

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY
Analysis & Insight

TWO-FACED

**Myanmar junta leader talks
peace while pushing war**



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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.

THREATS TO THE YOUNG GENERATION IN MYANMAR

Myanmar's youngest are under threat. The ongoing conflict in Myanmar has displaced nearly 1.3 million children by the end of 2024, exposing them to several critical threats, according to UNICEF.

What the latest reports suggests is many babies and children are under threat from not only the fighting ongoing in the country but a range of health and food challenges. Those particularly exposed are part of the growing number of internally displaced persons or IDPs forced to flee their homes due to the ongoing conflicts in a number of areas in the country.

Challenges to health are a particular concern. Over 1 million children are missing vital immunizations, making Myanmar a global hotspot for "zero-dose" children. This increases their vulnerability to preventable diseases. Many face a range of health problems including food poisoning, cholera and malaria, given their exposed circumstances. Displacement often leads to inadequate access to clean water, sanitation, and healthcare, further compromising children's health and well-being.

In regions like Kalay Township in Sagaing Region, approximately 800 displaced children face severe food shortages, heightening the risk of malnutrition and related health issues.

More than 5 million children are out of school, leaving the older ones susceptible to forced recruitment into armed groups, early or forced marriages, sexual exploitation, and other severe rights violations.

And then there is the exposure to violence. Displaced children are at increased risk of physical harm, including injury or death from ongoing military operations, as well as psychological trauma from witnessing violence. Many are exposed to almost daily trauma in conflict zones, with drills at makeshift schools seeing children run to dugout shelters at the sound of military aircraft.

A combination of these physical and psychological factors is ruining the upbringing of a significant sector of the population as Myanmar heads into its fourth year of war, post the February 2021 military coup.

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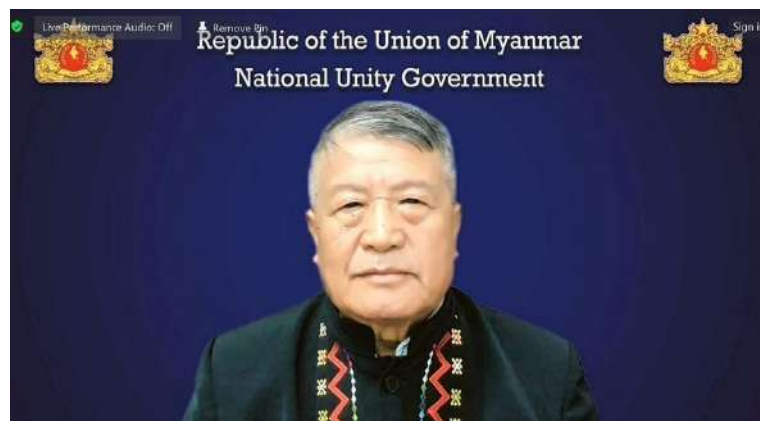
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Cover photo of Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing by AFP





The public know full well who is responsible for their misery.
Photo: AFP

TWO-FACED

MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER TALKS PEACE WHILE PUSHING WAR

It is confusing listening to Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing. The senior general and head of the State Administration Council (SAC) says one thing and does another.

Little wonder the majority of the Myanmar population believe he is “two-faced” as he oversees the destruction of his country, a process about to clock its fourth year.

In two recent speeches, he proposed peace but his actions mean war and a drive to continue in power under the smokescreen of the military’s discredited “disciplined democracy”.

FORMAL MESSAGE

While fighting is intensifying between the junta and the revolutionary forces across the country, Min Aung Hlaing said that peace talks for have always been welcomed, and the door open for them. These remarks were made in a formal message on the occasion of Karen National New Year, which fell on December 30.

The welcoming of dialogue has always been in place, and efforts will be continued for future peace, he claimed.

The military leader stated that the nation is still facing armed conflicts “due to disunity brought by colonial rule”.

The junta has been meeting with political parties and ethnic armed organisations and has recorded their opinions as topics for discussion and approval in the next parliament, he added.

The junta leader also said in a formal letter sent for the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Akha National Day on 28 December that some ethnic armed groups are turning a blind eye to invitations of peace talks.

NEW YEAR ADDRESS

In his 2025 New Year’s address, Min Aung Hlaing claimed that despite significant economic setbacks following Myanmar’s military takeover, the council has achieved some progress in national development. He highlighted the successful completion of the 2024 Population and Housing Census and the hosting of the 5th National Sports Festival, which he claimed set the stage for improving the country’s sports standards.

Addressing the ongoing armed conflicts, Min Aung Hlaing emphasized that the challenges could only be resolved through negotiations and political dialogue.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing says one thing and does another. Photo: AFP

He expressed the belief that peace and stability are prerequisites for achieving social and economic progress. However, he accused some ethnic leaders of attempting to disintegrate the Union and claimed that armed group leaders were inciting conflict to serve their personal interests.

The junta leader also reiterated the SAC's commitment to holding elections, urging citizens to unite and participate to ensure success.

"We are striving to guide the country back to the right path of democracy. We appeal to the people to show the same spirit and patriotism as displayed in 2024 to support this effort," he said.

That said, the junta leader has stacked the political party cards in his favour – with the popular National League for Democracy (NLD) disqualified and its leader Aung San Suu Kyi, 79, by all intents and purposes set to eventually die in jail under a 27-year-sentence.

Meanwhile, the Myanmar military continue to target civilians and the resistance forces, using fighter jets, helicopters, drones, artillery and infantry forces – with the civilian toll growing by the day.

GRIM OUTLOOK

Despite Min Aung Hlaing's assertions, Myanmar's economic outlook remains grim. An 11 December assessment by the World Bank showed that natural disasters, ongoing armed conflicts, and severe shortages of essential goods have significantly weakened the economy since the military takeover. The World Bank's report forecasts that Myanmar's GDP will shrink by 1 percent in the fiscal year ending March 2025.

Min Aung Hlaing's claims of progress stand in contrast to these findings, highlighting the disparity between the SAC's narrative and international economic assessments.

Regarding the socio-economic situation, electricity is only available on a scheduled basis in most regions and states, except in the Naypyidaw area where the junta leadership resides. Meanwhile, commodity prices continue to rise.

Few take the Myanmar junta leader's pronouncements seriously, in part because they are so far off base, and because they appear intent to mislead as he seeks to hang on to power.



FLASHBACK - There was never any real trust on Aung San Suu Kyi's relationship with the leader of the military. Photo: AFP

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Civilians flee fighting in Rakhine State. Photo: AFP

ARAKAN ARMY VICTORIES BUT ROHINGYA CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

The Arakan Army (AA) continues its military offensive, advancing beyond Rakhine State into Magway, Bago, and Ayeyarwady regions. After consolidating control over Ann, Taungup, and Gwa townships in Rakhine, the AA has intensified its campaign, targeting strategic and economic hubs.

On January 3, AA-led alliance resistance forces engaged junta troops in Thabaung Township, near a Chinese-invested paper factory. Military analysts underscore Thabaung's strategic importance, noting its proximity to Patheingyi, the capital of Ayeyarwady Region, and its accessibility to key coastal tourist destinations, including Shwe Thauk Yan, Ngwe Saung, and Chaungtha beaches. "Thabaung is a crucial intersection town. It connects the delta to Rakhine State and offers logistical advantages for the resistance forces," explained a military analyst. If AA gains control of Thabaung, it could significantly disrupt junta operations while positioning the resistance to

influence the region's economic and tourism sectors, including Chinese-backed projects.

Following the fall of the junta's Western Command Headquarters in Ann Township on December 20, the military launched a counteroffensive to reclaim the strategic base. Using the Chinese gas pipeline as a shield—untouchable for both sides due to its economic and diplomatic sensitivity—the junta's reinforcements advanced toward Ann.

However, AA forces thwarted the junta's efforts, forcing the reinforcements to retreat once again. Local sources confirmed that AA maintained its grip on the area, further consolidating its control.

The pipeline, which connects Kyaukphyu port in Rakhine to China, has become a critical focal point in the conflict, underscoring the intersection of military operations and economic interests.



Civilians flee the conflict in Bhamo, Kachin State. Photo: AFP

The AA also captured the Taungzaut post, a key base providing security for the Chinese power station along the pipeline. Local media reported that the AA seized nearby outposts as well. The Chinland Defense Force-Asho (CDF-Asho), an allied resistance group, claimed to have captured 11 junta soldiers retreating from Taungzaut and Singon Taing, along with their weapons.

The Myanmar military's airstrikes continue to target civilians in AA-controlled regions. On January 5, an airstrike in Ponnagyun Township killed three women and a child. Two of the women and the child were Rohingya from Kyauktaw Township. The attack targeted an area where civilians had gathered for better mobile connectivity. A similar airstrike in Ponnagyun on December 31 killed five civilians, including two women and a nine-year-old child.

Local analysts suggest that the AA's advances could challenge the junta's ability to safeguard key projects critical to China, potentially straining Sino-Myanmar relations. Resistance forces leveraging these zones also expose vulnerabilities in the junta's defenses while demonstrating their ability to disrupt regional economic activities.

The AA's expansion beyond Rakhine State showcases its growing influence and military capability. By targeting intersection towns like Thabaung and leveraging strategic locations, the AA and allied resistance forces threaten to erode the junta's control over key regions and infrastructure.

The intensification of fighting, coupled with the civilian toll, underscores the worsening humanitarian crisis and raises concerns about the stability of Chinese-backed investments in Myanmar. In addition, the Rohingya have been caught in the crossfire.

The Kachin Independence Army and their advances.

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and its allied forces are intensifying efforts to capture Bhamo, the second-largest city in Kachin State. The battle, which began on December 4, 2024, has entered its second month, with the KIA making significant territorial gains.

The KIA has taken control of key junta outposts, including a police station and civilian administrative offices. On January 6, fighting escalated as the KIA targeted the junta's No. 47 Battalion, a critical defense point for Bhamo. The battalion serves as the guardian regiment for the city. Inside Bhamo, the No. 21 Military Operation Command (MOC) Headquarters has become a focal point for junta resistance. Retreated troops have regrouped there, countering the KIA's assault with heavy airstrikes.

KIA spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu confirmed that their forces have advanced into some wards within the city. "Our members are positioned in certain wards, and battles are ongoing. Junta troops are consolidating inside the No. 21 MOC compound to resist our offensive. Civilians can still enter and leave Bhamo, and markets in some wards remain open for daily necessities. However, clashes continue near junta posts," he said.

Military analysts suggest that the fall of No. 47 Battalion could lead to the rapid collapse of the No. 21 MOC. A local resident noted, "If Battalion 47 falls, the KIA will dominate Bhamo completely and shift their focus to capturing No. 21 MOC."

Simultaneously, the KIA and allied forces have launched an intensified offensive in Mansi, a town 13 miles from Bhamo. Although the KIA has captured the town, heavy fighting persists as they attempt to secure the bases of junta battalions No. 319 and No.

601. Progress has been made, with the KIA taking key outposts and bunkers, but the junta continues to resist with air support and reinforcements.

The KIA's advances in Bhamo and Mansi signify a strategic push to undermine the junta's stronghold in Kachin State. If Bhamo falls, it would mark a major victory for the KIA and potentially shift the dynamics of the conflict in northern Myanmar.

As urban fighting intensifies, civilian casualties are rising. Communication disruptions have made it difficult to confirm the exact toll, but some local organizations estimate around 150 civilians have died, with many others wounded. Other groups report at least 30 deaths. Junta airstrikes have also caused extensive damage to civilian homes, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. The use of airstrikes by the junta highlights the growing intensity of the conflict, raising concerns about the safety of those caught in the crossfire.

The outcome of the battles for Bhamo and Mansi could have far-reaching consequences, not only for Kachin State but also for the broader resistance movement against the junta.

Junta steps up conscription drive

The Myanmar junta has escalated its reliance on conscription to replenish dwindling troop numbers, sending poorly trained recruits to frontline battles where casualty rates remain alarmingly high.

Recruits from the first batch under the conscription law were deployed to Rakhine State after completing their training. According to sources, 84 of over 100 conscripts from this group were killed in action during December's battles. Families of the deceased have been notified by the junta, confirmed a source close to the military to *Ayeyarwaddy Times*. The junta's first conscription effort in the delta region trained

approximately 400 recruits across two military camps. Now, the eighth batch is undergoing training, with many expected to be deployed to volatile areas like Rakhine and Ayeyarwady regions.

The rapid deployment of conscripts with minimal training has drawn sharp criticism. In one case, a hotel security guard was conscripted in mid-December while returning home. Less than a week later, his family was informed of his death on the frontline in Madaya, a conflict zone where clashes with People's Defense Forces (PDF) have intensified. A source close to the family stated, "He likely received no military training. When the notification of his death arrived, it had only been six days since he was conscripted."

As the AA-led forces advance into the Ayeyarwady Region, the junta is relying heavily on newly conscripted soldiers to bolster its defenses. Many of the junta's well-trained troops have already been diverted to the Rakhine frontline, leaving battalions in Ayeyarwady in a precarious state.

While the junta has not officially conscripted women, reports indicate that local officials have targeted women in Sagaing Region. In December, 70 people, including young women, were forcibly recruited in Ye-U Township. This conscription drive led to mass displacement, with two-thirds of the township's population fleeing to avoid arrest. Although the arrests have reportedly subsided in January, last month's conscripts are expected to be sent to the frontlines by summer, according to junta sources.

The junta's strategy of deploying inadequately trained conscripts reflects the severe strain on its military forces. The high casualty rates among these recruits have fueled criticism and despair among affected families, raising questions about the sustainability of the junta's military operations.

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Republic of the Union of Myanmar National Unity Government



Lashi La

NUG ACTING PRESIDENT'S NEW YEAR STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

The National Unity Government (NUG) issued a statement on 1 January 2025 summarising the New Year State of the Union Address by Acting President Duwa Lashi La.

The summary of the address is as follows.

As we embrace the New Year of 2025, I extend warm wishes for good health and peace to all. The National Unity Government (NUG) firmly believes that the New Year will bring continued victories in our Spring Revolution, which is nearing its fourth year.

We express heartfelt gratitude and deep respect for the sacrifices and dedication of all revolutionary forces, grounded in the unwavering trust of the people. We also deeply honour the sacrifices made by the people. Today, some individuals serving sentences imposed by the NUG's judicial system have been granted amnesty. May they celebrate the New Year joyfully with their families.

We have achieved significant victories and milestones while also enduring political challenges. These political challenges, however, pale in comparison to the immense suffering and sacrifices borne by the people and the true cost in lives, blood and sweat driving our revolution forward. We solemnly pledge that, regardless of the political challenges we face, we will never engage in actions that disregard or compromise the interests of the people.

While carrying out revolutionary tasks, we have maintained our nation-building efforts. In the course of our revolutionary duties, we recognize that there have been instances where people have been impacted or harmed. We reaffirm that our Government does not operate under a mindset of "favouring those we love while oppressing those we dislike." We are committed to leading with fairness and responsibility, guided by the best interests of the people.

Our revolutionary efforts are guided by principles and systems that ensure that we are moving forward

with integrity and purpose. We are striving to build a foundation where good policies and good individuals work hand in hand to ensure that the right people are in the right positions.

We are committed to fulfilling our responsibilities in public administration without neglect. If there have been weaknesses or shortcomings, we humbly request the people to extend their understanding with generosity of spirit. We fully understand that there are limitations in the capacities and capabilities of the People's Defense Forces, People's Administration, and People's Security Forces operating within our revolutionary framework. We are committed to strengthening these ground-level forces and are actively implementing processes to enhance the effectiveness and resilience of our defense, administration, and security teams. Our collective dedication remains steadfast, with the unwavering determination to deliver the best outcomes for the people.

We emphasise the paramount importance of unity and collective strength for the Spring Revolution. The core essence of the revolution is the complete eradication of the military junta and the establishment of a new federal democratic nation. Issues such as authority, jurisdiction, and territorial sovereignty of individual groups are secondary when compared to the overarching goal of the people's liberation and wellbeing.

The responsibility to overthrow the military junta does not rest solely on the NUG but also with all ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs). The revolution is not merely about the liberation of a single ethnic group; it is about achieving nationwide freedom. Our efforts must expand broadly and inclusively until we reach that goal.

The NUG exists to fulfil its revolutionary duties entrusted by the people. We are not here to cling to positions or titles or to expand our roles or authority. We warmly welcome leaders who can wholeheartedly take on revolutionary responsibilities for the people. We respectfully invite such individuals to join us in fulfilling the people's mandate. We are always open to new leadership that can guide effectively and more expansively than the current structure allows.

We believe that 2025 must be the year that we completely remove Min Aung Hlaing and his military junta. To achieve this, it is time for all EROs and political forces to demonstrate more concrete and unified political and military collaboration. The NUG is committed to intensifying its efforts in alliance-building, strengthening partnerships, and working more effectively towards this shared goal.

The NUG reaffirms its readiness to adapt and implement internal reforms in alignment with the evolving dynamics of the revolution. We remain unwavering in our commitment to consistently deliver better revolutionary outcomes for the people and to address weaknesses and make necessary improvements. Therefore, we are actively preparing to implement reforms within our Government, including restructuring members according to their respective ministries.

Leadership and ground-level implementation must not be disconnected from each other. Leaders who must re-establish their presence within the country will continue to lead on the ground, while ministries essential for international relations will maintain their presence abroad as needed. This dual approach is being pursued to align leadership and operations with the demands of the revolution. Both are essential and must work in tandem to ensure the success of the revolution. We hope this fosters a broader perspective on the importance of unity and collaboration between domestic and international efforts.

I directly convey a message to the soldiers who continue to serve as protectors of Min Aung Hlaing and his military junta. The Myanmar Tatmadaw and the oppressive military junta are not synonymous; there are fundamental differences. The leadership of the Tatmadaw has become consumed by power and self-interest, cruelly oppressing and killing the people, and exhibiting weak and corrupt leadership. As a result, the Tatmadaw is seen by the people as an oppressive and violent institution. It is time for those within the Tatmadaw to recognize the gravity of the situation and take responsibility for restoring the institution's dignity by aligning it with the people's will and rejecting the junta's oppressive leadership. I appeal to all soldiers to reject their roles as enforcers of the junta and to stand instead with the people. This presents the best

opportunity to bring an end to the conflict in our country as swiftly as possible. I assure those who align with the people that the NUG will fully safeguard your lives and security. The time has come for soldiers to transform themselves into honourable defenders of the people and to contribute to the building of a new and just nation.

The NUG consistently strives to maintain and foster good relations with its neighbouring countries, including China, as well as with the international community. Recently, we learned that Chinese workers involved in investment projects in Myanmar had been unable to return to their homeland for 4-5 years due to the ongoing conflicts in our country. In response, our Government successfully facilitated the safe return of 129 Chinese nationals to reunite with their families before the Chinese New Year. We are pleased to have collaborated effectively to ensure the safety and wellbeing of these individuals. This effort reflects our commitment to fostering mutual understanding and cooperation, even amidst the challenges we face.

The NUG wishes to share some clear messages with the international community and our neighbouring countries. Our entire population has unequivocally demonstrated through their actions that they reject Min Aung Hlaing and the oppressive military junta. This collective will of the people reflects a decisive stance against dictatorship and a resolute demand for a federal democratic future. We urge our regional neighbours and the international community to recognize this reality and to align their positions and actions with the aspirations of the Myanmar people, who are striving for freedom, justice, and a new democratic nation.

The military junta is facing significant military defeats on the ground. I appeal to regional countries to cease providing support and resources to the junta, which is pushing the entire population into deeper suffering. I respectfully urge all nations to help ensure that the Myanmar military withdraws from politics and governance, and I sincerely request your collective support in this critical effort to pave the way for a peaceful and democratic future for our nation.

Min Aung Hlaing and the military junta, facing defeat on all fronts, are planning to hold a sham election in 2025 in collaboration with certain political

parties as a means of securing an escape route. However, this sham election will not resolve Myanmar's current political crisis or end the ongoing conflicts. Instead, it will exacerbate violence and deepen the suffering of the people. Therefore, I earnestly appeal to neighbouring countries and the international community not to provide any support or recognition to this sham election. It is crucial to stand with the people of Myanmar in rejecting this illegitimate process and to work toward genuine solutions that pave the way for a peaceful and democratic future.

The NUG and revolutionary forces are fully committed to resolving Myanmar's political crises and conflicts. To achieve this, it is imperative that the military's involvement in politics and governance comes to an end. In conclusion, we once again urge neighbouring countries and the international community to stand with us in supporting this essential demand. Your steadfast position on this matter is critical to ensuring a peaceful and democratic future for Myanmar.

NUG PARDONS 169 PRISONERS ON NEW YEAR'S DAY

The National Unity Government (NUG) announced the release of 169 prisoners on 1 January 2025, as part of a New Year's Day amnesty.

According to the NUG, the pardons were granted in the interest of the Spring Revolution, promoting public peace of mind, and upholding humanitarian principles.

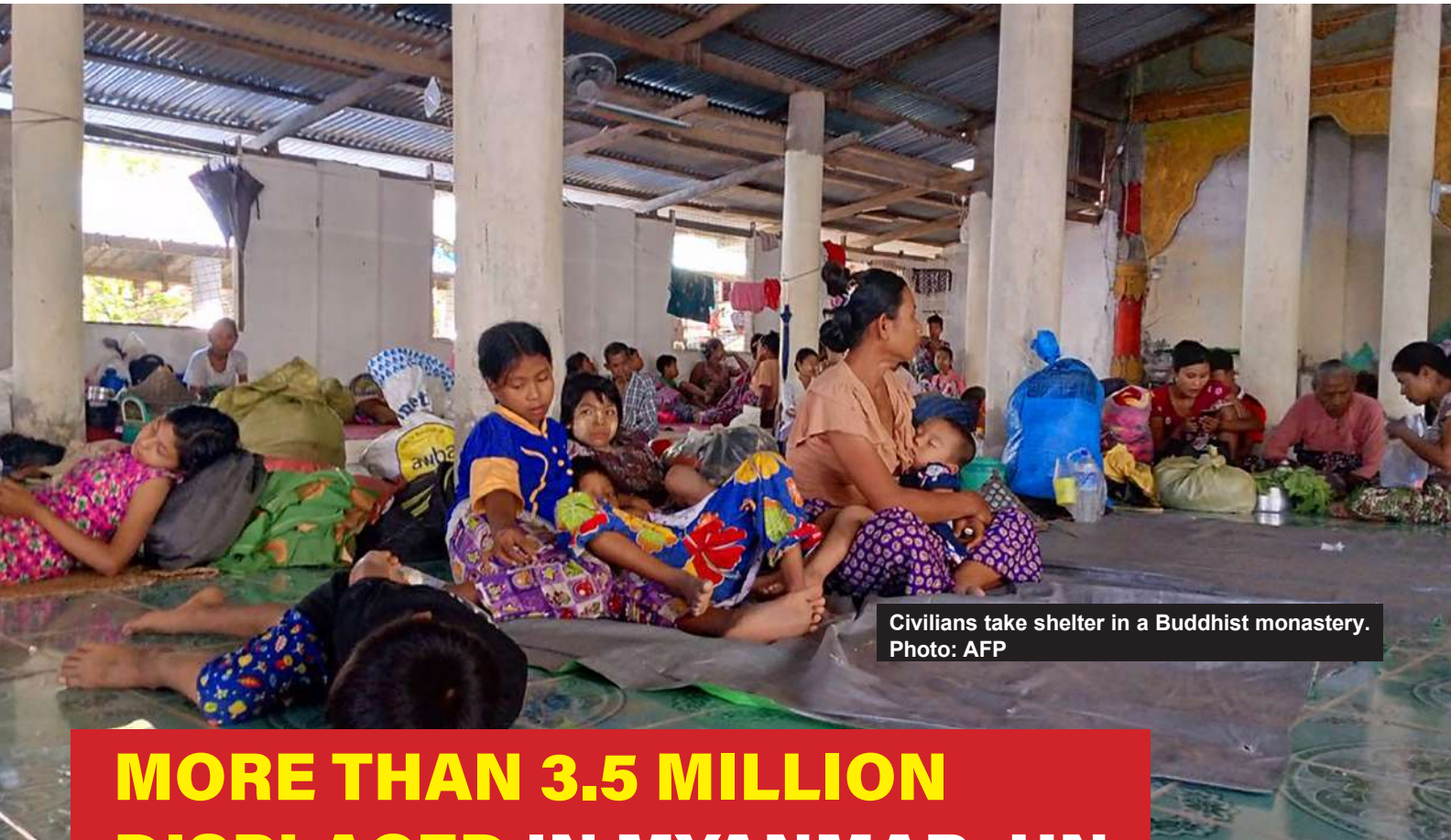
The amnesty was issued under Section 401 of sub section (1) of the Criminal Procedure Code, which allows the suspension or remission of sentences without conditions. For those not covered under Section 401 of sub section (1) of the Criminal Procedure Code, one-third of their sentences were reduced.

In his New Year's state of the union address on 1 January 2025, NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La stated, "Some convicted individuals sentenced by the

NUG Court have also been pardoned today. As you reunite with your families this New Year, may you find happiness and peace."

Section 401 of sub section (1) of the Criminal Procedure Code permits the President to suspend or remit sentences, with or without conditions agreed to by the convicted individual.

The NUG emphasized that this decision reflects its commitment to humanitarian values and fostering unity in the ongoing Spring Revolution.



Civilians take shelter in a Buddhist monastery. Photo: AFP

MORE THAN 3.5 MILLION DISPLACED IN MYANMAR: UN

More than 3.5 million people have been displaced by armed conflict in Myanmar, an increase of 1.5 million from last year, the United Nations said Friday, warning that the country's humanitarian crisis could worsen.

Since the military seized power in a 2021 coup, Myanmar has been rocked by fighting between numerous ethnic rebel groups and the army.

Those groups have battled the military since independence for autonomy and control of lucrative natural resources.

The conflict has spread from the borderlands to most regions nationwide, "forcing record numbers of people to flee their homes in search of safety and meeting their basic needs," the UN humanitarian agency OCHA said in a statement.

As of December 16, "it is estimated that over 3.5 million people -- more than six percent of the total population of 57 million -- across Myanmar are now displaced, approximately one-third of them children," OCHA said.

"This marks a staggering increase of nearly 1.5 million internally displaced persons compared to a year ago."

The agency said that the final days of 2024 had been marked by "intense fighting involving air strikes, drone attacks, artillery shelling, raids and arbitrary arrests."

It called the outlook for 2025 "grim," citing "an unprecedented humanitarian crisis fueled by escalating conflict, disasters, epidemics, widespread explosive ordnance and land mine contamination, and economic collapse."

"If these trends persist, the humanitarian situation will deteriorate further, leaving millions of people in urgent need of assistance," OCHA warned.

The United Nations estimates that 19.9 million people in Myanmar, or more than a third of the population, will need humanitarian aid in 2025.

OCHA has launched an appeal for \$1.1 billion in funding to reach 5.5 million people with "life-saving assistance" in 2025, but such appeals are chronically underfunded.

AFP



Photo: AFP

UN REPRESENTATIVE CALLS FOR ACTION TO UPHOLD CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN CONFLICT ZONES IN 2025

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict issued a statement on 31 December 2025, emphasizing the importance of upholding children's rights even in armed conflict situations.

The statement reads as follows.

The year 2024 marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes its Optional Protocol to prohibit the recruitment and use as soldiers of all children under eighteen years of age. What should have been a year of celebration in advancing fundamental rights of children, including during situations of armed conflict, has instead brutally demonstrated that children continue to bear the brunt of humanity's inability to seek peaceful resolution of manmade disputes.

Instead of stopping the practice, armed groups have increased recruitment and use of children for armed conflict purposes as attested in Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Lake Chad basin, Mozambique, the Sahel, Sudan, Somalia, Syria

and Haiti. Most of the impacted children were abducted and forcibly recruited. Majority of these children are girls, who have also suffered rape and sexual violence, and have been bought, sold and trafficked as if they were disposable commodities.

Armed forces are not lagging far behind. The increase in the use of military force by governments and regimes has wreaked havoc on children. Killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals are gearing to become—the two most prevalent violations against children in situations of armed conflict in 2024. Air strikes, rockets, missiles, and targeted attacks with the widespread use of explosive weapons in heavily populated areas, continued to wreak havoc in situations such as Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Gaza, the Sudan, Lebanon, Myanmar and Ukraine. The constant use of anti-personnel landmines, the disregard for the dangers posed by explosive ordnances have reached epic proportions, contaminating cities, towns and rural areas to such an extent that they alone are responsible for at least 30 percent of all children killed and maimed in conflict zones.

CORE DEVELOPMENTS

Children's age definition has been manipulated, thus breaking the letter and the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has led to increased forced marriages, the prohibition of girls to receive an education and the recruitment of boys into armed forces as seen, for example, in Afghanistan. Millions of children are being denied an education, for lack of provision of safe spaces where boys and girls can be shielded from wars and allowed to learn the skills needed to face their future and that of our humanity.

Instead of protecting children from the strife of conflict, in 2024, children have become the image of war. Perhaps there is no more tragic image than the faces of children who are being denied humanitarian access to lifesaving assistance, particularly in Gaza and in the Sudan.

"The cries of these children echo across conflict zones, but far too often, the world remains silent," said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba. "Their pain is a stain on our collective conscience. We must do better—because every moment we delay, another

child becomes just another number in the long list of conflict related casualties and violations in the children and armed conflict reports."

"The granting of safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to children, and responsible implementation of International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the elimination of wide impact explosives in populated areas, the prohibition of the military use of schools and the need to prohibit and eliminate anti-personnel landmines, are important commitments that can help children survive armed conflict when adults are not willing to commit to lasting peace."

"As we move into 2025, let us choose compassion over indifference and peace over war. Together, we can rewrite the stories of these children—not with fear and loss, but with healing and hope. Let us hear our own children: their requests are simple, they want peace, an education and the opportunity to heal, to grow and to hope. Let us make sure that we grant those wishes in 2025. Let us prove to them, that their wishes matter, that they matter," she concluded.

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UNICEF REPORT SAYS MYANMAR CONFLICT HAS DISPLACED NEARLY 1.3 MILLION CHILDREN BY END OF 2024

About 3.5 million people have been displaced by the conflict in Myanmar by the end of 2024, with nearly 40% of them—roughly 1.3 million—are children, according to a report released by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on December 5.

In 2025, 19.9 million people, including 6.4 million children, will need humanitarian aid, according to the UNICEF report.

Nearly 920,000 children are out of school and lack access to education, according to the report.

A statement released by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in December 2024, said that children across Myanmar have increasingly fewer opportunities to access safe education.

During the 2023-24 academic year, many children were reportedly out of school as a result of ongoing conflicts and were living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps.

According to the report, children make up three out of every 100 casualties caused by landmines and other explosive devices in Myanmar.

Furthermore, the mortality rate for children under five in Myanmar is the highest in Southeast Asia, at four per 100.

At least 650 children had been killed or injured in Myanmar's violence this year, UNICEF reported on November 21.

Kachin State-based civil society organizations reported on December 17 that during the fierce battle in Bhamo township of Kachin State, 10 children were killed by junta airstrikes and artillery shelling.

In 2024, the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC) said that junta airstrikes in Karenni State killed at least 20 children and injured 44 more.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), fighting in Rakhine State and Paletwa town in Chin State has caused the displacement of around 570,000 people. Out of 1,500 displaced persons, almost 800 children in Kalay Township in Sagaing Region are in grave danger because of a food shortage.

Similarly, a lack of proper diet and hygiene supplies is causing skin-related diseases in children in conflict zones in Rakhine State.



A released prisoner is welcomed by her family and friends. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA GRANTS AMNESTY TO 5,864 PRISONERS ON 77TH INDEPENDENCE DAY

Myanmar's military government announced the release of 5,864 prisoners, including 180 foreign nationals, serving sentences in various prisons and detention centres, under a general amnesty to commemorate the country's 77th Independence Day on 4 January.

According to Order No. 1/2025, the amnesty was granted as part of the 77th Independence Day celebrations to promote public peace and for humanitarian reasons. Prisoners released under Section 401, Sub-section (a) of the Criminal Procedure Code pledged to serve the remainder of their sentences alongside any new penalties if convicted again.

The State Administration Council (SAC), as the junta refers to itself, stated that the decision was intended to "honour the peace in people's hearts and minds."

The amnesty included 144 inmates serving life sentences, whose punishments were reduced to 15 years, as well as 180 foreign prisoners who were granted pardons and are destined to be deported.

The junta's separate statement on state media highlighted that the foreign detainees were released

"on bilateral relations and humanitarian grounds." Further details regarding their deportation were not provided.

In Yangon, families and friends of detainees gathered outside Insein Prison, anxiously waiting for their loved ones' release. By noon, prison authorities had begun releasing the prisoners.

Authorities in Myanmar traditionally release prisoners to mark the country's Independence Day, which celebrates its liberation from British colonial rule on 4 January, 1948. The day is usually celebrated with street games, public marches, and festivities, though such celebrations have been subdued since the 2021 military coup.

Despite the latest amnesty, the exact number of political prisoners released remains uncertain.

The Political Prisoners Network of Myanmar (PPNM) reported that, based on initial information, 37 political detainees were freed from five prisons—Daik-U, Pyay, Meiktila, Maubin, and Paungde—as part of the Military Council's 2025 Independence Day release.

As of 12:00 pm on 4 January, the information confirmed the release of 37 political prisoners from these locations.

"We will have to announce it soon as it is currently under verification. Based on the current situation, it can be roughly estimated that less than 10 percent of political prisoners will be released," said Ko Thaik Tun Oo, a committee member of the Political Prisoners Network of Myanmar (PPNM).

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reports that, as of 3 January, 2025, over 28,000 people have been arrested for political reasons since the coup, with 21,499 still in detention.

Among those still imprisoned is Nobel laureate and ousted State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, serving a 27-year sentence after being convicted of multiple charges, which she denies.

The international community continues to call for her release, along with that of former President Win Myint and all political prisoners.

The AAPP urged intensified global pressure on Myanmar's Military Council, emphasizing the need for an immediate and unconditional release of all political detainees.

22 POLITICAL 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.



MYANMAR JUNTA ENACTS CYBERSECURITY LAW, IMPOSING PENALTIES FOR UNAUTHORIZED VPN USE

The military junta enacted the Cybersecurity Law on 1 January, introducing prison sentences and fines for individuals establishing or providing virtual private network (VPN) services without permission.

Under the law, those found guilty could face imprisonment ranging from one to six months, fines between 1 million kyats and 10 million kyats, or both. Additionally, any evidence related to such offenses will be confiscated.

The law also imposes strict penalties for other cyber offenses, including online gambling without permits, cyber abuse, and unauthorized use of digital currency. For instance, anyone establishing an online gambling system without approval faces imprisonment of six months to one year, fines between 5 million and 20 million kyats, or both, along with the confiscation of assets.

The junta claims the law is necessary to investigate cybercrimes effectively and protect the nation's sovereignty and stability from cyber threats, attacks, and misuse of electronic technologies.

However, critics argue that the law is another measure to suppress freedom of expression and internet access. The junta restricted internet usage following

the 2021 military coup and blocked Facebook, leading many users to rely on VPNs to bypass these controls.

"The junta is exerting control in areas under its rule, but it cannot enforce the same restrictions everywhere. This is just a means of targeting and controlling individuals," said U Kyi Myint, a lawyer.

The law also mandates that cybersecurity and digital platform service providers with more than 100,000 users in Myanmar must register. The regime reserves the right to inspect or control these businesses as deemed necessary.

Legal experts have criticized the Cybersecurity Law for its overreach.

"There is no rule of law. They enact laws arbitrarily to tighten their grip. Citizens must remain vigilant about these developments," said another lawyer.

The law includes provisions to penalize those who electronically distribute, transmit, or sell information deemed unsuitable for public viewing, with penalties mirroring those for unauthorized VPN use.

Critics say the law is yet another step to restrict digital freedom in Myanmar, further isolating the population and silencing dissent.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA ARRESTS 17 FOR FUEL TRADE WITH ETHNIC ARMED GROUP AREAS, SEIZES VEHICLES AND SUPPLIES

The Myanmar junta announced on 2 January that it had arrested 17 individuals involved in importing and selling fuel to areas controlled by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

The military junta stated that the arrests were made in accordance with Section 5 of the Essential Supplies and Services Law, and further action will be taken.

The statement added that the suspects were arrested for transporting oil using diversion routes due to security restrictions in some areas of Sagaing and Mandalay Regions, storing oil in some villages in Sagaing Region and transporting it to Sagaing Region and Kachin and Northern Shan states for sale.

The junta also announced that the oil storage facilities were located near the Kantalu joint checkpoint in Nyaungpinzin village, Sagaing Township.

The statement said that during the operation, authorities seized four 22-wheeled fuel tankers, one fuel tanker trailer, three 20-wheeled fuel tankers, one

12-wheeled fuel tanker, three 10-wheeled fuel tankers, one eight-wheeled fuel tanker, three six-wheeled fuel tankers, five light trucks, one Toyota van, over 60,000 gallons of various types of fuel, and cash derived from fuel transactions.

The statement also stated that the seized vehicles and fuel will be inspected and dealt with in accordance with legal procedures.

The junta also stated that the fuel was being sold to support jade mining in Hpakant, gold and amber mining in Danai, gold mining in Kawlin and along the Chindwin River, gold extraction in Thabeikkyin, Singu Township, and gemstone mining in Mogok—areas controlled by the KIA, TNLA, and People Defense Forces (PDF).

The military regime issued a directive last November to halt fuel rations to areas controlled by ethnic armed groups and revolutionary forces, and is currently implementing fuel cuts in those regions.



Civilians seek to take shelter from the fighting in Bago. Photo: KNU

MYANMAR JUNTA DRONE STRIKE ON HINDU TEMPLE KILLS SEVEN CIVILIANS IN BAGO'S PHYU TOWNSHIP

A drone attack by Myanmar's military junta on a Hindu temple in Phyu Township, Taungoo District, Bago Region, left seven civilians dead and seven others injured on 31 December, according to an official from the Phyu Township People's Defense Force (PDF).

The attack followed days of clashes east of Zeyawadi town in Phyu Township, where fighting between junta forces and resistance groups had persisted since 27 December. The PDF reported that 19 junta troops were killed during the confrontations.

The drone strike targeted the Hindu temple in Ram Nagar village, Amae Khaung Village Tract, an area with no prior fighting, the PDF official stated.

"This was a public area where Hindus live and worship. The junta dropped the first bomb by drone, and as people rushed to aid the injured, a second bomb

was released, killing seven civilians on the spot," the official said.

Details about the victims' identities and the condition of the injured remain unavailable.

In response, the Myanmar Hindu Union condemned the attack in a 1 January statement, accusing the junta of deliberately targeting a civilian area.

The organization described the attack as a gross violation of human rights and international humanitarian law, calling it an inhumane act.

The statement urged human rights organizations, the international community, and global religious leaders to take action against the junta, emphasizing the need to hold it accountable for its crimes against religious and ethnic minorities.



MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES DESTROY HOSPITAL AND SCHOOL IN RAKHINE'S MYEBON TOWNSHIP, KILLING ELDERLY WOMAN

Myanmar's military launched airstrikes targeting a hospital and a school in Kamhtaunggyi town, Myebon Township, northern Rakhine State, in the early hours of 3 January, resulting in the death of an elderly woman. The area is controlled by the Arakan Army (AA).

The attack occurred at approximately 1 am, with a junta jet fighter dropping three bombs in two rounds of strikes, completely destroying the hospital and school.

The victim, identified as 70-year-old Daw Ma Thein from Ywar Thit Ward in Kamhtaunggyi, sustained critical injuries and died while receiving medical treatment, according to Arakan Princess Media.

Locals reported that the hospital had been closed since November 2023 due to ongoing clashes but was

targeted under suspicion that AA forces were present. A nearby school was also destroyed in the airstrikes.

The Arakan Army announced on 15 February that it had captured Myebon Township, located over 100 miles from Ann town, as part of its ongoing efforts to gain control of Rakhine State.

The AA currently controls 14 of Rakhine's 17 townships, with the junta retaining Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Munaung, key locations for Chinese-backed projects.

The AA has called on junta forces to surrender as their operations to take full control of the region continue.



On parade. Photo: KNU

INTENSE FIGHTING CONTINUES AT MYANMAR JUNTA'S KATAINGTI CAMP IN KAREN STATE

Fierce clashes persist at the Myanmar junta's Kataingti camp along the Hpapun-Kamamaung road in Hpapun Township, Karen State, according to a military source on the ground.

The battle, which began in mid-December, escalated after the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) launched attacks on the camp.

The daily fighting had intensified by the end of December, prompting the junta to rely heavily on airstrikes.

"Ground support has been cut off. They are primarily calling in air support to prevent further escalation," the source said on 2 January.

The camp, strategically important for the junta, is held by approximately 300 troops. It is jointly manned by the junta and Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion No. 1013, led by Commander Hla Kyaing.

Hla Kyaing's forces, however, have reportedly allied with the KNLA to attack the Kataingti camp.

"Commander Hla Kyaing is cooperating with the KNLA to fight the junta camp," the source said.

Airstrikes have stopped recently, but fighter jets continue to patrol the area. "We occasionally see aircraft hovering, but there have been no attacks yet," the source said.

The ongoing battle follows a series of KNLA-led assaults in November and December that captured four junta posts along the Hpapun-Kamamaung road, including Ku-Seik, Ma-Htaw, Taungthonelone, and Sin-Swe (Htee Ka Saw Me).

The Kataingti and Kamamaung security camps are the only remaining junta positions along the route.

Meanwhile, junta vehicles have reportedly arrived in Kamamaung town to reinforce their troops amid the ongoing clashes at Kataingti camp.



Photo: Supplied

JUNTA CONDUCTS AIRSTRIKES ON HSENI AMID MNDAA NEGOTIATIONS

Junta forces have reportedly carried out airstrikes on Hseni town in northern Shan State despite ongoing negotiations between the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the junta facilitated by the Chinese government.

According to Ying Hlyan Han, spokesperson for the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF), the junta conducted an aerial bombing near Hseni, a town under MNDAA control, around 11 pm on 1 January.

A local source close to the MNDAA reported damage to residential properties, though the extent of the destruction remains unverified.

In its 4 September statement, the MNDAA reaffirmed its commitment to self-defence while advocating for a political resolution to conflicts through cooperation with China.

Negotiations between the MNDAA and the junta are ongoing, with a meeting held recently on 18 December in Kunming, Yunnan Province.

However, talks reportedly stalled after the junta demanded the return of Lashio, which the MNDAA rejected.

The next round of discussions is scheduled for 15 January, according to Kokang news reports cited by VOA Burmese.

The MNDAA currently controls several towns in northern Shan State, including Lashio, Laukkai, Chinshwehaw, Monekoe, Hpawnghseng, Konkyan, Panglon, Kunlong, Hseni, Tamoenye, and Pang Hseng, taken during the Operation 1027 campaign in 2023-2024.

Residents in the region fear the recent airstrikes could reignite conflict despite the MNDAA's continued adherence to its ceasefire.

"The situation remains tense, and the airstrikes undermine efforts toward a peaceful resolution," said a local observer.



PDF fighters. Photo: Supplied

MILITARY COUNCIL ABANDONS KUTAW CAMP AFTER THREE YEARS

Local resistance forces report that junta troops stationed at the Kutaw military camp, about nine miles north of Butalin town in Sagaing Region, abandoned the base on the morning of 1 January after more than three years of occupation.

The Kutaw military base, which housed around 30 soldiers and police officers, was heavily fortified with trenches, bunkers, and defence towers. It is located approximately 30 miles from the Northwestern Region Military Command Headquarters at Monywa, Sagaing Region.

“On 31 December, a column from the Northwestern Command Headquarters reached Kutaw. The next morning, all personnel were taken back to Butalin town,” said a member of the People’s Defence Force (PDF) in Butalin Township.

The retreating column was attacked by the PDF near Thatthlaing village using landmines, resulting in the death of one junta soldier, according to the Butalin Township PDF.

The camp, initially a regional police station, was converted into a military base after the military coup in 2021 when additional forces were deployed to the area.

Commenting on the withdrawal, a member of the Butalin Township People’s Administration said, “The weakened army, facing growing strength from revolutionary forces, chose to retreat to avoid further losses of personnel and weapons. However, they appear to be constructing a strong and well-equipped base in Butalin.”

With the abandonment of the camp, villagers from Kutaw, who have been in displaced for nearly three years, are reportedly preparing to return home.

Meanwhile, the junta column remains stationed in Butalin town, causing villagers from nearby areas such as Liaw Te and Htantan to flee amid fears of intensified conflict.



Myanmar-India border. Photo: AFP

INDIAN ARMY CLOSES TRADE ROUTE NO.2 BRIDGE, RESTRICTS CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT WITH MYANMAR

The Indian Army, specifically the Assam Rifles, has closed the bridge on Trade Route No. 2, which connects Zokhawthar in India's Mizoram State with Rihkhawdar in Myanmar's Chin State. Border residents report increased inspections for those entering and exiting the area.

The bridge, a vital link for cross-border travel, was closed on 1 January 2025, without prior notice.

Security has also been tightened at other checkpoints, including Tlangsam, Reiek Tlang, Mei Bawk, and Vai Lui Kai.

"To enter Mizoram from Myanmar, individuals must present identification and supporting documents. Police fill out a form, and the Assam Rifles then photograph, fingerprint, and issue an entry permit before allowing passage," a Myanmar border resident said.

The entry permits, seen by Mizzima, include personal details like name, father's name, date of birth, and purpose of travel. They allow the holder to stay within 10 kilometers of the border for a maximum of seven days.

Indian citizens crossing into Myanmar, primarily for shopping or visiting Rih Lake, must be residents of Mizoram's Champhai District and carry a valid Aadhaar card.

Transit is restricted to 6.00 am–3:30 pm local time, and the movement of goods is also limited, a border resident said.

A defense official from the Hualngo region, under the People's Administration of Chin State, stated that Indian authorities did not notify them about the restrictions. Temporary recommendation letters are currently being issued by the local administration to facilitate public movement.

"I don't know how long this closure will last. When I inquired, the Indian Army said they were acting under orders to suspend the Free Movement Regime (FMR) agreement between the two countries," a trader said.

The closure impacts border communities dependent on the trade route for livelihood.

Myanmar refugees may also face additional challenges. The shared ethnic and cultural ties between communities on both sides could suffer, affecting social, educational, health, and religious interactions.

The India-Burma border, demarcated in 1826, allowed ethnic groups within 25 miles (40 kilometers) to travel freely without visas to preserve their daily lives. However, the Free Movement Regime (FMR) was suspended in 2024 by the Indian government, citing concerns over security, drug trafficking, illegal trade, and unauthorized migration.

Myanmar shares a 1,643-kilometer border with India's Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram states.



Photo: Esmonde Yong

MALAYSIA EXPELS TWO BOATS FERRYING ABOUT 300 MYANMAR MIGRANTS

Malaysia said Saturday it expelled two boats ferrying about 300 undocumented migrants from Myanmar from the country's waters.

The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) said the boats were located two nautical miles (3.7 kilometres) southwest of the northern resort of Langkawi late Friday evening.

"MMEA provided assistance, including food and clean drinking water, before expelling the boats out to the national maritime border to continue their journey," Director-General Mohd Rosli Abdullah said in a statement.

"We are also working closely with Thai authorities to obtain additional information on the movements of these boats."

On Friday Malaysian police detained almost 200 suspected Rohingya migrants from Myanmar after their boat ran aground in Langkawi.

The Rohingya experience persecution in their predominantly Buddhist homeland of Myanmar, with many fleeing to affluent, Muslim-majority Malaysia or refugee camps in Bangladesh.

They often endure harrowing, months-long sea journeys to arrive in Malaysia by boat or sneak into the country via its porous border with Thailand.

If caught, they are often sent to detention centres that rights groups say are typically overcrowded and filthy.

AFP



THAILAND DENIES ALLEGATIONS THAT THAI BANKS FACILITATE MYANMAR JUNTA'S ARMS PURCHASES

Thailand has denied allegations from the United Nations that some Thai banks are assisting the Myanmar junta in purchasing weapons, stating that no evidence has been found.

The Bank of Thailand and the Anti-Money Laundering Office jointly announced on December 30 that Thai banks were not being used as intermediaries in the junta's arms transactions.

Although the investigation uncovered financial transfers between individuals named in the report and Thai banks, it found no evidence linking these transactions to the junta's weapons purchases.

In a report published in June 2024, UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar Tom Andrews stated that businesses registered in Thailand transferred \$120 million through Thai banks during the 2023 fiscal year to procure weapons and military equipment for the Myanmar junta.

The report also alleged that some Thai banks served as intermediaries in facilitating these military purchases.

In response, the Thai government formed a special investigation team in July after Thai banks claimed they were unable to verify all transactions related to the junta's arms purchases.

The Bank of Thailand and the Anti-Money Laundering Office subsequently conducted months-long investigations into accounts and transactions in Thai banks, prompted by the UN's report.

Their joint statement emphasized that the Thai financial system must not be used for money laundering, terrorism financing, weapons of mass destruction purchases, or military operations leading to human rights violations.

While Thai banks are adhering to stringent procedures, the Bank of Thailand and the Anti-Money Laundering Office acknowledged a need for improved oversight in the financial sector.

Tom Andrews' report indicated that payments via Thai banks for junta-related purchases rose from over \$60 million in the 2022-23 fiscal year to more than \$120 million in the 2023-24 fiscal year (up to March), doubling within one year.

Over the past two years, 16 banks from 7 countries reportedly provided financial services for the Myanmar junta's arms purchases. Among these, Thailand's Siam Commercial Bank (SCB) was the largest participant.

SCB was alleged to have facilitated over \$5 million in military-related payments by the end of March 2023. However, SCB issued a statement on June 28 denying the claims, asserting that after reviewing its records, it found no evidence of transactions related to weapons purchases.



Young Force UG carry out the attack.
Photo: Supplied

YOUNG FORCE UG GROUP CLAIMS FATAL ATTACK ON MYANMAR JUNTA MEMBERS IN PAKOKKU TOWNSHIP

The Young Force UG group reported the deaths of four junta members following an armed attack in Pakokku Township, Magway Region.

The incident occurred on 30 December when the group targeted a vehicle traveling from the gate of the industrial zone to the downtown area.

According to a member of the Young Force UG group, the ambush took place at approximately 4:15 pm, about 300 meters from the industrial zone gate.

"The shooting happened near the gate. We are strategically deployed across the city and monitor operations to execute such attacks," the group member said.

The group also reported seizing four MA-3 rifles, eight magazines, 168 bullets, and a mobile phone from the scene, suggesting that the vehicle's occupants were likely military personnel.

"This was a mission carried out in town. Although we left the bodies at the scene and couldn't confirm their identities, the weapons they carried, specifically the MA-3 rifles, indicate they were soldiers," the comrade said.

Local sources reported that following the attack, junta forces swiftly responded by blocking city entrances and exits, conducting thorough inspections, and detaining residents near the incident site.

Revolutionary forces claim that while the junta retains control over most parts of Pakokku, revolutionary groups dominate areas outside the city limits.

This incident follows a similar attack reported on 15 November, when revolutionary forces targeted junta troops stationed in East Chaukkan village, Pakokku Township. That operation also resulted in casualties among the junta forces.



Yonelay. Photo: Facebook

CAR BOMB ATTACK TARGETS SINGER YONELAY'S VEHICLE IN YANGON

A car belonging to singer Yonelay was hit by a bomb blast on Pyapon Street, Sanchaung Township, Yangon, on 30 December at around 9:00 am, according to a local source speaking to Mizzima. The explosion also damaged a nearby vehicle and left one person injured.

"There were two bomb blasts this morning. An explosion hit the singer's car and another vehicle parked nearby. One person, reportedly the singer's brother-in-law, was injured," the source said.

However, independent confirmation of the injured person's identity has not yet been obtained.

Junta troops arrived at the scene following the attack, blocked both sides of the road, and began an investigation. The road remains closed as of the afternoon.

"Around 1 pm, another explosion occurred. It's possible they discovered an unexploded bomb while

inspecting. With the road closed and investigations ongoing, the details are still unclear," said the source.

The night before the attack, military personnel were already patrolling Pyapon Street based on reports of a bomb threat, according to local residents.

Mizzima is investigating further to confirm details about the car bomb attack and the injuries sustained. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, and urban guerrilla forces contacted by Mizzima denied involvement.

Singer Yonelay, who has faced public criticism for his cooperation with the junta after the 2021 coup, is known for actively participating in military-organized events.

Revolutionary forces have repeatedly urged the public to enact social punishment against him due to his perceived support for the junta.



CHIN BROTHERHOOD ALLIANCE MARKS FIRST ANNIVERSARY, REPORTS 1,000 BATTLES AND HEAVY LOSSES

Nearly 250 members of the Chin Brotherhood Alliance (CBA) have been killed, and around 1,000 injured in clashes with the Myanmar military since the coup four years ago, according to CBA Military Chairman Thang Chawn Phe.

During an online event marking the alliance's first anniversary, Thang Chawn Phe reflected on the group's achievements and challenges since its establishment on 30 December 2023.

"Our forces have fought alongside allies in Chin State, as well as in Magway and Sagaing Regions, and the Yaw areas," he stated.

In its inaugural year, the CBA engaged in over 1,000 battles, including operations to seize towns and junta camps. Notable successes include the capture of four major towns—Kyindwe, Matupi, Mindat, and Kanpetlet while current operations target Falam.

The alliance reported seizing approximately 1,000 weapons, capturing 600 junta personnel, and rescuing 30 political prisoners. However, the battles for these towns over the past year came at a cost, with 100 members killed and 400 injured.

The anniversary event featured speeches from key figures such as Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) Acting President Duwa Lashi La and Deputy Foreign Minister U Moe Zaw Oo. Revolutionary organizations and allied groups also participated, with messages of support from the Chief Minister of Mizoram State in India.

Beyond its military role, the CBA is actively involved in public administration, education, healthcare, and humanitarian efforts. It is also drafting a constitution for Chin State and promoting reconciliation among Chin organizations with differing perspectives.

The alliance reaffirmed its commitment to achieving liberation from military rule and establishing a federal democratic system that guarantees equality and self-determination for Chin nationals.

The Chin Brotherhood Alliance comprises six organizations: the Chin National Organization (CNO), Zomi Federal Union (ZFU), Chin National Council (Mindat), Mara Territorial Committee, Chinland Defence Force-Kanpetlet, and Chinland Defence Force-Matupi (Brigade 1). It collaborates politically with the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC).



CHRISTMAS GIFT FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTORS OF MYANMAR: CZECH PARLIAMENTARIANS REFUSE JUNTA REPRESENTATIVES AND DISREGARD PLANNED SHAM VOTING

Just before the Christmas, the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Parliament of the Czech Republic adopted two significant resolutions regarding the support of the pro-democratic forces of Myanmar. The main point being not to invite SAC (State Administration Council) representatives to official events in the Czechia and to disregard the sham voting planned by SAC.

"I strongly believe that in the globalized world the democratic forces represent a sympathetic approach towards events and people. We should care about others, not only about our own selves, therefore I supported the resolutions reinforcing freedom for the country that I still keep in my heart," says MP Ing. Jarmila Levko who is an initiator of the Resolutions in the Committee.

It is worth mentioning that the resolutions represent several significant deeds (among others):

- They strongly discourage Czech national authorities to invite the representatives of the junta (e.g. Myanmar Embassy of Prague) to any official events, and acknowledges that such meetings are misused to legitimize the propaganda of the infamous junta in the country. Here the Czech parliamentarians show an exceptional understanding of the propaganda machine applied to create the impression that a member state

of the European Union, Czechia, accepts the SAC rule by spreading the manipulative pictures of the junta representatives with unaware representatives of the Czech Republic.

- They call for the release of political prisoners in the Myanmar and they warn against accepting the planned national election in Myanmar; moreover they encourage democratic Western politicians to meet with NUG representatives,

- They also remind the public about the long friendship between the Czech Republic and democratic Burma rooted in president Václav Havel's friendship with later Aung San Suu Kyi and his deep concern for human rights and freedom in the country.

The causal press briefing on Resolutions of MP Jarmila Levko and NUG representative U Linn Thant with journalists and civil society actors on 20.12.2024, took place at the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament.

"The Resolutions are also a great example of advocacy dialogue between the civil society and political representation in our country," said Ondřej Čásl (Integria NGO) at the meeting, "and it sends flagrant signals of our support for democratic values not only to Myanmar and the international community, but also to us here in Central Europe, where such symbolic gestures of sympathy and admiration for freedom and human dignity become very needed again," he continued.

"The Myanmar peoples' struggle for freedom and self-determination against a much stronger enemy has only one equivalent in the current world: it is the struggle of Ukrainians against the Russian invasion," Igor Blažević, long term human rights defender for Myanmar, added.

"The Czech Republic has been the first country to invite NUG representatives to an official event, therefore we regard it as our close friend and a supporter of Myanmar freedom and democracy," U Linn Thant wrapped up.

Resolutions at official web of the Chamber of Deputies of Parliament of the Czech Republic are to be found here:

176 <https://www.psp.cz/sqw/text/text2.sqw?idd=249781>

177 <https://www.psp.cz/sqw/text/text2.sqw?idd=249782>

Photo Caption: Member of Parliament Mrs. Jarmila Levko (third from left) at a press briefing with Representative of NUG Mr. Linn Thant at the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, Prague 20.12.2024

AMID TAIWAN TENSION, JAPAN RAISES ALARM OVER ESCALATING CHINESE MILITARY ACTIVITIES

SUN LEE



Japan on joint military exercises.
Photo: AFP

Tensions between Beijing and Tokyo have been steadily escalating in recent years, with Japan's foreign minister expressing deep concerns over China's increasing military assertiveness.

This growing friction stems from a series of geopolitical flashpoints, including territorial disputes, economic restrictions, and the detention of a Japanese national, alongside broader regional anxieties over China's activities near Taiwan and the Philippines.

These developments underscore the fragile state of relations in the Indo-Pacific and highlight the challenges to regional stability from Chinese aggression.

Japan and China share a complex history marked by periods of conflict, cooperation, and competition.

In recent decades, their relationship has been shaped by territorial disputes, particularly over the Senkaku Islands (referred to as Diaoyu by China) in the East China Sea.

This long-standing disagreement has been a persistent source of tension, with both nations asserting sovereignty over the uninhabited islands, which are surrounded by resource-rich waters and vital shipping lanes.

The post-World War II period saw Japan adopting a pacifist constitution, refraining from building a large-scale military force.

However, China's rapid military expansion and assertive actions in the region have prompted Tokyo to rethink its defence policies.

This shift has been particularly evident in recent years, as Japan has taken steps to bolster its military capabilities and strengthen alliances with like-minded nations.

Economic tensions have added another layer to the strained relationship.

China's ban on Japanese seafood imports, imposed in response to Tokyo's release of treated wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant, has drawn criticism from Japanese officials.

Beijing's move not only disrupted Japan's seafood exports but also signalled China's willingness to leverage economic tools in geopolitical disputes.

Japan's foreign minister has called the ban "unjustified" and emphasised the safety of the wastewater release, which has been validated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Tokyo's frustration is compounded by the perception that China's actions are part of a broader strategy to exert economic pressure and influence.

Diplomatic relations were further strained by China's detention of a Japanese businessman earlier this year on allegations of espionage.

While the specifics of the case remain unclear, it has fueled unease in Japan and raised questions about the safety of Japanese nationals operating in China.

Tokyo has called for transparency and the immediate release of its citizen, but Beijing has remained firm, citing its legal procedures.

This incident has added to the mistrust between the two nations and heightened the perception of China's increasingly authoritarian approach to internal and external challenges.

Japan's concerns are not confined to its bilateral issues with China.

Beijing's growing military activities around Taiwan and the Philippines have further amplified regional anxieties.

The frequent incursions by Chinese military aircraft and naval vessels into Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ) are seen as provocative actions aimed at intimidating the self-governed island, which Beijing considers a breakaway province.

Japan views stability in the Taiwan Strait as critical to its security and economic interests.

The proximity of Taiwan to Japan's southernmost islands makes any escalation of tensions in the area a direct threat to Tokyo.

In recent statements, Japanese officials have reiterated their commitment to peace and stability in the region, emphasising the importance of international cooperation to counterbalance China's assertiveness.

Meanwhile, China's activities in the South China Sea, including near the Philippines, have also drawn international criticism.

Beijing's militarisation of artificial islands and harassment of Philippine vessels underscore its broader ambitions in the region.

These actions have led to closer defence ties between Japan and the Philippines, as both nations seek to enhance their capabilities to counter shared security challenges.

In response to China's growing military activities, Japan has taken several steps to strengthen its defence posture and regional alliances.

Tokyo has increased its defence budget, with plans to double it over the next five years, reflecting a significant shift in its post-war pacifist stance.

The funds will be used to modernise Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF), enhance missile defence

systems, and develop new capabilities such as cyber and space defence.

Japan has also deepened its security partnerships with key allies, including the United States, Australia, and India.

The Quad grouping, comprising these four nations, has emerged as a cornerstone of Japan's strategy to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific. Regular joint military exercises and defence technology collaborations are further strengthening these ties.

In addition, Japan has been working to expand its partnerships with Southeast Asian nations, recognising the shared concerns about China's actions in the South China Sea.

Tokyo's support for infrastructure development and capacity-building in the region is part of a broader effort to counterbalance Beijing's influence.

From Beijing's standpoint, its military activities and economic measures are framed as defensive responses to perceived threats from the United States and its allies, including Japan.

Chinese officials have accused Tokyo of aligning too closely with Washington and escalating tensions by increasing its military spending and participating in joint drills.

China's assertiveness is also driven by its long-term goal of reunifying Taiwan with the mainland.

While Beijing insists that its actions are aimed at safeguarding territorial integrity and regional stability, they are widely viewed as destabilizing by its neighbours.

The United States' role in the region is a critical factor in the Japan-China dynamic.

Washington's security alliance with Tokyo, established under the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty, remains the cornerstone of Japan's defence strategy.

The U.S. has also increased its military presence in the Indo-Pacific, conducting freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea and bolstering ties with regional allies.

While the U.S. has consistently affirmed its commitment to defending Japan and supporting Taiwan, its actions have also drawn sharp criticism from Beijing.

China views the U.S. presence as an attempt to contain its rise and undermine its sovereignty.

The growing tensions between Japan and China highlight the complexities of navigating a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan's foreign minister's concerns over China's military activities reflect not only bilateral issues but also broader regional dynamics involving Taiwan and the Philippines.

As both nations grapple with these challenges, the path forward will depend on a delicate balance of deterrence, diplomacy, and dialogue.

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



SHAKEN, NOT SILENCED

"I was born on the sixth of the 8th of the '88; the famous '88! And then my parents, especially my dad, he is part of the student movement in '88. I didn't know much about it until when I was 14, or even later, because I grew up with my grandmother. That's something they don't usually tell you! They just say, 'Your parents are away.'"

Hnin's story is intertwined with Burma's evolving history, shaped by her family's activism, personal growth, and the political upheavals that defined the country, according to the Insight Myanmar Podcast. Born just two days before the 8888 Uprising—a pivotal moment in Burma's pro-democracy movement that saw brutal suppression of student-led protests—her journey reflects both Burma's broader struggles and the personal challenges of her family's revolutionary past with her own identity and activism. Raised by her grandmother after her parents' involvement in the student protests forced them into exile, Hnin's early life was challenged by uncertainty and loss, as her parents' roles in the revolution and subsequent exile were kept from her for much of her childhood. The lack of parental presence, and without a clear understanding as to why, fostered in Hnin a sense of independence during her childhood that would shape her future.

Hnin's father had left when she was just 47 days old, followed by her mother a year later. The family's story was rarely discussed; the grandmother who raised her simply said her parents were "away." So she spent her childhood wondering why her parents were absent, which was difficult emotionally. Her parents' involvement in the 8888 protests and the subsequent

decision to leave the country was a history that Hnin only began to piece together during her teenage years.

Her relationship with her grandmother, a chef who ran a restaurant in Mawlamyine, became significant in shaping her sense of identity. Growing up in this environment, Hnin was immersed in the sensory experience of cooking and food, a theme that would significantly influence her career. She recalls waking up to the sounds of chopping meat and vegetables, and fondly remembers the street food vendors outside her windows that offered simpler, more evocative tastes of Burma.

When Hnin was 12, her mother arranged for her to travel to the refugee camp where they were living. The reunion with her parents was emotional and disorienting, as she had not had them in her life for so long, and also included meeting siblings she had known nothing of before. Life in the camp was marked by hardship, with makeshift housing, limited resources, and constant uncertainty. Hnin remembers the experience as necessitating both a cultural and psychological shift—having to adapt to life in the camps, meeting her younger sisters, and getting to know her parents. It was only in the camp that she came to understand what an important role her father had played in the 8888 student uprising. He was now the camp chairman and a screen printer making flags and protest signs; her mother, meanwhile, ran a tea shop. These roles were a testament to their resilience in the face of displacement.

In the early 2000s, after 14 years in the refugee camps, Hnin's family moved to Australia. In Melbourne, she faced new challenges—adapting to an entirely new culture, learning English, navigating an unfamiliar educational system, and finding her place in this new land. Meanwhile, Hnin's parents continued their activism, hosting the Burmese community every week at their home, which became a hub for conversation, politics, and cultural preservation—a practice that would later influence Hnin's approach to her own activism.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2024/12/14/episode-295-shaken-not-silenced>



Photo: AFP

JUNTA'S 2024 CENSUS SHOWS SLIGHT POPULATION DECLINE

Myanmar's latest census reveals a population of 51.3 million, slightly down from 51.5 million recorded in 2014, Reuters reported citing the junta-controlled media.

The census, conducted in October 2024, will be used to compile voter lists for upcoming elections that opposition groups have widely condemned as illegitimate.

The population count includes 32.2 million people who were directly counted and an estimated 19.1 million in areas inaccessible due to security and transportation challenges. To estimate populations in unreachable areas, the census relied on high-resolution satellite imagery.

The figure differs from World Bank estimates, which projected Myanmar's 2024 population at 54.5 million.

The 2024 Census excluded the country's Rohingya minority, as did the previous 2014 count.

The census comes amid ongoing political turmoil following Myanmar military's 2021 overthrow of the elected civilian government. The junta is currently fighting resistance groups and ethnic armed groups on multiple fronts while struggling to manage a deteriorating economy. Despite widespread criticism and opposition, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing maintains his commitment to organizing what he calls "free and fair elections" this year.

Last month, Myanmar's foreign minister briefed neighboring countries on election preparations, though the process has faced international criticism due to the exclusion and sidelining of opposition groups.



MIZZIMA
DAILY NEWS

SOCIAL MEDIA REACTIONS MIXED ON ACTIVISTS' NGWESAUNG DISCUSSION

A closed discussion held in Ayeyarwady Region's Ngwesaung, involving 88-generation student leader Mya Aye, Shan Nationalities League for Democracy chairperson Sai Nyunt Lwin, and over 30 participants including activists and politicians, came to public attention following Mya Aye's interview published on January 1 by Mizzima.

The Ngwesaung Statement consists of seven points, including the demand for the release of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and a temporary cessation of nationwide conflicts.

The statement declares that the country's immediate political need is "establishing a Federal Democratic Union" and emphasizes that a common political agreement aimed at federal democracy, acceptable to all stakeholders, is necessary to achieve this situation.

The closed discussion gained prominence after Mizzima's interview with Mya Aye, where he expressed concerns about the widespread slogan "No reconciliation talks over bloodshed" - which firmly states that due to the massive loss of civilian lives,

there should be no reconciliation negotiations with the military regime responsible for these deaths.

Social media responses reflected deeply divided opinions. Some users strongly opposed any negotiations, with one commenting that talks would only be possible "when the revolution gains the upper hand and the fascist army surrenders." Another user expressed skepticism about dialogue, citing trust issues with the junta.

However, support for Mya Aye's stance also emerged, with one user commenting, "Mya Aye's words are true. We should have dialogue. Many people are suffering. The conflict continues because of war-lobbying. We've become a country that celebrates death."

The Ngwesaung Discussion took place against the backdrop of ongoing conflict in Myanmar, where various approaches to achieving peace and democracy continue to be debated among different stakeholders.

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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