/ULA addresses these critical issues.

Safe and protective repatriation of Rohingya refugees remains top priority for Bangladesh. On the other hand, AA/ULA now must make the situation conducive for a successful and protective repatriation and rehabilitation of Rohingya refugees to their homeland.

Rohingya have been the victims of human rights violations by many parties. Burmese military forcefully conscripted Rohingya from IDP camps, all the remaining villages. Some Rohingya criminal armed groups have collaborated with the genocidal Burmese military.

We reiterate our strong rejection to all those groups cooperating with Burmese military. Such groups do not represent the Rohingya people or fight for Rohingya people.

AA uses these criminal armed groups as pretext to commit crimes against Rohingya as a collective punishment which mimics the crimes committed by the military regime in 2017 that led to the submission of an arrest warrant application by the ICC's chief prosecutor to the presiding judge.

We welcome the detention of Brigadier-General Thurein Tun. This presents an important opportunity for justice and accountability. Thurein Tun has been implicated in serious abuses, including the forced conscription of Rohingya men and underaged children by coercion, inciting ethnic tensions, and using propaganda to divide communities.

After 2021 coup d'état, he oversaw brutal crackdowns on anti-coup protesters, including arbitrary arrests, torture in detention facilities, prosecution and imprisonment of dissidents in Mandalay. It is important that international investigators, such as the office of the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights situation in Myanmar, and Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), be given access to investigate him.

As the AA/ULA exercises control over Northern

Arakan, we urge them to take the following steps to reinforce their commitment to inclusive governance and to ensure a peaceful and prosperous Arakan State:

1. Guarantee the rights and security of all communities including Rohingya by protecting civilians from all forms of violence and discrimination, ensuring freedom of movement, and providing equal access to livelihoods and essential services for everyone.

2. Establish an interim consultative committee which includes representatives of all ethnic and religious people in Arakan State, so that all voices can be heard, and all can work together to rebuild the future Arakan State. There must be integration of Rohingya and other minority communities into decision-making processes and administrative structures at all levels. Equal representation is essential to building trust and promoting inclusivity.

3. Recognise the Rohingya as an integral part of Arakan State's diverse communities. Human rights violations against the Rohingya are often justified by falsely claiming that the Rohingya identity does not exist, and Rohingya do not belong in Burma or Arakan State.

4. Adopt and enforce a public code of conduct for Arakan Army fighters to ensure the protection of civilians and investigate violations of the code.

5. Support independent investigations into allegations of abuses committed by the Burmese military, Arakan Army, and Rohingya armed groups. Allow UN human rights agencies, including the OHCHR, Special Rapporteur, IIMM as well as independent human rights organisations to have access to Arakan State. Human rights violations by the Burmese military must be documented with a view to either domestic or international prosecutions. Human rights violations by fighters under the command of the Arakan Army have been documented by independent international organisations and media that must be fully investigated.

6. Facilitate humanitarian access by allowing unrestricted aid to reach all communities in need, ensuring that assistance is delivered equitably and without discrimination.

7. Engage in regular, meaningful dialogue with Rohingya leaders, within Arakan State, in the refugee camps in Bangladesh, and in the diaspora, to address grievances, rebuild trust, and foster understanding.

8. End restrictions on internet and communications, such as confiscation of mobile phones, and banning the use of satellite dishes which can be used to access the internet. Independent media should also be given access to operate freely.

9. Cooperate with Rohingya community leaders in Arakan State and Internationally to advocate for an emergency humanitarian aid corridor from Bangladesh to prevent famine.

Ms. Rana Flowers

UNICEF STATEMENT ON THE RECENT FIRE IN COX'S BAZAR ROHINGYA REFUGEE CAMPS

On 24 December 2024, Ms. Rana Flowers, UNICEF Representative to Bangladesh, issued a statement regarding the fire that occurred in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

The statement is as follows.

UNICEF is profoundly saddened by the news that yet another fire broke out in the Cox's Bazar refugee camps and claimed the life of one child. UNICEF sends its deepest condolences to the child's family and loved ones.

While the fire was brought under control within hours, initial reports indicate that at least 800 shelters were fully destroyed or partially damaged. At least one learning centre and 17 community-based learning facilities were damaged or burned down.

UNICEF is on the ground assessing the full extent of the damage. Our foremost priority is to protect and provide support to the affected children and their families.

Rohingya refugee children, who have already endured unimaginable suffering since their families were forcibly displaced from their homes in Myanmar over seven years ago, deserve our full support and every means of help that we can provide. UNICEF will continue to work closely with local authorities, UN agencies and partners to meet the basic needs of these children and their families, and ensure they are safe and protected.



Photo: AFP

SAVE THE CHILDREN REPORT SHOWS EDUCATION DENIED TO 103 MILLION CHILDREN IN CONFLICT ZONES GLOBALLY, OVER 6 MILLION IN MYANMAR

On 27 December, Save the Children reported that about 103 million children—one in three—are out of school in conflict-affected or fragile countries in 2024. A UNICEF report from October 2023 also revealed that over 6 million children in Myanmar lack access to education, representing more than a third of school-age children there.

Research found around 103 million school-aged children - or one in three - living in 34 of the countries classified by the World Bank as conflict-affected or fragile missed out on education in 2024.

This was significantly higher than the one in 10 children out of school globally, underscoring the strong link between conflict or fragility and missed learning.

In Sudan, 17.4 million children are out of school amid the ongoing conflict which started in April

2023. In Gaza, where 96% of school buildings have been damaged or destroyed by Israeli airstrikes since October 2023, all 625,000 school-age children missed out on education.

Nigeria, considered by the World Bank as conflict-affected, has one of the highest numbers of children out of school in the world with over 18 million children missing education, as poverty, insecurity and socio-cultural practices and norms that keep children, particularly girls, out of school intersect to affect education. The situation is made worse by increasing attacks on schools, particularly in the north of the country, as well as devastating climate disasters such as floods in September that led the Borno state government to close all schools.

Kyariyam*, 12, was displaced with her family when floods hit her home in Borno state, in northeast Nigeria,

in September. The family's belongings, including the children's books and school uniforms were washed away in the floods which also destroyed half of their school. Save the Children supported Kyariyam's* education with evening classes to make up for school.

"I feel really bad that I'm no longer able to go to school. I constantly worry about how I will catch up. I loved learning, and my favourite subjects were mathematics, basic science, business studies, and physical and health education.

"We need our homes to be rebuilt and our schools as well. We also need clothes, uniforms, and books so we can go back to school."

Fragile countries are those more often affected by crises like wars and climate disasters, where the government does not have enough control over responsibilities like law-making, law enforcement, managing the economy and the services that people need to be safe, healthy and protected in school and learning.

Progress towards reducing the number of children missing out on basic education has been stalled for over a decade as under-investment in education, restrictive government policies, devastating conflicts in place such as Sudan, the occupied Palestinian territory and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), climate-change-linked weather disasters and attacks on education combine to keep children out of school.

Attacks on education and military use of schools increased by nearly 20% in 2022 and 2023 compared to the two previous years, while around 62 million children and adolescents in 27 countries have had their education disrupted by climate shocks since 2020.

James Cox, Head of Advocacy and Policy for Education at Save the Children, said:

"Around 103 million children – one in three – living in the world's most violent and fragile countries are out of school. Far too many children are being denied their right to education, as their schools are damaged

or destroyed by conflict or climate-related weather disasters, attacks on education, or poverty, exacerbated by crisis, which prevents families from being able to pay for necessities. We know conflict and crisis increases the number of children forced into early marriage or child labour.

"Education in crisis settings is lifesaving, it protects children from violence, sexual and gender-based abuse, exploitation, and recruitment into armed groups. It also provides lifesaving learning such as how to keep safe from unexploded bombs in their neighborhoods.

"Parents and children in humanitarian crises repeatedly tell us that education is their top priority. It is time world leaders listened to these children and made it their priority too by ensuring funding requirements for education in emergencies is fully met in 2025, and by endorsing and implementing the Safe Schools Declaration. All parties to conflicts must also ensure schools are not targeted or used as military bases, and ensure children can access safe, quality education, no matter where they live.

Save the Children supports children around the world by providing safe learning spaces for those whose lives are shattered by conflict, where children can also access healthcare, vaccinations and mental health support. We also amplify the voices of children opposing child marriage and campaigning for a greener, fairer future. The child rights organisation also campaigns for and with children to call for urgent action on the climate crisis and inequality to create a safe, healthy and happy future for children.



Photo: AFP

THAI GOVERNMENT ISSUES CHOLERA OUTBREAK ALERT ON MYANMAR BORDER IN TAK PROVINCE

The Thai government is working to block the spread of a cholera outbreak on its border with Myanmar.

The Public Health Ministry has opened an emergency operations centre (EOC) in Tak province in a bid to block cholera, which is spreading in the adjacent town of Shwe Kokko in Myanmar.

Dr. Opas Karnkawinpong, Permanent Secretary for Public Health, said on 22 December that the EOC was watching for possible cholera cases in border communities, factories and refugee camps.

“Mae Ramat and Mae Sot districts of Tak are at high risk because they stand opposite Shwe Kokko and there are many factories and communities of migrants. During the New Year holidays people will have parties and share meals,” he said.

According to the Permanent Secretary for Public Health, there have been about 200 cholera cases in Shwe Kokko, with two fatalities. There have been two cholera cases in Mae Sot district.

Thai media reported that there were two cholera cases in Mae Sot district as of 22 December.

Both cases were admitted to Mae Sot Hospital.

The junta, however, has not yet issued any alert on the outbreak of cholera in Shwe Kokko in Myawaddy Township, Karen State.

Local media reported that the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) which controls Shwe Kokko town issued a cholera outbreak alert.

The Shwe Kokko town is notorious for its online scams centres popularly known as Jia Pian in Chinese. It is controlled by the BGF-turned Karen National Army (KNA) led by Col. Saw Chit Thu.

Thais living near the border said that most cholera cases in Shwe Kokko were Chinese employers and their Myanmar workers, according to a 22 December report by the Bangkok Post.

Thai doctors say that severe diarrhoea is a symptom of cholera. The waterborne bacterial disease is potentially lethal unless patients take proper treatment.

Dr. Opas Karnkawinpong said that the EOC was also monitoring the quality of drinking water, advising people and migrants on hygiene, supervising food fairs and vendors, and preparing medical supplies including rapid test kits to cope with cholera.

Thai soldiers were actively patrolling the border in Mae Ramat and Mae Sot districts to block illegal immigration through natural border crossings for the time being. Tak authorities provided their Shwe Kokko counterparts with medical supplies as requested to support disease control.



HOW BEIJING IS LOOTING & PLUNDERING AFRICA'S ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES

SUN LEE

China's aggressive expansion into Africa's energy sector has morphed from economic partnership into predatory exploitation, creating a neo-colonial stranglehold that threatens the continent's sovereignty and development. Through calculated investments, debt-trap diplomacy, and strategic manipulation, Beijing has established unprecedented control over Africa's vital energy and mineral resources. The scale of China's energy monopoly is staggering. Three state-owned giants - China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), and Sinopec - have systematically outmaneuvered Western competitors to become the fourth-largest collective energy investor in Africa. With plans to invest an additional \$15 billion in upstream development, these companies have secured China's position as a dominant force, with Africa now supplying approximately 30% of China's total crude oil

imports.

Beijing's predatory lending practices reveal a calculated strategy of economic colonialism. Through the China Development Bank and EXIM Bank, Beijing has extended superficially attractive but ultimately exploitative loans totaling \$29.7 billion for power generation and \$9.3 billion for transmission networks. These loans, while filling a financing gap left by Western institutions, have become instruments of control, leaving African nations trapped in cycles of debt and dependency. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) stands as a stark example of China's exploitative approach. A controversial \$6 billion infrastructure-for-minerals deal signed in 2008 has resulted in massive mineral exports to China while delivering minimal infrastructure benefits to the DRC. The deal's terms were so unfavorable that DRC's President Tshisekedi was recently forced to seek renegotiation with Xi

Jinping, highlighting the fundamentally unequal nature of China's "partnerships."

China's monopolistic control extends far beyond conventional energy resources. In the critical minerals sector, Beijing has systematically positioned itself to dominate supply chains crucial for future technologies. In the DRC, which supplies 70% of the world's cobalt, Chinese entities now control or have stakes in nearly all producing mines. A recent \$4.5 billion investment spree in lithium mines across Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Mali further cements their dominance, potentially securing one-third of global lithium mining capacity by 2025. The consequences of this Chinese monopoly are devastating for African nations. Countries like Djibouti, Kenya, and Zambia have found themselves trapped in unsustainable debt levels, while the lack of transparency in Chinese loans has severely limited public scrutiny and accountability. Chinese operations consistently demonstrate poor environmental standards and worker safety practices, prioritizing rapid resource extraction over sustainable development and local community welfare.

China's strategic manipulation extends beyond economic control into political influence. By spreading investments across African nations regardless of their governance quality or corruption levels, Beijing has created a network of dependent states that can be leveraged for political support in international forums. This calculated approach ensures China's continued access to resources while building a bloc of nations effectively subservient to Chinese interests.

The recent decline in Chinese oil imports from Africa, dropping from one-third to one-tenth of total imports, masks a more insidious reality. Rather than indicating reduced Chinese influence, this shift reveals Beijing's tactical flexibility in maintaining control over Africa's broader mineral wealth. Africa holds 30% of the world's mineral reserves, including 90% of cobalt and platinum reserves, significant portions of gold, manganese, and uranium, and 75% of the world's coltan. China's grip on these resources positions it to dominate global supply chains critical for future technologies. The exploitation of Africa's energy resources by China represents not just an economic challenge but a moral failure of the international community to protect vulnerable nations from predatory practices. Western nations' reluctance to invest in countries with weak governance or poor labor practices has created a vacuum that China eagerly fills with its no-strings-attached approach to investment. However, this approach often exacerbates existing problems of corruption, environmental degradation,

and social inequality.

Looking ahead, the future of Sino-African energy relations appears increasingly problematic. Global energy transitions and environmental considerations are likely to intensify competition for Africa's resources, particularly those critical for renewable technologies. China's weakening economy and domestic demand may temporarily reduce its resource appetite, but its strategic grip on African resources remains firm and far-reaching. The African countries must respond to this challenge by offering alternative partnerships that prioritize African development over resource exploitation. This requires not just investment capital but a commitment to transparency, environmental protection, and genuine economic development. Without such intervention, Africa risks remaining trapped in Beijing's web of economic colonialism, its vast resources serving Chinese interests while its own development aspirations remain unfulfilled.

The path forward requires a concerted effort to break China's monopolistic control over African resources. This includes supporting African nations in renegotiating unfair deals, providing alternative financing options, and helping build local capacity for resource management. Only through such efforts can Africa hope to transform its resource wealth from a tool of foreign exploitation into a foundation for sustainable development and prosperity.

Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who reports on China and geopolitical developments.



BANGLADESH PROTESTERS ENTER TV STATION OWNERS, JOURNALISTS SACKED

A gang of Bangladesh student protesters entered the offices of the investor of a television station accusing it of “propaganda,” protesters said Tuesday, with at least five journalists subsequently fired.

The students had taken part in the August revolution that toppled prime minister Sheikh Hasina, whose tenure was marked as one of the worst periods for media freedom.

Hasnat Abdullah, convener of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement, led around 15 to 20 students on December 17 to the offices of City Group, who invest in Somoy Television.

“Somoy Television was spreading propaganda, twisting my comments, and accommodating the views of a fallen political party,” Hasnat told AFP.

“We are staunch supporters of press freedom, but the press must remain unbiased,” Hasnat said, adding that he saw no issue in making demands -- but rejecting reports the students had handed over a list of those they wanted fired.

The managing director of the business conglomerate that funds the television station did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

The incident has intensified fear among journalists in the wake of the revolution.

One journalist, Omar Faroque, who had been a senior editor of the television station, said he was among the five who received a termination letter without reason.

“The television authorities requested a few of us to step down for the greater good of the station,” Faroque told AFP.

“We demanded an explanation for the decision, but the authorities refused to provide any”

Interim leader Muhammad Yunus has repeatedly insisted he wants media freedom.

Yunus’ press secretary Shafiqul Alam sought to distance the government, saying that if someone “takes any action, the responsibility lies with them”.

Press watchdogs say many journalists -- seen by critics as having supported Hasina when she was in power -- face police investigations in apparent retaliation for their past work.

At least four journalists were imprisoned, and scores are facing legal cases across the country.

Hasina and her government were frequently accused of exerting undue pressure on the handful of independent media outlets, including shutting down newspapers and TV channels, and imprisoning journalists.

After Hasina’s government fell, several TV channels including Somoy TV came under attack for their alleged allegiance to her Awami League.

In November, protesters besieged the offices of Prothom Alo -- the largest Bengali-language newspaper -- and threatened to shut it down, as well as The Daily Star.

Press freedom in Bangladesh has long been under threat.

Bangladesh ranks 165 out of 180 countries in press freedom, according to Reporters Without Borders.

AFP



A SANCTIONED RESISTANCE

"I don't think sanctions alone will be able to end the conflict," says Anrike Visser, a Senior Policy Advisor at The Sentry tells the Insight Myanmar Podcast "Doing more in terms of enforcement, collaborating better with civil society organizations, I think the impact of the sanctions would be a lot bigger than it is today."

The Sentry is an investigative and policy organization that seeks to disable multinational predatory networks that benefit from violent conflict, repression, and kleptocracy. It was co-founded by the famous actor, George Clooney, and John Prendergast, and has engaged in the crises in Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Central African Republic, and more recently in Libya and Myanmar. In its own words, The Sentry describes its mission as follows: "Pull back the curtain on wars, mass atrocities, and other human rights abuses, and you'll find grand corruption and unchecked greed. The Sentry aims to alter the warped incentive structures that continually undermine peace and good governance. Our investigations follow the money as it is laundered from war zones to financial centers around the world. We provide evidence and strategies for governments, banks, and law enforcement to hold the perpetrators and enablers of violence and corruption to account."

Anrike's work in the organization focuses on economic statecraft—the strategic use of economic tools by states to influence international relations and achieve foreign policy objectives—and leading partnerships with European governments and institutions like the IMF and World Bank. She has experience in financial regulation and has worked on

investigations into "violent kleptocracies" in Africa and Myanmar.

Before delving into the complex issue of sanctions regarding Myanmar, Anrike provides some background. She explains that economic statecraft has gained momentum as a diplomatic tool, particularly following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. "Especially in active conflicts, like Myanmar and the recent coup d'état, it's really become a tool that is used a lot more often now," she says. She believes that closer collaboration between the EU, US, and UK strengthens the sanctions' impact.

However, as the opening quote illustrates, to be truly effective, sanctions need to be part of a broader approach that includes diplomacy and aid, and clearly communicate both punishment-based and incentive-based elements (such as IMF loans, which often include requirements like anti-corruption frameworks). Then, if conditions aren't met, there must be strict enforcement, ensuring transparency and accountability for positive outcomes. Finally, Anrike believes that sanctions should be targeted at specific sectors, like arms, teak, and gems, where Western markets dominate and therefore have leverage.

Anrike goes on to explain the complex mechanism of international sanctions: "Targeted network sanctions [are] specifically where we go for specific companies and individuals active in certain human rights abuses or undermining democracy, and we target those specifically and try to prevent civilian harm." In Myanmar's case, sanctions on sectors like garments have been avoided because, although revenue to the junta from these sectors is minimal, they provide essential jobs for thousands of women. She mentions that targeted sanctions restrict individuals from traveling to places like the EU and freeze their assets held in foreign currencies, such as USD, which is critical for Myanmar's economy. These measures also prohibit trade with sanctioned companies, aiming for impactful pressure while minimizing harm to civilians.

CATCH THE PODCAST

To read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast, please check here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/12/5/episode-292-a-sanctioned-resistance>

Photo: Kyle Petzer

MYANMAR JUNTA TIGHTENS GRIP ON FILM INDUSTRY WITH HARSH NEW RESTRICTIONS

Myanmar's military regime has significantly intensified its control over the film industry by amending the 1996 Motion Picture Law, reported Radio Free Asia.

The changes, enacted recently, tripled the maximum prison sentence from one to three years for screening or exporting films without censorship approval, while fines have jumped twentyfold from 100,000 kyat to 2 million kyat (US\$430).

Repeat offenders now face up to five years imprisonment and 3 million kyat (US\$650) in fines. The amended law also introduces new restrictions

targeting "disrespectful remarks about the state" and "actions that harm national interests."

Film industry professionals speaking anonymously note that while the law aims to restrict films from resistance-controlled areas and international submissions, it may prove ineffective against underground productions. Many anti-junta filmmakers have already fled the country.

Since the 2021 coup, over 30 publications and media organizations have been banned, demonstrating the junta's ongoing efforts to control information flow in Myanmar.



PRESS RELEASE

SHADOW GOVERNMENT NUG EXTENDS KAREN (KAYIN) NEW YEAR GREETINGS TO KAREN PEOPLE

Myanmar's opposition National Unity Government (NUG) issued a ceremonial message on December 30, 2024, marking the Karen New Year 2764. The occasion, which has been officially recognized since 1938, represents 86 years of cultural preservation and national identity for the Karen people.

The statement highlighted the Karen people's rich cultural traditions, including harvest ceremonies, communal feast celebrations, flag-raising ceremonies, and traditional performances with traditional Karen drums and buffalo horns. The NUG expressed solidarity with Karen leaders and communities both within Myanmar and abroad.

In their message, the shadow government acknowledged the historical struggles of ethnic minorities under Myanmar military rule and reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the Karen people's aspirations for self-determination and equal rights within a possible federal democratic union.

Social media responses to the announcement reflected public sentiment, with users sharing hopes for peace and revolution. One user commented, "May peace come quickly," while another expressed, "May the revolution succeed soon. Let this Karen New Year mark the beginning of a victorious year."

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.