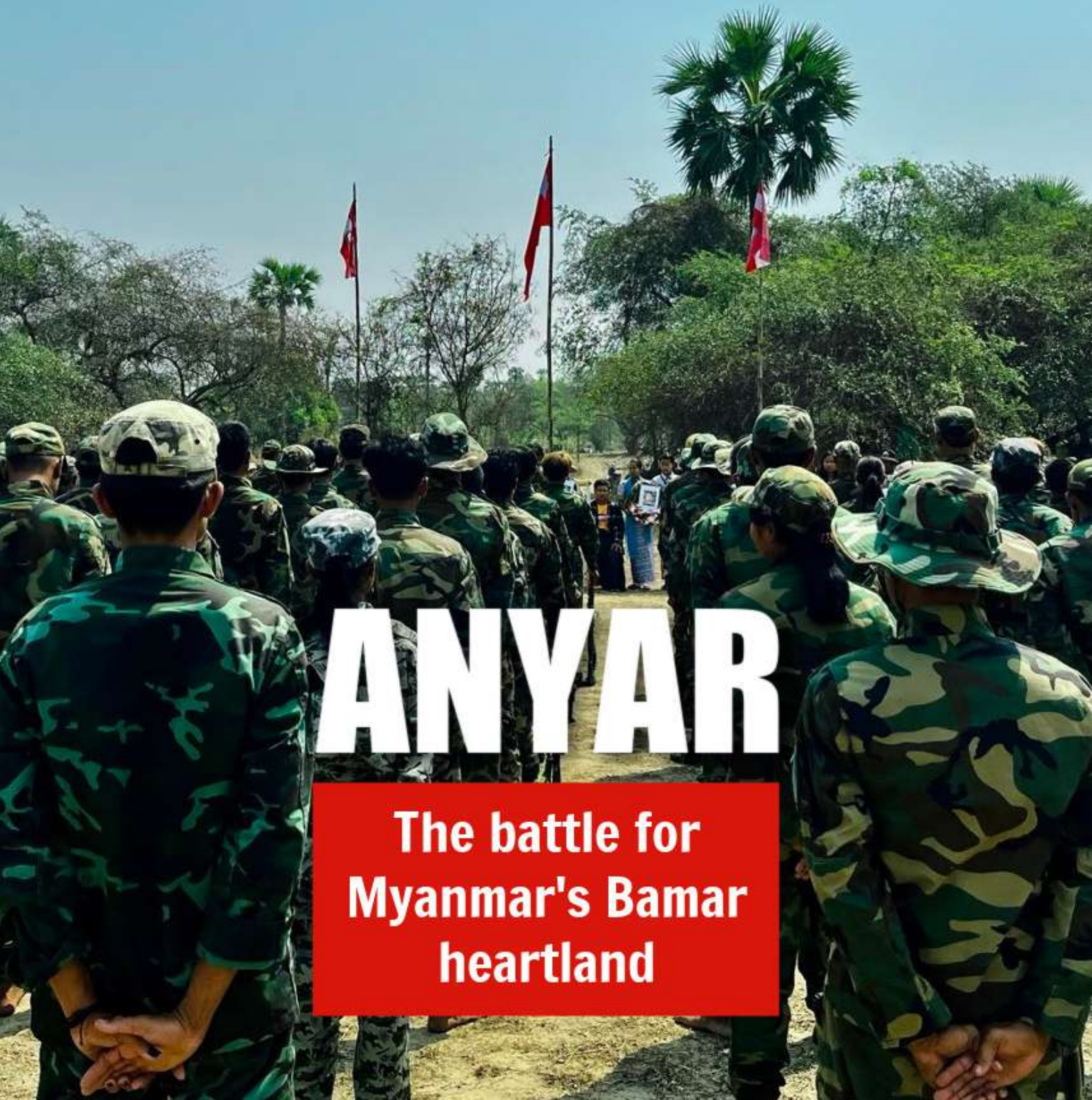


ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



ANYAR

The battle for
Myanmar's Bamar
heartland

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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.

SAD, SAD SITUATION

Imagine being freed from prison in an amnesty only to be re-arrested. How would you feel?

This was the situation for more than 10 political prisoners released earlier this month from Shwebo Prison in Sagaing Region have been re-arrested by police under Myanmar's military junta, according to a report on 14 January by the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM).

The situation is dire. Since October 2024, PPNM has observed a concerning pattern, with re-arrests predominantly targeting individuals freed from Shwebo Prison. Most of those detained again are middle-aged to elderly men, and their families have since lost contact with them.

Currently, the detainees are being held at the Shwebo Police Station and Mhan Thar Monastery, a site occupied by junta forces, according to PPNM representative Ko Thaik Tun Oo, who says there have been no official charges or clear explanations for the arrests.

"Some families, if financially able, have negotiated with junta officials to secure the release of their relatives. However, most remain imprisoned, unable to pay, highlighting a widespread pattern of extortion involving prison officials, police, and military personnel," Ko Thaik Tun Oo said.

PPNM emphasized that these arrests blatantly violate the political prisoners' freedom of movement, even after their formal release. The organization voiced concerns that others set for release this year may face similar re-arrests.

We should join Ko Thaik Tun Oo in condemning the actions, and urge the authorities to address these violations.

It is notable that extortion cases similar to this have been reported previously, including at Kalay Prison in Sagaing Region, where families were forced to pay for the release of their loved ones.

As of 13 January 2025, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reported that over 28,200 individuals have been arrested since the military coup on 1 February 2021, with more than 21,490 still in detention.

Imagine how those unjustly held must feel. This is yet one more reminder of the cruelty and brutality of the Myanmar military junta and its administration.

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Cover photo of resistance fighters in Sagaing Region by Hlwan Moe





People's Defence Force fighters in Sagaing Region.
Photo: Hlwan Moe

ANYAR

THE BATTLE FOR MYANMAR'S BAMAR HEARTLAND

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HLWAN MOE

For Ma Sandar and her family, trees provide a modicum of protection from both the sun and the fighter jets that prowl the skies of Anyar – Myanmar’s arid Bamar heartland.

For close to four years, the residents of Sagaing and Magway have endured the ravages of the Myanmar military’s brutal “four-cuts” strategy, coupled with a scorched earth policy and arbitrary arrests which have plunged this region into turmoil following the 2021 military coup.

Banbwe village resident Ma Sandar and others like her have had to step up to the plate to look after their families as many of the men have taken up arms against the illegal junta or are trying to make a living – leaving the women to take charge.

Anyar is a crucible, a battleground where Myanmar military forces appear to exercise their hatred of their fellow Bamar citizens who are a core component of the Spring Revolution resistance against the Bamar-led

junta. The fighting over the last three to four years has forced thousands of civilians like Ma Sandar and her family into a cycle of displacement and hardship.

Junta brutality

Continued air and ground offensives by the junta have left entire communities uprooted, typically camped out under trees or in forests, or in monastery grounds. Families are fleeing from one location to another, trying to escape advancing military columns.

For Ma Sandar and others, the danger is real. The people of Anyar are under attack from ground troops, artillery, and fighter jets and drones with a level of brutality at times hard to fathom. In one shocking incident in October 2024, troops entered Sipa village in Budalin Township and killed six villagers, beheading them and burning down over 300 homes. Villagers described horrific scenes where bodies were mutilated, heads were hung on walls, and individuals were dismembered. Some were even burned alive, according



Displaced people take shelter in the shade of trees in Sagaing Region. Photo: Hlwan Moe

to the Budalin Township People's Administration.

Tens of thousands of people are displaced in the Anya region. On the Kyaukhmaw-Nabutaw road in Yimarbin Township, Sagaing Region, vehicles and motorcycles fully loaded with belongings are parked by an acacia tree near a makeshift local rest house, providing temporary refuge. These civilians are constantly on the move, seeking safety from the junta's military operations and advancing columns in Yimarbin Township.

Since the February 2021 coup, displacement in Sagaing Region has escalated dramatically. Ongoing clashes between revolutionary forces and the military have forced many to leave their homes repeatedly in search of safety.

"Junta forces send out military columns and launch artillery attacks in areas where displaced people take shelter, forcing families to flee again to other locations.

They are trying to stay as far away as possible," said another woman from Banbwe village.

Ma Sandar's village of Banbwe, once a thriving community with over 500 households along the Monywa-Yargyi road, has become a site of prolonged suffering. Following the coup, junta soldiers and Pyu Saw Htee militia occupied the area. Over 1,000 residents from 450 households abandoned their homes and sought refuge in forested areas for close to three years.

Amid this turmoil, women are taking the lead in addressing daily challenges. According to Ma Sandar, families face severe food shortages and livelihood difficulties due to limited humanitarian assistance.

"Women are now leading efforts to support their families. If men venture to towns for work or trade, they risk arrest and abuse by junta soldiers. As a result, men stay home to cook while women take on



Women have had to take on extra responsibilities to help their families during the conflict displacement. Photo: Hlwan Moe

small businesses to sustain their families. In the past three years, we've only received aid from civil society organisations twice," Ma Sandar said.

It is easy for people like her to think the people's plight is forgotten but the crisis in Sagaing Region has drawn international concern. On 30 December, the UNHCR reported that approximately 120,000 people in Sagaing Region have been displaced due to junta air and ground operations. This number represents the highest displacement in Myanmar, where over 2 million people nationwide in urgent need of assistance. Sagaing and Magway often pop up in international reports.

Air raids drive displacement

Over the four years of Myanmar's Spring Revolution, the junta, facing defeats on multiple fronts, has increasingly relied on air power to carry out sustained bombing campaigns. These attacks have resulted in

significant civilian casualties and a sharp rise in the number of people fleeing their homes.

Facing difficulties in launching effective ground offensives due to the actions of the People's Defence Forces (PDF), the military has intensified its use of Russian-made UAVs and kamikaze drones in frontline operations. UAV drones are deployed for surveillance and air control, while kamikaze drones are designed for direct attacks, proving particularly effective in combat situations.

"With the junta unable to maintain dominance on the ground, airstrikes are becoming their primary tactic. Civilians must remain vigilant to the increasing threats from aviation," said the People's Security Officer of the Yinmabin District Battalion 12.

Drone deployment has upped the ante prompting new heights of fear amongst the civilians.



Children are under threat in the conflict between Myanmar junta forces and the resistance. Photo: Hlwan Moe

In Ye-U, Kanbalu, and Kani townships of Myanmar's central Anyar region residents are forced to seek shelter in forests during daytime hours to escape drone and air attacks.

Between 1 January and 31 October 2024, over 1,000 civilians were killed across the country due to junta airstrikes, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). Sagaing Region and Rakhine State reported the highest death tolls, with 119 and 159 fatalities respectively in these air strikes.

The reliance on air power reflects the junta's struggle to assert control on the ground.

Conflict set to expand in 2025

As Myanmar enters 2025, the military situation in the Anyar Region has intensified, with an influx of ethnic armed organizations such as the Kachin Independence

Army (KIA) and the Arakan Army (AA) gaining strength. These forces, alongside robust intelligence and guerilla operations, have managed to gain momentum, significantly impacting the central region of the country.

In the four years since the revolution began, the People's Defence Forces (PDF) in the Anyar Region have reached a point where they can intercept junta columns and engage in significant battles for control of towns.

In collaboration with the KIA, PDF battalions under the National Unity Government (NUG) successfully captured and held Pinlebu town in Kawlin District as part of the "Three As" operation.

Ko Hnin Yeik Nway, from Yimarbin District Battalion 12, stated that military efforts are expanding in the region.



PDF fighters in Sagaing, part of Myanmar's Bamar heartland.
Photo: AFP

“Various military formations and units are already being prepared. Forces are coming together under collective leadership, working in coordination with the NUG’s battalions and forming joint operations,” he said.

On 6 January, local defence forces launched a successful attack on a junta column in Wetlet Township, marking another significant victory for resistance forces in the Anyar Region.

The experiences gained from previous battles in Northern Shan, Kachin, and Rakhine states have sharpened the skills of resistance forces in the region. Additionally, the Student Armed Force (SAF), which was formed with the assistance of the Arakan Army, announced that one of their main objectives for 2025 is to expand operations into Myanmar’s central region.

Civilians caught in the crossfire

However, as the conflict in Anyar continues, the humanitarian situation worsens, with Ma Sandar and

her family just numbers – statistics in reports – civilians desperate for food and shelter.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region face critical shortages of medicine, livelihoods, and transportation, with many at risk of losing their lives if adequate humanitarian aid does not reach them.

Since the coup, the number of IDPs in Myanmar overall has surged to over 1.2 million. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), nearly 20 million people in Myanmar’s population of 55 million are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

The ongoing conflict between the junta’s army and the revolutionary forces has worsened the plight of civilians like Ma Sandar, with no immediate end in sight.

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People's Defence Force fighters - both male and female - during training in the Mandalay region. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR MILITARY ON THE BACKFOOT AS BATTLES INTENSIFY

The battles in Rakhine State, Ayeyarwaddy Region, and Kachin State highlight the escalating nationwide conflict as the junta struggles to maintain its grip amidst coordinated offensives by resistance forces.

The Arakan Army (AA) has provided an update on the ongoing military situation in Rakhine State and neighbouring regions, including Ayeyarwaddy, Bago, and Magway. In Rakhine State, the AA has taken control of nearly all townships, leaving only three, including the capital city of Sittway, still under the junta's control.

On January 17, the AA, in coordination with allied forces, seized the junta's Bawmi base camp in Patheingyi Township, the capital of the Ayeyarwaddy Region. The capture resulted in the AA securing an armoured vehicle, ammunition, and leaving numerous junta troops dead. Despite losing the base, the junta's navy and artillery regiment continue to shell the surrounding villages. Of the 400 junta troops stationed at Bawmi, only a few dozen managed to retreat. Reports indicate that a strategic commander and hundreds of junta

troops remain cut off from their headquarters.

In Sittway, clashes erupted on January 16 in the city's suburban areas and continued into the early hours of January 17, with sporadic artillery fire still audible. The junta has reportedly deployed additional troops, including military-trained Rohingya fighters, along key routes they anticipate the AA might use. A local resident described the tense situation, saying, "The junta raised its security forces outside checkpoints rather than inside. The situation has intensified. A battleground will happen in Sittway sooner or later."

Unsurprisingly, as fighting along the coastal areas escalates, tourism in the region has taken a hit. Hotels in Chaung Tha Beach, a popular destination for domestic travelers, are set to close from January 21. Additionally, about half of the local population has already evacuated the area.

Meanwhile, the junta faces mounting pressure in northern Myanmar. The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and allied forces are advancing toward Bhamo



Photo: EPA

after successfully clearing junta battalions in Mansi Township. Local military sources report that Bhamo's primary guard regiment, Hka La Ya (47), is on the verge of collapse due to significant losses.

Myanmar's economy in the dumps

Myanmar's military junta is facing a crippling economic recession, exacerbated by international sanctions and escalating military expenditures. According to economists, the country's economy is in a downward spiral, with the Myanmar kyat reaching its lowest value in history. The production and export sectors have ground to a halt, while essential imports like fuel remain insufficient due to a severe shortage of foreign exchange.

For the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the junta allocated 5,635 billion kyats to military spending, dwarfing the combined expenditure of 3,000 billion kyats for the health and education sectors. The World Bank projects a growing budget deficit, with estimates reaching 5.4% of GDP in 2024-2025 and climbing to 5.8% in 2025-2026.

To address the deficit, the junta has turned to selling government bonds to domestic monetary organizations, including private banks and international insurance companies. Efforts to boost revenue have included increasing taxes and cracking down on illegal trade, but these measures have done little to stabilize the floundering economy.



There is a growing health crisis in various parts of Myanmar. Photo: EPA

Myanmar's macroeconomic instability is compounded by ongoing armed conflicts, natural disasters, and a sharp decline in countryside production. "As an agricultural country, the safety of rural farmers is critical," said Sein Htay, a prominent economist. "But with many conflict zones located in rural areas, food production has significantly declined, further straining the economy."

Unlike previous authoritarian regimes that relied heavily on selling natural resources to sustain the budget, the current junta faces significant challenges due to sanctions and dwindling resource reserves. Consequently, the regime has resorted to exploiting every available revenue source, regardless of the long-term consequences.

The junta's loss of control over border regions has nearly halted trade with neighbouring countries, including China, Thailand, India, and Bangladesh. Struggling to secure foreign exchange, the junta has imposed unfair currency exchange rates on exporters, often higher than the prevailing market rate. The Central Bank of Myanmar has tightened restrictions on export foreign exchange eight times, further hampering trade and alienating the business community.

Economic practitioners describe a dire situation in Myanmar under military rule. Unstable macroeconomic conditions, internal strife, and natural calamities have severely impacted the country's already fragile economy. With production and exports paralyzed, foreign trade restricted, and military spending prioritized over essential sectors like health and education, the junta's handling of the economy continues to deepen the country's economic woes.

As sanctions persist and internal conflicts rage, Myanmar's path to economic recovery remains uncertain, leaving millions of citizens to bear the brunt of the junta's policies.

Growing health crisis

The Myanmar junta is also grappling with a worsening public health crisis as cholera spreads across the Thai-Myanmar border areas, Mandalay, Ayeyarwaddy regions, and Chin State. The outbreak began in December and continues to affect vulnerable regions. Thai authorities have responded by imposing stricter border controls, raising public awareness, and providing a limited number of cholera vaccines to Myanmar.

In Paletwa, Chin State, controlled by the Arakan Army (AA), the outbreak began in late December and persists due to limited communication and resources. Local media report that at least two infants have died, while Paletwa's council president highlights severe shortages of medicine and healthcare personnel. "Some patients died due to late access to treatment," he noted, emphasizing the dire situation in this conflict-stricken area.



HUMAN
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HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH ACCUSES MYANMAR JUNTA OF INCREASED BRUTALITY IN WORLD REPORT 2025

In a press release on 16 January, Human Rights Watch called attention to the Myanmar junta's stepped up 'scorched earth' tactics in its war with the armed resistance in the country. Contained in the recently released World Report 2025, the press release noted an increase in human rights abuses related to junta military campaigns throughout the country.

The text of the press release is as follows.

Myanmar's military junta ramped-up its "scorched earth" tactics against opposition areas amid a growing armed resistance and territorial losses during 2024, Human Rights Watch said today in its World Report 2025. The military committed unlawful attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including indiscriminate airstrikes, killings, rape, torture, and arson amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

For the 546-page world report, in its 35th edition, Human Rights Watch reviewed human rights practices in more than 100 countries. In much of the world, Executive Director Tirana Hassan writes in her introductory essay, governments cracked down and wrongfully arrested and imprisoned political opponents, activists, and journalists. Armed groups

and government forces unlawfully killed civilians, drove many from their homes, and blocked access to humanitarian aid. In many of the more than 70 national elections in 2024, authoritarian leaders gained ground with their discriminatory rhetoric and policies.

"The Myanmar military has increasingly committed grave crimes against civilians and civilian infrastructure in response to heightened resistance from armed anti-junta groups and ethnic minority armies," said Bryony Lau, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "The suffering of villagers has been made all the worse by the junta's determination to block humanitarian aid from reaching those in need."

- Myanmar's military has increasingly carried out aerial and artillery attacks using explosive weapons in populated areas, increasing the risk of resulting indiscriminate attacks. Myanmar is one of only four countries using banned cluster munitions and landmines.

- The junta has further tightened restrictions on humanitarian aid and telecommunications services as a method of collective punishment. Aid blockages and economic collapse have left millions of people at risk of starvation and half the population in poverty. More than three million people have been internally displaced.

- After the enactment of a conscription law in February, military authorities forcibly recruited young adults and children through abductions and detention of family members. Conscripts have been used as human shields and porters on the front lines.

- Junta forces and the ethnic Arakan Army have committed mass killings, arson, and unlawful recruitment against Rohingya civilians in Rakhine State.

The United Nations Security Council should pass a resolution instituting a global arms embargo on Myanmar, imposing targeted sanctions on junta leadership and military-owned companies, and referring the country situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC), Human Rights Watch said. To better support people in need, donors should channel aid through civil society groups and cross-border efforts, support independent organizations, and allow the transfer of funds to these groups outside Myanmar's formal banking system.

Mandalay. Photo: Kentaro Komada

122 ARRESTED IN MANDALAY UNDER MILITARY SERVICE LAW, ACTUAL FIGURES LIKELY HIGHER

The Mandalay Strike Force has reported the arrest of at least 122 individuals across seven townships in Mandalay Region under the pretext of the Military Service Law between 1 and 15 January 2025.

An official from the Strike Force, speaking to Mizzima on 17 January, indicated that the actual number of arrests might exceed the reported figure of 122.

"We have released this information, but since the data is based on reports from reconnaissance and media teams on the ground, the true number could be higher than what we've disclosed," the official said.

According to the statement, the arrests were distributed as follows: 19 in Aung Myay Thar Zan Township, 15 in Chan Aye Thar Zan Township, 17 in Maha Aung Myay Township, 19 in Chan Myat Thar Si Township, 19 in Pyay Gyi Ta Khun Township, 18 in Amarapura Township, and 15 in Patheingyi Township.

The Strike Force highlighted that the arrests are being conducted round-the-clock under various guises, including the Military Service Law and the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law. Authorities are also targeting individuals through illegal phone inspections under the Cyber Security Law, extorting money, and detaining young people returning from work. These incidents reportedly occur almost daily.

Residents described the alarming situation in Mandalay.

"Arrests are being carried out everywhere by both

general office staff and police. People are afraid to go to the market or return from work. If someone is caught, they are forced into military service. This is the reality," said a Mandalay resident.

Another resident from Pathein Gyi Township reported that even individuals from Yenangyaung town selling goods in Mandalay markets have been detained.

"They can arrest anyone, even those registered as overnight guests," Pathein Gyi resident said.

In response, the Mandalay Strike Force advised young people to limit unnecessary travel, avoid gatherings, and remain vigilant. They emphasized the importance of monitoring Military Council activities and taking proactive measures to avoid dangerous situations. Those threatened or coerced into military recruitment were urged to prepare in advance.

The Strike Force also advised individuals to delete sensitive materials, including VPNs, from their phones before traveling to avoid complications during inspections or roadblocks.

The statement condemned the Military Council's newly enacted cybersecurity law, effective from 1 January 2025, describing it as a violation of democratic principles.

Additionally, the Strike Force called on the public to resist any attempts by the Military Council to hold a sham election, describing it as a ploy to legitimize their actions. They urged citizens to oppose such moves in every possible way to reflect the will of the people.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: Screenshot

MYANMAR MILITARY LEADER BLAMES FOREIGN INTERFERENCE AND RESISTANCE FORCES FOR ONGOING UNREST

Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing, Myanmar's military leader, attributed the country's ongoing instability to alleged foreign interference and actions by resistance forces in a message commemorating Karenni State Day on 15 January.

In his address, the junta leader accused certain foreign countries, organizations, and fabricated misinformation campaigns, as well as the activities of the National Unity Government (NUG), the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), and the People's Defence Forces (PDF), of creating divisions and unrest in the country.

"He's just trying to deflect blame onto international actors, PDFs, and armed groups to avoid accountability. This is another baseless accusation," said a female resistance fighter from Khin-U Township, Sagaing Region.

While Min Aung Hlaing did not name specific countries or organizations, he alleged that some democratic nations were supporting armed resistance.

In his speech, Min Aung Hlaing reiterated claims that the unrest was fuelled by attempts to unlawfully seize power through fraudulent elections and violent

resistance, instead of resolving disputes democratically.

The coup on 1 February 2021, which the military justified by citing alleged electoral fraud, led to mass protests and subsequent crackdowns involving live ammunition. These actions resulted in significant civilian casualties and a surge in armed resistance.

Vice Senior-General Soe Win, the junta's Deputy Commander-in-Chief, also attended the 73rd Karenni State Day celebrations in Loikaw, Karenni State's capital.

The event was overshadowed by attacks the night before, on 14 January, when the Brave Warriors for Myanmar (BWM) resistance group targeted a dinner hosted at Loikaw State Hall with five 107-mm rockets. Simultaneously, two additional rockets struck the regional military command in Loikaw, as confirmed by a BWM statement.

Note: Referred to as Kayah State Day in the junta's announcement and by previous Myanmar governments, it has been renamed as Karenni State Day by resistance forces following the coup.

MYANMAR'S TOP GENERALS MISSING FROM PUBLIC VIEW AMID SPECULATION OF CONFLICT-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Myanmar's two top military leaders, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and Vice Senior General Soe Win, have not been seen in public for several days, sparking speculation about their whereabouts and activities.

Typically, when one of the leaders is absent, the other maintains public appearances. However, Vice Senior General Soe Win has been out of the spotlight for six days, and Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who is known for his preference for public attention, has not been seen for five days.

Soe Win was last seen on 10 January at a dinner event in Naypyidaw following an educational conference. Since then, he has not attended any official events, and junta-controlled media outlets such as Myawaddy TV, Myanma Alinn, and the Mirror Daily have refrained from publishing recent images of him.

Min Aung Hlaing was last seen on 11 January during a visit to Pyin Oo Lwin.

According to independent media reports, Soe Win reportedly attended the 73rd Karenni State Day event in

Loikaw on 15 January. However, junta-controlled media only acknowledged the presence of General Tin Aung San, a deputy prime minister, leading the delegation.

This absence is not without precedent for Soe Win. In April 2024, he reportedly missed official meetings for nearly a month due to health issues that required hospitalization, according to sources in Naypyidaw.

Soe Win is known for visiting frontline conflict zones, while Min Aung Hlaing primarily oversees operations from secure military headquarters. Clashes frequently occur in areas where Soe Win is rumoured to visit.

Ahead of the Karenni State Day event in Loikaw, speculation about Soe Win's presence grew. The Mountain Knights Civilian Defence Force (MKCDF) and joint forces claimed responsibility for launching five 107mm rockets at the State Hall and two at the Regional Operations Command Headquarters on the night of 14 January.



PDF fighters in Sagaing. Photo: AFP

FIVE CIVILIANS, INCLUDING TWO CHILDREN, KILLED IN JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON SAGAING'S KHAMPAT TOWN

Five civilians, among them two children, lost their lives during an airstrike conducted by Myanmar junta forces on Khampat town in Tamu district, Sagaing Region, at 8:30 pm on 16 January, according to local sources.

"The bomb hit Kanan Monastery. Five people were killed. Although there was prior warning about the approaching aircraft, the bombs were dropped almost immediately," a resident of Tamu said.

Another local resident confirmed that three bombs were dropped between 8:20 pm and 8:38 pm. Details of the damage are yet to be verified.

A member of the People's Defense Forces (PDF) confirmed that civilians were among those killed and injured in the attack.

Khampat town has been under the control of the People's Defense Joint Forces, operating under the Ministry of Defense of the National Unity Government (NUG), since 7 November, 2023. Myo Thit town in the same district was captured on 11 May, 2024.

In response to the ongoing airstrikes, the PDFs from Tamu and Kalay districts have urged residents to stay vigilant. Many locals are now seeking safety in bomb shelters, fearing further attacks.

The Myanmar junta has intensified bombing raids on areas controlled by revolutionary forces, with frequent strikes reported since early January 2025.

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES KILL 40 CIVILIANS IN AREAS CONTROLLED BY THREE BROTHERHOOD ALLIANCE




Photo: AFP

Myanmar's military junta conducted airstrikes across eight townships under the control of the Three Brotherhood Alliance between 1 and 13 January 2025, resulting in at least 40 civilian deaths.

The Three Brotherhood Alliance comprises the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). According to reports, the military carried out airstrikes roughly every two days in these regions.

An airstrike near MNDAA-controlled Hsenwi on 1 January destroyed several homes. On 3 January, an airstrike in AA-held Kangyidaung, Myebon Township, struck a hospital and a school, killing a woman.

The deadliest attack occurred on 8 January, when an airstrike on Kyauknimaw village, Ramree Township, Rakhine State, killed 26 civilians, injured 27 others, and destroyed 398 homes. The AA detailed that many victims were children and elderly residents, with several bodies yet to be recovered.

Additional airstrikes targeted TNLA-controlled Mogok on 8 January, Kyauktaw Township on 11 January, and Taung U Maw village, Pauktaw Township, on 12 January. On 13 January, attacks struck TNLA-held Kyaukme Township in northern Shan State and AA-controlled Paletwa Township and Samee town in Chin State.

In total, five AA-controlled, two TNLA-controlled, and one MNDAA-controlled townships were bombarded during the 13-day period. The strikes have reportedly destroyed nearly 400 homes and killed at least 40 civilians, based on data from Mizzima and other sources.

AA spokesperson Khaing Thu Kha condemned the attacks, labelling them as war crimes.

"Targeting civilians in non-conflict areas is a cowardly act by the terrorist junta army," he said.

Despite a late-2024 announcement by the Three Brotherhood Alliance to engage in political talks, the junta has intensified its air campaign. Revolutionary groups have urged the public to remain vigilant, warning of potential future airstrikes.

Since the beginning of the year, the junta has also carried out strikes on towns such as Tanai, Hpakant, and Bhamo in Kachin State; Myeik Township in Tanintharyi Region; Falam Town in Chin State; Phyu Township in Bago Region; and Pekon and Hsihseng Townships in southern Shan State, in addition to towns controlled by the Three Brotherhood Alliance.

An operation by the alliance, dubbed Operation 1027, resulted in significant gains since late 2023, with the MNDAA, TNLA, and AA taking control of various towns in Shan, Rakhine, and Chin States.

During Operation 1027, the MNDAA took control of several towns in northern Shan State, including Lashio, Laukkai, Chinshwehaw, Monekoe, Hpawnghseng, Konkyan, Pan Lon, Kunlong, Hsenwi, Tamoenye, and Pang Hseng.

The TNLA has captured and taken control of the towns of Hsipaw, Kyaukme, Namhsan, Monglon, Momeik, Mogok, Mantong, Namtu, Kutkai, Nawngkhio, Namhkam, and Mongngawt.

The AA launched Operation 1027 in Rakhine State on 13 November 2023, capturing Paletwa in Chin State and nearly all of Rakhine State, except for Kyaukphyu, Sittwe, and Munaung Townships.

The alliance has reaffirmed its commitment to resistance, with analysts predicting continued clashes between the military and revolutionary forces.



Kagabu People's Force fighters. Video screenshot

KAGABU PEOPLE'S FORCE ANNOUNCES IMMINENT ATTACK ON KACHIN'S PUTAO REGION AMID RISING TENSIONS

The Kagabu People's Force (KPF) announced on 16 January that they, in collaboration with allied groups, are planning an inevitable offensive in Kachin State's Putao region.

A spokesperson for the KPF, Saw Ngwe Khun Hsengkham, said, "Our revolutionary forces aim to eliminate the Military Council wherever they operate. It is our shared goal to dismantle their presence as quickly as possible."

Putao is home to Military Council troops as well as the Khao Lan Phu local militia, which operates under its command. According to the KPF, the militia headquarters are stationed in Shen Khao village, with smaller camps established in areas where Military Council troops are active.

The Putao district encompasses several towns, including Nogmung, Putao, Machanbaw, Khao Lan Phu, and Sumprabum.

In May 2024, Sumprabum was captured by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and allied forces. Similarly, the Lahusel militia base in Khao Lan Phu Township, which housed approximately 100 personnel,

was also overtaken by the KIA and its allies.

The KPF, working in coordination with the KIA, has urged local residents to stay informed about military developments and prepare for potential disruptions.

"In areas of conflict, challenges arise not only in terms of security but also in transportation and food availability. Locals must listen to the news and stock up on essentials," advised the KPF spokesperson.

Currently, communication lines in the Putao area are down, making it difficult for residents to receive accurate updates.

The KPF has also warned of misinformation spread by the Military Council and local militias, including false reports about casualties among revolutionary forces in the Khao Lan Phu and Putao areas.

Additionally, prolonged conflict along the Putao-Myitkyina road has rendered the route impassable, disrupting the flow of goods and causing inflation, further burdening local residents.

Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA INTENSIFIES AIRSTRIKES IN RAKHINE STATE, CIVILIANS BEAR THE BRUNT

The Myanmar junta launched airstrikes on Taung U Maw village in Pauktaw Township, Rakhine State, at around 11 am on 12 January, marking the second consecutive day of attacks on areas controlled by the Arakan Army (AA), according to local sources.

A local resident reported that junta jet fighters dropped 500-pound bombs on the village twice, but the full extent of the damage remains unknown.

This follows a series of intensified air raids targeting AA-controlled areas across Rakhine State in recent days.

On 8 January, junta airstrikes destroyed 398 homes in Kyauk Ni Maw village, Ramree Township, killing many elderly residents and children. The AA reported that 26 people were killed, and over 27 injured, with the casualty count expected to rise as many remain missing.

Further attacks were reported in Kyauktaw Township on 11 January, where two civilians were reportedly killed.

According to local sources, the junta dropped 15 bombs on densely populated areas, including Kyauktaw markets and residential neighbourhoods.

The AA stated that the attacks deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure.

“The junta only knows cruelty. We want to go back home, but we can’t because we are afraid of the airstrikes,” said a displaced woman from Pauktaw Township.

Despite the AA expressing its readiness to resolve the conflict through political means on 29 December, the junta has continued its aggressive airstrikes across Rakhine State.

The AA accused the junta of committing war crimes by deliberately targeting non-combat areas, including hospitals, clinics, schools, religious sites, markets, roads, bridges, and homes.

Meanwhile, on 13 January, junta forces also carried out airstrikes in Moebye Township, southern Shan State, dropping 500-pound bombs in the afternoon, further escalating violence in the region.

Mizzima continues to monitor developments as the humanitarian toll in Rakhine State and other conflict-affected areas grows.

TWO CIVILIANS KILLED, ONE ABDUCTED BY MYANMAR JUNTA JOINT MILITARY COLUMN IN CHAUK TOWNSHIP

According to a local defence force, a joint military column comprising a junta unit and allied Pyu Saw Htee militia killed two civilians, abducted one, and seized hospital supplies from a vehicle in Chauk Township, Magway Region.

On the morning of 15 January, around 100 Pyu Saw Htee militia from Kongyi Pyu village raided Htain San village, capturing three civilians and executing two of them, according to Ko Paing, leader of the Chauk Guerrilla Force (CGF).

"They captured three villagers and shot two in the head near the rural health centre. The third individual was taken to Kongyi Pyu village," Ko Paing said.

Local witnesses confirmed the raid, stating that several villagers were trapped during the arrival of junta forces, resulting in three arrests and two executions.

Ko Paing also reported that clashes occurred between revolutionary forces and the junta during the raid.

"Our heavy weapons struck their forces, causing explosions and injuring at least six of them," Ko Paing said.

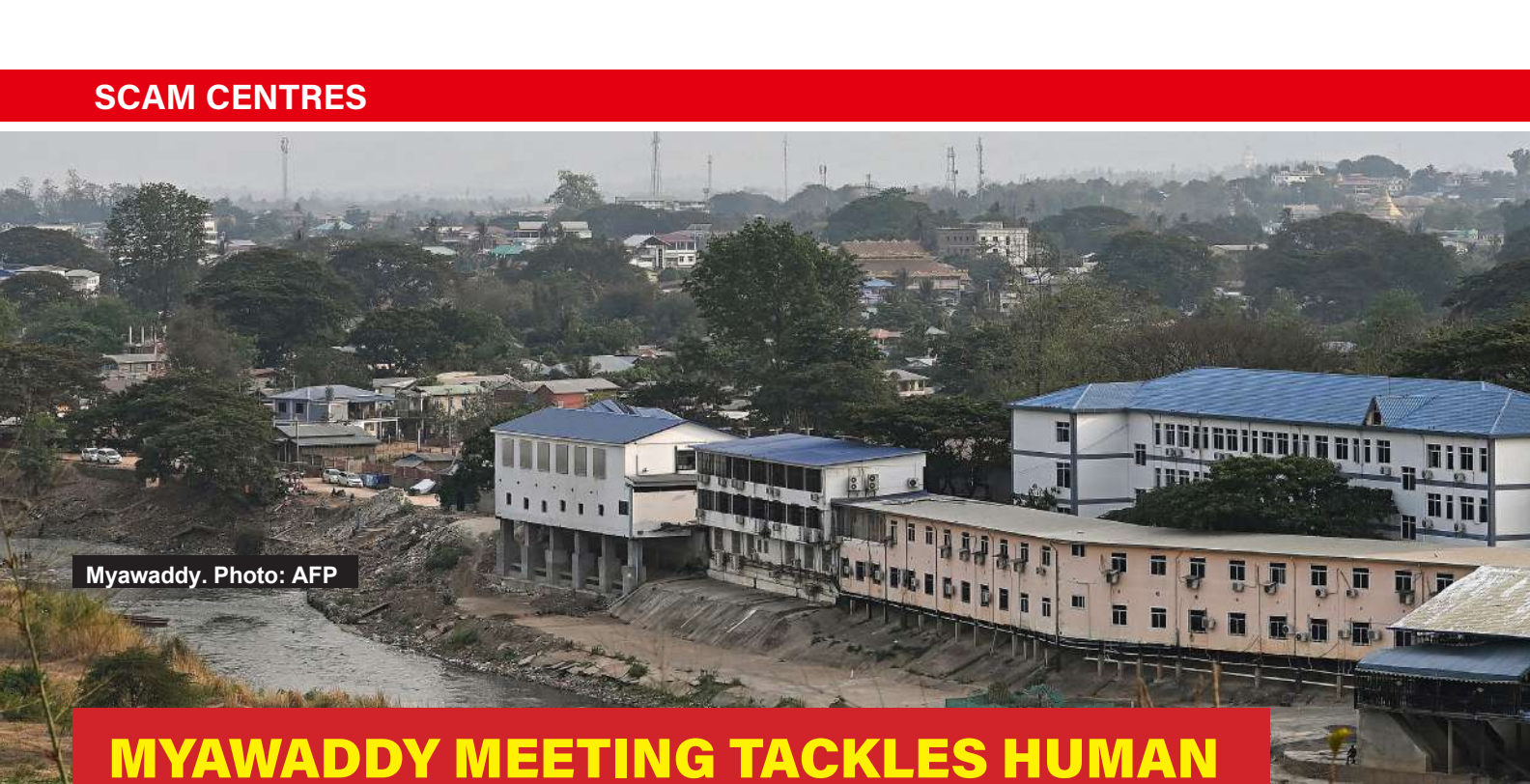
On 14 January, the joint military column seized medical supplies from Lintakaing District Hospital and raided nearby villages, including Sel Kan and Thit Hla, according to an official from the Chauk Revolutionary Army (CRA).

"The Kongyi Pyu troops set fire to three houses in Sel Kan after surrounding the area on 14 January," the CRA said.

The Chauk Guerrilla Force (CGF) has issued a warning about heightened military activity, with daily operations by Pyu Saw Htee and junta troops from Kongyi Pyu village in nearby villages.

As of today, the military has not conducted new operations, but revolutionary forces remain on high alert and are monitoring the situation, according to Ko Paing.

The junta's actions have forced residents from Htain San, Kan Thit Kone, and Ka Taing Mauk villages to flee.



Myawaddy. Photo: AFP

MYAWADDY MEETING TACKLES HUMAN TRAFFICKING OF CHINESE CELEBRITIES

Amid a rise in incidents of human trafficking involving Chinese celebrities, including actors and models, leaders of the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF), the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), and Chinese businessmen convened a meeting in Myawaddy on 15 January.

The meeting in the Myanmar-Thai border town of Myawaddy, reported by Thai news outlet The Reporters, addressed transnational crimes such as fraud, human trafficking, and the operations of illegal gambling syndicates.

"We met to address the issue of preventing illegal gambling centres in the region," said a DKBA major.

However, a source close to the DKBA revealed that the primary focus was human trafficking.

"The discussions involved Major Mote Thun, Major Tin Win, and Colonel Saw Chit Thu, but they have chosen not to publicly disclose the specifics of their meeting. Shwe Kokko town, which is linked to an online casino scam syndicate, remains their primary business operation. The recent discovery of a Chinese actor's involvement brought heightened attention to the issue," said a source close to the DKBA.

Mizzima is continuing to investigate the details of the meeting.

The BGF and DKBA emphasized the importance of preventing coercion, torture, child labour under the age of 18, and fraud within business operations in the area, according to The Reporters.

Key attendees included BGF leader Saw Chit Thu, Major Mote Thun of the BGF, Colonel San Aung, and Sai Cho La of the DKBA, along with approximately 60 Chinese businessmen.

Chinese actor Wang Xing was trafficked to KK Park, a notorious area south of Myawaddy linked to online scam syndicates. Wang arrived in Bangkok from China on 3 January for a supposed film opportunity but was discovered on 7 January by Thai authorities at an online scam site on the Myanmar side.

Chinese media reported that five additional victims were rescued from Myawaddy's gambling sites following the incident. Thai authorities also intercepted and rescued two Chinese men before they could cross into Myawaddy.

Meanwhile, Chinese model and actor Yang Zeqi went missing near the Thai-Myanmar border on 20 December 2024, after traveling to Thailand for another supposed film project.

Thailand's Deputy Defence Minister, Mr. Phumtham Wechayachai, announced that the Thai and Chinese governments are collaborating to combat cross-border crimes. He warned that failure to curb criminal activities within six months could result in the dismissal of Thai officials involved.

Additionally, a Hong Kong anti-human trafficking team arrived in Thailand on 12 January to aid in investigating and dismantling online scam syndicates operating in the region.



Photo: AFP

THAILAND SEEKS TO QUELL FEARS OF CHINESE TOURISTS OVER MYANMAR KIDNAPPINGS

Thailand sought to dampen safety concerns among potential Chinese tourists on Friday last week as fears mounted over reported kidnappings on the Thai-Myanmar border.

Scam compounds have mushroomed in Myanmar's borderlands and are staffed by foreigners who are often trafficked and forced to work, swindling their compatriots in an industry analysts say is worth billions of dollars.

Concerns were raised after reports that Chinese actor Wang Xing was allegedly trafficked into a cyber-fraud centre in Myanmar's Myawaddy town, just across the Thai border in early January.

Myanmar authorities handed him over to Thai police days later, Thai local media said.

Another Chinese, Yang Zeqi, a model, went missing last month and was found this week, swirling fears on Chinese social media with netizens saying Thailand was a "dangerous" place.

A senior Thai police officer Pittayakorn Petcharat told AFP he had reports that Yang "returned to China from Myanmar" on Thursday, but gave no further details.

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra on Friday said the government would enhance safety standards to combat transnational crime citing reports of illegal organ trafficking, call centre scams and zero-dollar tours.

"Though such incidents were not caused by Thai people, they have raised safety concerns among Chinese tourists," she said in a post on X, adding that she welcomed all Chinese tourists to celebrate Lunar New Year in Thailand.

Bryony Lau, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch on Friday called the scam centres -- which have spread from Cambodia to Laos and the Myanmar border areas -- "one of the most pressing regional crises the region is facing".

The Thai government has promised to boost confidence by strengthening safety measures, it said in a statement Friday.

"Every sector will ramp up its security and services to facilitate tourism (in Thailand)," it said.

According to Thai media, the Tourism Authority of Thailand is looking to recruit Chinese influencers to improve the kingdom's image to Chinese social media users and would-be visitors.

China remained at the top of Thailand's tourist numbers list in the first two weeks of January, comprising almost a sixth of the 1.3 million arrivals.

The Thai government anticipates a further seven percent rise in Chinese tourists during the upcoming Lunar New Year holiday period, which is expected to add 8.8 billion baht (\$255 million) to the kingdom's income.

AFP



Photo: AFP

NUG EXPLORES RESTRUCTURING HUMAN RIGHTS MINISTRY FOR GREATER INDEPENDENCE AND EFFICIENCY

Talks are ongoing to restructure the National Unity Government's Human Rights Ministry into a more effective and impactful body, according to Human Rights Minister U Aung Myo Min, who spoke to Mizzima on 15 January.

At a press conference held on 3 January, the Ministry announced that efforts are being made to transform the Human Rights Ministry into an independent and non-governmental entity.

Responding to Mizzima's inquiry about this development, U Aung Myo Min said, "Discussions are underway on how to make the ministry more efficient and impactful. We will announce the type of structure at the appropriate time."

Addressing reports suggesting the Ministry may be converted into a commission, he said, "Transforming a ministry into a commission is not appropriate and cannot lead to an independent entity. A human rights commission must be established in line with its governing law, with selection and appointment processes adhering to that law. Only then can it be deemed independent. It is neither practical nor appropriate for ministry officials to transition into such a commission."

To strengthen revolutionary momentum and foster better cooperation with alliances, the NUG plans to base its ministries inside Myanmar, according to U Kyaw Zaw, spokesperson for the NUG President's Office.

He added, "If there are any changes to announcements regarding the Ministry of Human Rights, they will be communicated at the right time."

During a meeting held on 14 January, NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La proposed including talented leaders from ethnic revolutionary armed groups in the government. Similarly, NUG Prime Minister Mahn Win Khaing Than stressed the urgency of implementing government reforms in 2025.

The National Unity Government was established by the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) and the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) on 16 April 2021. Comprising 17 ministries, the NUG will mark its four-year term on 16 April this year.

National Unity Government of Myanmar

Office of the President



NUG TO ESTABLISH DOMESTIC MINISTRIES TO BOLSTER REVOLUTIONARY EFFORTS AND PUBLIC SERVICES

The National Unity Government (NUG) plans to establish ministries within Myanmar to enhance revolutionary efforts and strengthen alliances, U Kyaw Zaw, spokesperson for the NUG President's Office, told Mizzima.

"Not all our ministries operate from abroad. Both the President and Prime Minister are inside the country, leading the revolution alongside the people. Many ministers and cabinet members are also working domestically," U Kyaw Zaw clarified.

He added that this move aims to improve the efficiency of public services within administrative sectors.

"This will not be an immediate or all-encompassing shift. There will be a systematic division

of responsibilities, with some officials working from abroad while coordinating closely with those on the ground. Our preparations are focused on ensuring smooth operations and avoiding chaos," he said.

For security reasons, U Kyaw Zaw refrained from disclosing the specific locations or regions where these offices would be established.

This initiative comes nearly two months after Acting President Duwa Lashi La, during a cabinet meeting on 26 November 2024, called on NUG leaders based abroad to return to Myanmar and actively contribute to the revolution from within.



Photo: Supplied

7 EAO ALLIANCE PUSHES FOR INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE AMID ESCALATING CIVIL CONFLICT

The 7 EAO Alliance, a coalition of seven ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), has emphasized the need for inclusive political dialogue involving all stakeholders to address Myanmar's ongoing crisis. This was discussed during the alliance's steering group online meeting on 14 January, according to an official statement.

The 7 EAO Alliance consists of seven ethnic armed organizations that have maintained signed ceasefire agreements with the junta. The alliance includes the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), the New Mon State Party (MNSP), the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), the Karen National Union/ Karen National Liberation Army-Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC), the Lahu Democratic Union (LDU), the Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO), and the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP).

The discussions focused on broadening the internal political framework, advancing the peace process, enhancing coordination among EAOs, and preparing for potential political developments in 2025.

Colonel Saw Kyaw Nyunt, spokesperson for the 7 EAO Alliance, stated that the alliance aims to establish fundamental principles for their respective states and lay the groundwork for a future federal union.

The alliance is also engaging with neighbouring countries like China and India, ASEAN nations, and international actors involved in the ceasefire process. These interactions aim to garner support and explore collaborative solutions to Myanmar's crisis.

"Despite the challenges, resolving the civil war through political dialogue is crucial. It is the only path to reduce harm to the Union and address a conflict that

has persisted for over 70 years. We are committed to this effort," Col. Saw Kyaw Nyunt said.

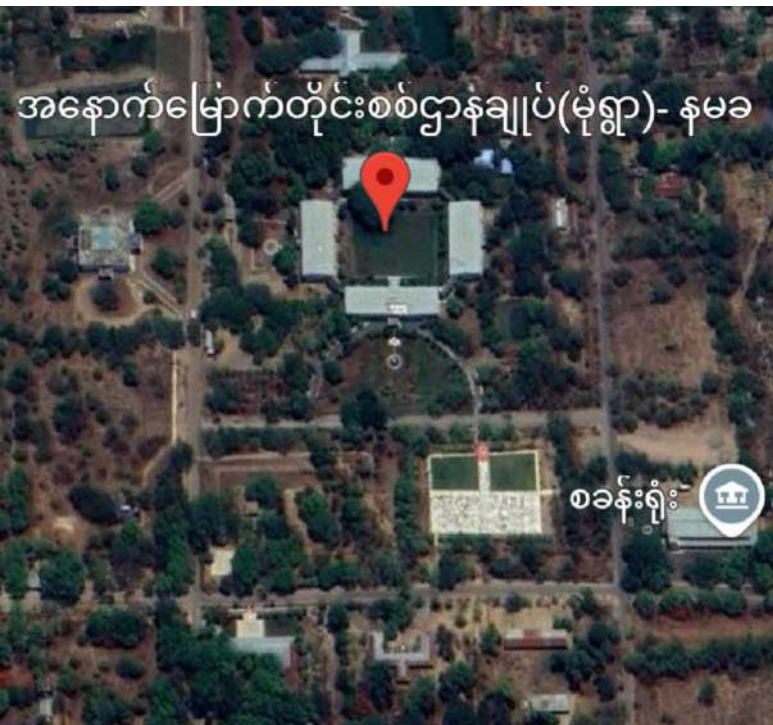
While each ethnic armed group has unique historical and geographical influences, they share a common vision of establishing a federal union rooted in freedom, equality, and self-determination.

"Although our goals align, our tactics and approaches differ. Dialogue and cooperation focusing on the Union's and people's best interests can help bridge these differences, regardless of whether it is the State Administration Council (SAC) or ethnic armed groups," he said.

In a related program, U Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson for the NUG Prime Minister's Office, reiterated six shared political objectives among anti-regime forces. These include removing the military junta, ending military involvement in politics, and placing armed forces under civilian control in a federal democratic union.

Col. Saw Kyaw Nyunt acknowledged concerns that current efforts might prolong the conflict but emphasized the importance of mutual and sincere dialogue, with both parties having equal standing.

Meanwhile, the Three Brotherhood Alliance, comprising the Arakan Army (AA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), has expressed readiness for political dialogue following military gains during its Operation 1027 from 2023 to late 2024. However, clashes with the junta persist, including airstrikes targeting civilian areas in Three Brotherhood Alliance-controlled townships, resulting in rising casualties.



MYANMAR RESISTANCE FORCES TARGET NORTHWESTERN MILITARY COMMAND HEADQUARTERS, CLAIM SIX JUNTA SOLDIERS KILLED

The Brave Warriors for Myanmar (BWM), an anti-regime resistance group, reported launching a rocket attack on the junta's Northwestern Military Command headquarters in Monywa, Sagaing Region, resulting in the deaths of six soldiers, including a captain.

The attack occurred at 9:45 pm on 14 January, during which four 107-mm rockets struck the Northwestern Military Command headquarters. One rocket reportedly destroyed the deputy commander's residence.

A BWM official told Mizzima that the casualties included Captain Kaung Htet Zaw, while three others, including a sergeant, sustained injuries.

"The death toll and injuries were confirmed through reliable military informants and ground-level reports. The Northwestern Command headquarters main building was hit twice. Following the strike, junta forces

responded with small arms fire and heavy weapons," the BWM official said.

BWM highlighted that investigations are underway to assess the full extent of casualties and structural damage, with updates to follow.

The Northwestern Military Command is a key operational hub for the military regime, overseeing operations in Sagaing Region, northern Magway Region, and Chin State. According to BWM, it serves as a significant barrier to revolutionary movements, prompting coordinated strikes with allied resistance groups.

The operation involved BWM in collaboration with allied groups, including Shadow (Monywa), Anonymous Heroes, Chindwin Fighter, Peacock Generation - Bo Moat Seik, and Democratic Rangers.

Although Mizzima has yet to verify the exact casualty numbers, local residents reported hearing explosions and gunfire emanating from the command compound on 14 January. Artillery fire was also reported from Kyauksitpon village, located near the military headquarters.

A local media outlet in Monywa stated that multiple explosions occurred at the Northwestern Command compound on 14 January, followed by retaliatory gunfire from the compound. Investigations are ongoing to determine whether any civilians were harmed in the junta's response.

The following afternoon, junta forces reportedly entered Kyeepadon village, near the Northwestern Command headquarters, where they opened fire and set homes on fire.

Additionally, BWM and allied forces reportedly fired two additional rockets at the Regional Operations Command headquarters in Loikaw, Karenni State, around 7 pm on 14 January. This attack occurred while Vice Senior General Soe Win was in the area. Details regarding casualties from this strike remain unconfirmed.

BWM emphasized its commitment to conducting coordinated operations with allied forces against military junta targets as part of the broader resistance movement.



Defecting government soldiers.
Photo: Supplied

29 MYANMAR JUNTA PERSONNEL DEFECT TO PDF BATTALIONS IN JANUARY

The Ministry of Defence under the National Unity Government (NUG) announced on 13 January that 29 soldiers and police officers from the Myanmar junta's military defected to People's Defence Force (PDF) battalions in the first two weeks of January 2025.

On 2 January, a police officer from Saw Township Police Station joined Gangaw District Battalion 2. Shortly after, on 6 January, five junta troops from a military column defected to PDF Battalions 3 and 5 in Gangaw District.

In his New Year's address on 1 January, Acting President of the NUG, Duwa Lashi La, urged junta leaders and soldiers to align with the people's forces, stating, "It is time to unite with the people's forces to move the country forward. Junta soldiers sacrificing their lives to protect junta leader Min Aung Hlaing and the generals should no longer serve the leaders of the SAC."

On 7 January, 16 soldiers from Lagoon Pyo Camp in Bilin Township joined the Revolutionary Joint Force. Additionally, a police officer from Saw Township and two soldiers from the BPI Livestock Camp in Pakokku Township joined revolutionary forces on 9 January.

Two junta soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 13, stationed in Shainmaka village, Wetlet Township, Sagaing Region, defected on 10 January. The next day, two conscripts from Light Infantry Battalion 559 who recently completed Batch-5 training of the 12th Military Advanced Training Depot joined the PDF.

The NUG's Ministry of Defence also reported the seizure of military equipment during this period. Items included 13 MA-1 rifles, one MA-2 light machine gun, three MA-3 rifles, one MA-4 rifle, two G-3 rifles, 29 boxes of MA ammunition, a sniper rifle, a machine gun, an 80 mm mortar, a 60 mm mortar, 10 grenades, and additional ammunition.



Photo: Supplied

RARE EARTH MINING IN MYANMAR'S CHIPWI REGION CAUSES SOCIO-ECONOMIC DECLINE AND SEVERE ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

The rapid growth of rare earth mining in the Chipwi region of Kachin State since the 2021 military coup has caused significant socio-economic decline, primarily due to environmental destruction and its impact on agriculture, the backbone of the local economy, according to a report by Myanmar Resource Watch (MRW).

The MRW report states that the main sources of income for local people in Chipwi are the cultivation of cardamom, walnuts, and quince. The population is largely dependent on agriculture, forestry, and the environment for their livelihoods, with 70 percent of the population engaged in agriculture, forestry, and fishing.

However, the report also states that since the 2021 military coup, intensified mining of rare earth minerals by armed groups, militias, and the authorities controlling the region has severely impacted the livelihoods of local people due to soil erosion, climate change, and environmental degradation.

The report also states that more than 96 percent of households in Chipwi Township lack access to clean drinking water, and that the chemical contamination of rivers and streams from rare earth mining waste has increased to the point where even fish can no longer survive.

The report highlights that the side effects of rare earth mining are causing unemployment among Chipwi residents, who rely on the environment for their livelihoods.

Locals are also facing rising rates of miscarriage, inadequate healthcare, lack of access to education, and transportation difficulties in the region.

Chipwi District includes Chipwi town, Hsawlaw town, and Pangwa town, which were once part of Kachin Special Region 1 and previously governed by the New Democratic Army – Kachin (NDA-K) led by U Zakhung Ting Ying.

After the 2021 military coup, the NDA-K also operated rare earth mining in Kachin Special Region 1. However, by late 2024, Kachin Special Region 1, including Chipwi District, was entirely taken over by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). The KIA subsequently announced the abolition of the Kachin Special Region. The rare earth mining blocks have now come under the control of the Kachin Independence Organization/ Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA).

"Regarding rare earth minerals, our Economic Management Committee of the Economic Department has set a framework and is currently discussing the necessary requirements with the working group. Regarding rights, we will continue to collaborate with them, but we are still discussing the details," KIA spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu told Mizzima on 14 January.

He added that the Chipwi administration has also appointed staff in relevant sectors and is now operational.

"There is not as much mining as there used to be, but I hear that the KIO is trying to regulate it a bit and set a good policy for 2025. They are also under pressure to manage this, and technically, they cannot do it alone. There are sectors that need to be worked on together with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)," said Ko Henry Aung, a Kachin environmental activist.

He corroborates the fact that the socio-economic life of the Chipwi residents has indeed declined due to the mining of rare earth minerals under the military rule.

The MRW report recommends that local authorities, with the support of CSOs, address the impact of rare earth mining on local economies in a timely manner.

The report recommends that the income from rare earth minerals should be used to improve infrastructure, healthcare, education, and transportation in the Chipwi region, and that crops grown in agricultural fields near rare earth mining sites should be tested for their suitability for human consumption.

Rare earth is essential for enhancing the quality of electric cars, smartphones, and electronic devices. The global supply of these metals primarily comes from Myanmar, China, the United States, India, Vietnam, Brazil, Russia, and Australia. Myanmar is only able to extract rare earth metals in their ore form.

Myanmar's rare earth ores are purchased by China and resold on the global market. According to the China's Customs Department, in the first nine months of 2024, Myanmar exported more than 30,000 tons of rare earth minerals to China, amounting to over three billion dollars in total exports over the three years since the military took power.

A May 2024 report by Myanmar Witness revealed that rare earth mining in Myanmar involves drilling into the ground, using potent acids, and chemically evaporating the resulting solution in large vats to extract ores. The report also emphasized the severe environmental destruction caused by these practices.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing inspects air force personnel. Photo: Supplied

BLOOD MONEY CAMPAIGN RELEASES REPORT CRITICAL OF INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT TO MYANMAR'S JUNTA

On 10 January, Blood Money Campaign released a new report entitled "Close the Skies" critical of continued international support for the Myanmar junta. The report takes a look at how this support allows the junta to continue devastating airstrikes against Myanmar civilian population.

The press release continues below.

The ongoing international support for the criminal junta's airstrikes has devastated the lives, homes, and livelihoods of civilians—including women, children, and the elderly—resulting in catastrophic challenges in meeting their most basic survival needs.

The Blood Money Campaign calls on ASEAN member states, United Nations member states and corporations around the world to immediately cease the export, sale, or transfer of weapons, ammunitions, aviation fuel, aircrafts, equipment, and technologies to the Myanmar military junta.

According to the research report by the Blood Money Campaign, it has found that international support for the Myanmar military junta's perpetual aerial attacks has resulted not only in the loss of civilian lives but also in dire consequences on daily livelihoods.

The report "Close the Sky: The Dire Consequences of Inaction on Aviation Fuel in Myanmar" involved firsthand accounts from civilians who narrowly escaped death while fleeing aerial attacks. The report highlights the devastating impacts of continuous airstrikes, relentless aircraft flights, and forced displacement, including loss of access to education and healthcare services, food shortages, psychological trauma, and the severe destruction of livelihoods, particularly those reliant on agriculture and the ongoing challenges currently being faced.

Since seizing power nearly four years ago, the junta has been exploiting and manipulating the country's economy and finances to serve its interests. It has also been using aviation fuel intended for civilian (passenger) airlines for military purposes, targeting

civilians in its attacks. According to findings, the junta's airstrikes frequently target crowded public spaces such as markets, donation areas, festivals, religious events, hospitals, clinics, and schools.

To date, international sanctions on aviation fuel have primarily targeted domestic companies within Myanmar. However, no action has yet been taken against the key international companies supplying these domestic entities. Due to weak enforcement mechanisms and ineffective monitoring systems, the junta continues to access aviation fuel, aircraft, aircraft parts, and technical maintenance services from international sources. Additionally, the junta has been exploiting commercial civilian aviation and aviation fuel for military purposes.

The junta has completely disregarded the rules of war by violating international humanitarian laws (IHL) outlined in chapter 2 and 3, which explicitly prohibits indiscriminate attacks that fail to distinguish between civilians and military targets. Meanwhile, international governments and companies continue to supply aviation fuel and related equipment, thereby becoming complicit in these violations.

International governments must immediately impose sanctions on entities involved in the export, sale, and transfer of aviation fuel to Myanmar, including the Chinese-flagged ship HUITONG78, Vietnamese petroleum storage terminal operator Hai Linh Co.Ltd, Chinese state-owned entity (SOE) CNOOC Trading (Singapore) Pte. Ltd., Singapore-based Sahara Energy International Pte. Ltd, and British shipment insurance companies providing insurance coverage services for fuel shipments. Additionally, Airbus SE (European aerospace corporation) must cease its collaboration with China's state-owned The Aviation Industry Corporation of China, Ltd. (AVIC), which is complicit in war crimes, and takes the necessary urgent measures and actions to end its involvement in such violations.

International companies and governments involved in each and every node of the aviation fuel supply chain to Myanmar must, before allowing for the export, sale, and transfer of aviation fuel, investigate whether the fuel is likely be abused to commit

international crimes. Alternatively, targeted sanctions should be imposed to halt all aviation fuel export, sale, and transfer to Myanmar. The Blood Money Campaign calls for the establishment and effective enforcement of robust monitoring mechanisms among countries and companies to oversee the aviation fuel export, sale, and transfer to Myanmar.

Mulan, spokesperson for Blood Money Campaign, says:

“Currently, International governments designated sanctions on aviation fuel against Myanmar's military junta have only been applied to domestic companies. However, international companies are the supplier of aviation fuel.

No government action has been taken so far against the primary suppliers: international fuel companies and maritime insurance companies facilitating these fuel supply chains. Aviation fuel being shipped from international is causing daily deaths, including those of children and women. It results in destruction of civilians' livelihoods in their daily lives.

International governments, instead of issuing statements to the military junta to stop airstrikes, must immediately halt the sale and supply of aviation fuel, aircraft-related materials, and technologies to the junta. Only when this support stops will the airstrikes truly come to an end. Urgent action is needed immediately to prevent further destruction and loss of life ”



Aung San Suu Kyi. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S AUNG SAN SUU KYI REACHES A TOTAL OF 19 YEARS IN DETENTION

The Burma Campaign UK released a statement on 14 January about Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Myanmar's democratically elected National League for Democracy (NLD). Since 1989 Myanmar democracy leader has spent a total of 19 years in detention. She is currently undergoing her fourth period of detention by Myanmar's military leaders, having been arrested on February 1, 2021, the first day of the coup.

Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners are being illegally detained by the Burmese military and should be freed immediately. In every election Aung San Suu Kyi has won a huge mandate from the people. The Burmese military have never won a mandate, and they have no legitimacy.

Aung San Suu Kyi is one of more than 21,000 political prisoners currently detained by the Burmese military. The current number of political prisoners since the latest military coup began in 2021 is ten times higher than the average number of political prisoners during the previous military dictatorship prior to 2010.

Today's briefing from Assistance Association Political Prisoners - Burma calculates that there are 21,507 political prisoners detained today. More than 28,000 have been arrested since the coup, including 589 children.

Political prisoners are subject to appalling treatment and conditions, including torture, sexual violence and denial of medical care.

In July 2024 the International Commission of Jurists released a report, *Unseen and Unheard: Violations of the Human Rights of Women Deprived of Liberty in Myanmar*, documenting violations of international law committed against women detainees. The report is available [here](#).

Denial of medical care is resulting in the deaths of political prisoners. Most recently the Political Prisoners Network-Myanmar reported that political prisoner Myo Min Oo in Daik-U Prison, Bago Region, passed away on January 10 due to complications from untreated kidney stones.

Aung San Suu Kyi became a controversial figure internationally after she failed to defend human rights for the Rohingya when the upsurge in violence against them began in 2012. She then went on to defend the Burmese military at the International Court of Justice where a case of genocide against the Rohingya was being heard.

Aung San Suu Kyi also faced criticism domestically for failing to repeal almost all repressive laws and allowing them to be used to jail critics of the government and the military. Her government also violated international law, restricting humanitarian access in Rakhine, Shan and Kachin States where internally displaced people were in desperate need of aid following attacks by the Burmese military.

Aung San Suu Kyi's own human rights record has reduced international support for the struggle for human rights and democracy in Burma, resulting in less attention on the country. Burma is in the midst of a human rights and humanitarian crisis since the 2021 coup. More than 4 million people are now displaced, airstrikes happen on a daily basis and a Burmese military aid and trade blockade in Rakhine State threatens a famine, with 2 million people at risk of starvation.

"The Burmese military detaining Aung San Suu Kyi for a total of 19 years demonstrates how, decades on, they are still afraid of her," said Mark Farmaner, Director of Burma Campaign UK. "Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners must be freed, and much more done to cut off the supply of money and arms to the Burmese military."



OVER 360 JOURNALISTS JAILED IN 2024, CHINA, ISRAEL, MYANMAR 'WORST OFFENDERS': NGO

Over 360 media workers were behind bars in the final month of 2024, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported Thursday, highlighting China and Israel as jailing the highest number.

In its annual census the New York-based organization counted 361 people as being in prison on December 1, 2024, its highest total since 2022, when 370 were counted.

China, Israel, and Myanmar -- with 50, 43 and 35 journalists detained, respectively -- "emerged as the world's three worst offenders in another record-setting year for journalists jailed because of their work," CPJ said.

The organization said China's "pervasive censorship" made it difficult to determine the exact number of journalists jailed there and highlighted rising cases in Hong Kong, notably the continued imprisonment of media tycoon Jimmy Lai.

Lai has been jailed since December 2020 and is one of the most prominent figures to be prosecuted under Hong Kong's national security law, which was imposed following huge pro-democracy protests in the city.

The 77-year-old is currently on trial over charges of colluding with foreign forces -- which carries a maximum penalty of life in prison.

"These numbers should be a wake-up call for us all," CPJ's chief executive Jodie Ginsberg said in a statement.

"A rise in attacks on journalists almost always precedes a rise in attacks on other freedoms -- the freedom to give and receive information, the freedom to assemble and move freely, the freedom to protest."

CPJ said that Israel, a multi-party democracy, had rarely appeared on the annual prison sentence before the outbreak of the Gaza war in 2023.

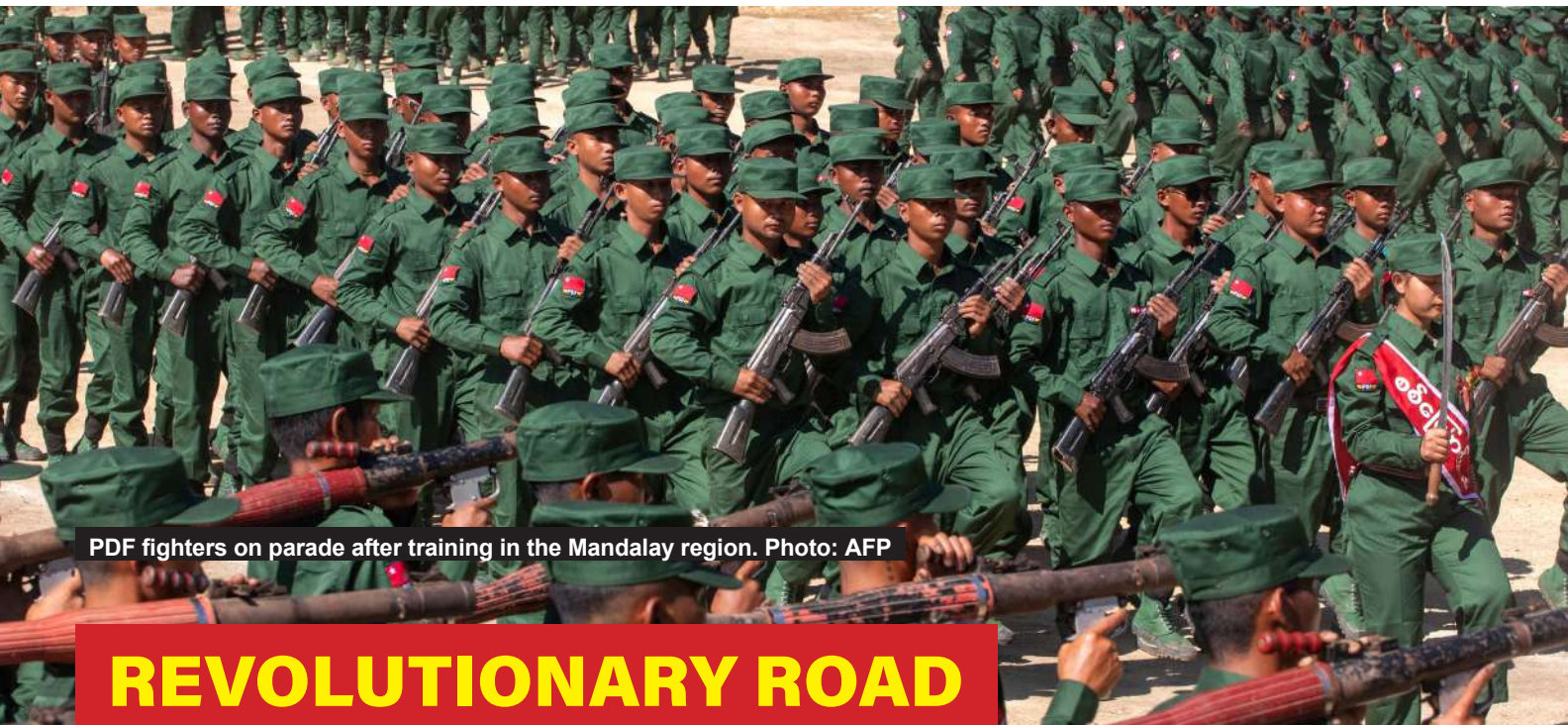
It nonetheless "catapulted to second-place last year as it tried to silence coverage from the occupied Palestinian territories," CPJ said, noting all journalists detained by Israel were Palestinians.

Asia remained the region with the highest number of jailed journalists, with Vietnam (16), Afghanistan (2), Bangladesh (4), India (3) and the Philippines (1) adding to China and Myanmar's world-leading figures.

"Journalists who were merely seeking to expose corruption and wrongdoing, or the devastating impact of climate change on local communities, have found themselves thrown behind bars," CPJ Asia Program Coordinator Beh Lih Yi said in a statement.

"There is no way to suppress the truth forever, it is high time for Asian governments to realise this and stop targeting journalists."

AFP



PDF fighters on parade after training in the Mandalay region. Photo: AFP

REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

INSIGHT MYANMAR

The Burmese nation's struggle against the military junta captures the raw intensity of a people fighting not just for survival, but for a future built on justice and freedom. It is a story defined by extraordinary courage, in which ordinary citizens transform into revolutionaries, a grassroots resistance rising up against a heavily armed and entrenched regime, driven by an unyielding desire to reclaim their homeland.

This is the dramatic topic of a panel discussion for Insight Myanmar – see link at the end of this story. It features a stellar and experienced group of guests: Anthony Davis, an international security analyst with decades of experience in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Philippines; Azad, an internationalist from the United States who spent nearly a year working with resistance groups in Chin State after a stint fighting in northeastern Syria; and Marc, who has extensive field operations experience in Africa and Asia and has been providing tactical and logistical guidance to Myanmar's resistance efforts since the conflict's early days.

The conversation begins by exploring the layered nature of the conflict, including tactical, strategic, logistical, and socio-political dimensions. As Marc recalls, "In the early days, the resistance movement resembled a grassroots uprising with no central organization. People were coming together without clear communication or a shared strategy. This made it incredibly difficult to consolidate efforts or even

establish trust among the various groups." Indeed, the resistance started organically as peaceful protests; then as it morphed into an armed struggle following violent military crackdowns, it had to overcome a number of challenges, like disorganization, communication barriers, and an initial mistrust between various ethnic armed organizations and newly formed People's Defense Forces (PDF) stemming from decades of inter-ethnic strife.

Another significant issue was the lack of a unifying, revolutionary party or external state support. Unlike other post-World War II revolutionary movements, Myanmar's resistance has not secured backing from neighboring countries; regional powers like China, India, and Thailand have remained cautious, prioritizing their own strategic interests over direct involvement. Nor have any global powers backed Myanmar struggle for democracy. This absence of international support has placed the burden entirely on the backs of the Burmese people, and forced the movement to self-organize with limited resources. This has further complicated efforts to consolidate under a single command structure, which the panelists also described below as a critical element for any successful revolutionary endeavor.

They also highlight how the nature of the Myanmar conflict stands out from other, more conventional conflicts. As Azad explains, "The philosophy of war here is deeply rooted in social and political dimensions, unlike the more mathematical, resource-driven approach in the West. For example, even acquiring something as

basic as magazines becomes a monumental task, not just due to financial constraints but also the need to convince others of its importance. Every step forward requires social and material buy-in from multiple stakeholders." Yet when the value of a purchase is recognized, it can reshape perspectives, as happened recently with regards to thermal optics. He notes, "When people saw its efficacy in the field, suddenly there was money for more." Resistance forces have also adapted innovative technologies, such as encrypted communication and drones to bolster effectiveness. The collective advantages of these decisions, however, cannot overcome historical grievances and mistrust over resource distribution, which continue to hinder partnerships. But in the end, despite these challenges, the guests note how resistance forces have steadily increased their effectiveness on the battlefield. In contrast, the Burmese military has material superiority and control of the state apparatus, yet often fails to capitalize on their advantages due to poor training and low morale; in some instances, under pressure from resistance forces, soldiers melt away, abandoning their equipment.

The discussion then touches upon what the panelists all identify as the resistance's critical weakness as was mentioned earlier—its lack of centralized command and control. Marc highlights how their origins as a grassroots uprising with no central organization still impact its ability to consolidate efforts, while Anthony emphasizes that fragmented groups operating without a unified structure diminish the potential for significant advancements against the junta. Finally, Azad adds that every step forward requires extensive social and material buy-in from multiple stakeholders, making coordination even more challenging. The panelists stress the need for improved communication and trust-building measures to foster unity. To effectively challenge the regime, they also stress that the resistance must shift from guerrilla tactics to semi-conventional warfare, which requires the formation of regular units capable of coordinated operations, a process still in its early stages. Transitioning from small, fragmented groups to larger, coordinated units remains a crucial step for the resistance's success.

Concerning the role of the National Unity Government (NUG), Anthony notes how they face "a significant challenge in balancing its international diplomacy efforts with the urgent needs on the ground. While it has made strides in education and healthcare initiatives, its limited engagement with local resistance groups creates a perception gap. Bridging this gap will require more direct collaboration and a clearer strategy

to unify disparate factions." He adds that while the NUG strives to position itself as the legitimate representative of the people, its influence in ethnic regions remains limited. While it does provide some logistical support for resistance forces and helps rebuild essential services like schools and clinics in areas under resistance control, it has not really become involved in strategic collaboration with local resistance groups. This latter concern fosters a perception among some factions that the NUG prioritizes international diplomacy over the immediate needs of the resistance.

The humanitarian toll of the conflict stands as a major obstacle to achieving victory. Millions of civilians have been displaced, often living in dire conditions, and without access to adequate food, shelter, or healthcare. This widespread suffering not only devastates families but also places immense pressure on resistance group to divert resources to humanitarian efforts, yet at the same time, still having to engage on the battlefield. The junta exploits these vulnerabilities, trying to deepen divisions within the resistance, while using fear and deprivation as weapons against the people.

Meanwhile, as noted earlier, the lack of substantial, external support continues to limit the resistance's capabilities, leaving them reliant on domestic solidarity and whatever support they can get from the global diaspora communities to sustain operations. This creates a fragile dynamic where every setback risks unraveling hard-fought progress. Beyond these immediate concerns, unresolved issues about federalism and power-sharing among Myanmar's ethnically diverse population loom large. Questions about how to equitably balance autonomy with unity complicate discussions about the nation's future, even as resistance factions press on.

Despite these formidable challenges, the resistance's unwavering resilience shines through. Their determination offers hope that a free and inclusive Myanmar remains within reach. However, the panelists stress again that realizing this vision requires more than battlefield victories—it demands deliberate efforts to foster unity across factions and to address the humanitarian crises that weaken the broader struggle. Only through a cohesive, inclusive approach can the resistance transform the nation's collective suffering into a foundation for lasting freedom and justice.

Listen to the Insight Myanmar discussion here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/e4b1ca5a-d903-450a-a86d-5f5a05234235>

US President Donald Trump and his wife watch a firework display to herald his arrival in office. Photo: AFP

US PRESIDENT TRUMP TOUGHENS CRACKDOWN ON IMMIGRATION AND DIVERSITY

US President Donald Trump announced Wednesday deployment of an extra 1,500 US troops to the Mexican border, as he stepped up a crackdown against illegal immigration and diversity programmes in a whirlwind start to his second term.

The 78-year-old Republican - who has pledged a "golden age" for America - halted refugee arrivals and threatened to prosecute local authorities that fail to deport migrants.

As part of his blitz of right-wing measures on returning to office, the billionaire also ordered that US government employees in controversial diversity programmes - conceived as ways to combat racism and sexism - be put on paid leave immediately.

Trump held what was reportedly his first phone call with a foreign leader since taking office Monday,

talking with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who promised increased trade to the United States, according to the kingdom's foreign ministry.

And in the latest round of appointments, Trump announced that fast food executive Andrew Puzder - who has previously faced questions over his business and private conduct - will be the new US ambassador to the European Union.

He named his longtime Secret Service bodyguard Sean Curran - who was at his side when an assassin opened fire and grazed his ear during a presidential campaign rally last July - as director of the security agency, which protects the president and other top officials.

But while Trump is steamrolling through Washington, there have been surprise speedbumps.

Close advisor and world's richest man Elon Musk revealed budding tensions when he bashed an AI investment mega project that Trump himself publicly touted at a televised White House event, flanked by top Silicon Valley tycoons.

And Trump prompted questions when he threatened Russia with sanctions if it doesn't accept an unspecified Ukraine peace deal - something he previously had claimed he would broker within 24 hours.

His predecessor Joe Biden had left him a "lot of work," Trump told Fox News's Sean Hannity in his first television interview since taking office.

As Los Angeles continues to be scorched by wildfires, he also floated the idea of ending federal disaster aid and disbanding FEMA, the government agency that manages disasters.

"I'd rather see the states take care of their own problems," he told Hannity.

Migrants and diversity fight

Trump, who has more than a dozen ex-Fox News employees in his administration, discussed his barrage of executive orders and his plans for the first 100 days.

But it was a typically divisive conversation, with Trump - investigated for leading unprecedented efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss - calling Democrats "stupid" and claiming that "the only thing they're good at, really, is cheating."

Since reentering the White House, Trump has focused heavily on harsh migration measures.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt confirmed that Trump was dispatching 1,500 troops to add to the 2,000-plus contingent already at the Mexican border.

He likewise halted arrivals of refugees already cleared to enter the United States as part of the crackdown, according to a State Department memo.

Trump's other main target has been on anything related to the controversial diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programmes, part of what he claims is a "Woke" agenda. He ordered related government websites and social media accounts to go offline and federal workers involved to put on paid leave.

Trump also ended what he called "radical" affirmative action in awarding federal contracts, revoking an order crafted to combat racism that dates back to the civil rights era of the 1960s.

One of Trump's first acts as president on Monday was to pardon more than 1,000 supporters who stormed the US Capitol, attacking police and vandalizing the seat of US democracy, after he lost in 2020.

A row between Trump and the bishop at the National Cathedral, who asked him during her sermon at a service he attended Tuesday to show "mercy" to "scared" migrants and LGBTQ people, simmered on.

Trump called Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde "nasty" and she later told The New York Times that she felt compelled to speak up.

"Was anyone going to say anything about the turn the country's taking?"

More radical changes can be expected in the coming days and weeks as the new president seeks to make good on his election pledges that help win him a landslide victory.

AFP



IS SICHUAN'S CHENGDU THE NEW HACKING HUB OF THE WORLD?

SUN LEE

In the past 20 years, a variety of cyberthreat intelligence analyses have pointed out that Sichuan Province is a "known hot spot for hacking" and that Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province in southwestern China, has "become a hub for Chinese advanced persistent threat activity." Facts and Details has a fascinating Chengdu page (last updated in July 2020) with information about the city that potential travellers might find useful, such as transportation, sights and tea houses and food in Chengdu. The Chengdu page also includes a section - "Chengdu Hackers".

Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan Province in Southwestern China is the fourth most populous city in China with a population of over 20 million. Located in the fertile Chengdu Plain region and historically called the "Country of Heaven" or "Land of Abundance", the city is also known as the city of leisure. When mentioning Chengdu, many are fond of the city's teahouses and hole-in-the-wall restaurants which have a special name called fly restaurants. Visiting teahouses in Chengdu is

not only for enjoying tea but also as social activity for locals. Families and friends meet in teahouses and can spend hours drinking tea, playing board games, or just relaxing.

It is learnt that hackers in Chengdu seem to love hotpot meals. Hotpot restaurants often are their go-to places for gathering or meeting clients and business partners or even journalists. In 2007, Time Magazine journalist Simon Elegant interviewed a well-known Chinese hacker Tan Dailin. Back then, Tan was in his early 20s and later in 2020 the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) placed him on a wanted list with three other members of APT41. Tan was accompanied by seven of Tan's buddies from the Network Crack Program Hacker group, in a hotpot restaurant in Chengdu.

After lots of beer, which is probably the best beverage to accompany a hotpot meal, members of the NCPH showed their hacker spirit when they were

asked if they might hack for money, and responded that “the real hackers keep their heads down, finding network loopholes, write killer programs and live off social security,” and they would not do it “for a name or money.” Although such a hacker spirit is inspiring, the reality is not. Tan had taken payment from “an unknown company or entity” for hacking in 2006 and prior. In 2019, a report from Mandiant (Now part of Google) disclosed threat group APT41, of which Tan was a member, conducted financially motivated activity for personal gain while continuing its cyber espionage operations activities from 2012 to 2019.

The leaked documents from i-SOON in 2024 also showed hackers’ love of hotpot. On one occasion, i-SOON executives proposed to have a 200 people hotpot party for a company event. Hotpot dinners had been the choice of i-SOON employees and their clients in multiple chatlog conversations. The leisurely pace of life with teahouses and hotpot restaurants is unique to Chengdu. It seems that exchanging ideas, building networks, and initiating collaborations happen in many of Chengdu’s hotpot restaurants and teahouses – the informal meeting places.

Chengdu as a hacking hub benefits from science and technology focused universities in the city. Chengdu is among the top 10 cities in China with the most universities and colleges. As of the end of 2022, the data from the municipal government of Chengdu showed that the city had a total of 65 universities and colleges. Chengdu is home to several prestigious universities and technical institutes, including Sichuan University, Chengdu University of Information Technology (CUIT), University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (UESTC) and Chengdu University of Technology. These universities produce a steady stream of skilled engineers and programmers.

China’s 2023 Cybersecurity Industry Talent Report, which was based largely on data from Chinese online recruitment services provider Zhaopin, indicated that Chengdu was right behind Beijing ranking as the 2nd city where the most cybersecurity talent resides, followed by Shenzhen and Shanghai. These cybersecurity talents provide ample human resources for local information technology companies. Researchers and cybersecurity firms have identified that several Chengdu-based Chinese APT groups have had close ties with local universities.

For example, several members of APT41 attended Sichuan University. Chengdu 404, the company behind APT41, provided internships and scholarships to students from Sichuan University and Chengdu University of Information Technology. Published in October 2024, the “Pacific Rim” report series from The United Kingdom-based company Sophos identified Chengdu-based Sichuan Silence Information Technology and the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China in Chengdu as being involved in the threat campaigns against Sophos’ firewalls and other perimeter devices for five years.

No doubt, Chengdu is a very charming city that draws talent. However, Chengdu becoming a hub for hacking was not a random case. It builds on its rich hacker culture, ample educational opportunities and talent resources. In addition, of course, gathering at teahouse and sitting around a table for a spicy hotpot dinner with cold beer can make ideas flow freely, help networks build easily, and allow collaborations to occur naturally – and sometimes hacking happens. Thus, beyond the cute panda image portrayed by the CCP to depict Chengdu, there lies an infectious hub of state-sponsored hacking.

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



HONG KONG MOGUL JIMMY LAI GRILLED OVER US, TAIWAN TIES

Jailed Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai testified on Thursday last week that he brokered meetings between former Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen and American establishment figures, with prosecutors alleging that he colluded with foreign forces.

Lai is one of the most prominent figures to be prosecuted under Hong Kong's national security law, which Beijing imposed in 2020 following huge pro-democracy protests in the city.

Western countries and rights groups have demanded the release of the 77-year-old founder of the now-shuttered tabloid Apple Daily, who has been behind bars since December 2020.

Lai first took the witness stand in November and prosecutors began cross-examination on Thursday after defence lawyers wrapped up their questioning.

The offence of collusion with foreign forces carries a maximum penalty of life in prison. Lai also faces a charge related to "seditious publications".

On Thursday, Lai said he set up a paid "consultancy" arrangement in 2017 where retired United States general Jack Keane and former US deputy secretary of defence Paul Wolfowitz would meet with Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan's leader at the time.

Lai said that, shortly after Trump became president in 2016, Tsai's government had wanted insight into the latest US thinking on the self-ruled island.

"(Keane and Wolfowitz) were both my friends and they seemed to know about the (Trump) administration's sentiments and thinking toward Taiwan," Lai told the court.

Prosecutors presented messages in court they said showed Lai supporting a stronger US military presence in Taiwan.

"I suggest to you that the purpose of engaging (Keane and Wolfowitz) was to give advice to Taiwan for a military upgrade," said prosecutor Anthony Chau.

"I disagree," Lai replied.

Prosecutors have previously displayed a chart in court titled "(Lai's) external political connections" that featured headshots of political and diplomatic figures in the US and Britain.

At the start of his testimony, Lai said his newspaper championed democracy and freedom, adding that he had always disavowed violence.

Apple Daily was forced to close in 2021 after police raids and the arrests of its senior editors.

He did not opt to testify in any of his five previous cases, all of which resulted in convictions, including for organising and participating in marches during the 2019 protests.

A meeting between Lai and former US vice president Mike Pence in 2019 — at the height of the Hong Kong protests — has become key to the prosecutors' case to prove Lai's foreign collusion.

On Thursday, Pence took part in a Hong Kong event organised by UBS bank for its clients, where he gave "an insider view into the US elections and its far-reaching global implications", according to the event website.

AFP



HOMeward BOUND

“How can I ever live and have a comfortable life knowing young men, young brothers and sisters, are going through this stuff?” asks Saw Sha Kerpaw Wah, a humanitarian working in Karen State, speaking on the Insight Myanmar Podcast. A refugee himself before resettling in Norway, Wah shares his experiences as a young immigrant, his motivation to serve the Karen community, and his ultimate dream for Kawthoolei—the Karen word for their homeland.

Growing up in a refugee camp, Wah felt a deep sense of displacement from an early age. “This is not a village. This is not where we belong, and there must be some changes one day,” he recalls thinking as a child. When his family moved to Norway at the age of nine, he found physical safety, but not peace. The feeling of not belonging followed him, and he remembers his initial weeks in Norway vividly: “I would close my eyes, hoping that when I opened them, I’d be back in the poor refugee camp, playing with my friends, being a kid again. But reality was different.”

As one of the first Karen families to arrive in Norway, Wah had to quickly adapt to a new life in a foreign country, navigating the challenges of language and culture. But he always keeps in mind the story his family tells of how they became refugees in 1995, just two months after his birth in Manerplaw, the former headquarters of the Karen National Union. After the fall of Manerplaw to Myanmar military forces, his family was forced to flee through the jungle, beginning a tragic odyssey that took them from their own homeland.

Although he has lived in Norway for 20 years and feels warmly welcomed there, Wah always believed that Kawthoolei was his true home. “I do consider [Norway] as a home,” he admits. “It’s like my second home. But Kawthoolei, where most people know as Karen State,

that’s where I truly belong. No matter how much I love Norway, I will always want to return to my homeland.” This sense of belonging was coupled with a strong belief that it was in his DNA to go back and serve his people.

Wah’s dedication his mission grew slowly over time, nourished by the many stories his mother told him about the struggles and wars endured by the Karen people. “I don’t think we have any other purpose in this world than serving the people around us,” Wah explains. Speaking philosophically, Wah reflects on how, in the end, everything—including we, ourselves, all those we love, and in fact everyone in the world—will die; so what truly matters is how we live our lives, and what we do for others.

A real turning point for Wah came during his final year of college when he saw a short video by an indigenous community leader from Kawthoolei, Saw O Moo. Though Wah had never heard of him person before, the message sparked something inside him. It resonated so strongly, in fact, that Wah dropped out of college and fully committed himself to the cause of his people, making frequent trips back to Kawthoolei ever since. “Because of him, I made the decisions that shaped who I am today,” Wah says simply.

Wah describes how the Karen have been resisting the Myanmar military since 1949, when their first president, Saw Ba Oo Gyi, was assassinated. His death left a leadership void, causing divisions among Karen leaders that persist to this day. “We tear ourselves apart if we lack leadership, good leadership,” he says. “We need a new leader who can reunite the whole people.” This fragmentation has weakened the Karen’s efforts to unite and secure control of their borders, preventing the realization of an independent Kawthoolei. This is one of the reasons why Wah returned, joining those who continue to stand firm in the fight for freedom, while hoping he can help to finally bridge these long-standing divisions. He also shares his ultimate ambition for his work and for Kawthoolei: “My children don’t have to grow up in a time of war. You know, they can grow up peacefully, play among the bamboo and in the river, in the rain, however they want. That’s my ultimate dream. A free, godly [place] where all can flourish, not just Karen people.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/1/1/episode-301-homeward-bound>



BELARUS DEEPENS TIES WITH MYANMAR'S JUNTA

The military junta in Myanmar is seeking closer ties with Belarus, hosting the first-ever Myanmar-Belarus Business Forum and welcoming Belarusian Foreign Minister Maxim Ryzhenkov this month.

This diplomatic engagement comes as the junta faces widespread international condemnation for its ongoing human rights violations.

The high-level meetings in Naypyidaw featured discussions between junta leader Min Aung Hlaing and the Belarusian delegation, focusing on expanding cooperation in multiple sectors, including the sensitive area of defense collaboration, according to Burmese news outlets.

The timing of these discussions raises concerns, as the junta continues its brutal campaign against its own people across Myanmar.

The talks covered various sectors such as pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and industry, but observers note that Belarus could become a significant

military supplier to Myanmar's increasingly isolated regime. Both nations, facing international sanctions, appear to be forging closer ties to circumvent diplomatic pressure.

Belarus exports arms to many countries, including authoritarian regimes like Myanmar, China, Sudan, and Azerbaijan, according to Stop Wapenhandel, an independent research and campaign organisation against arms trade and arms industry.

Lt-Gen Nyo Saw, a key figure in the junta's economic empire and member of the junta's Military Council officially known as State Administration Council, played a prominent role in the business forum.

While the junta claims these meetings aim to promote economic development, critics argue that such partnerships primarily serve to prop up the military regime's grip on power.



TIGER MUAY THAI GYM SIGNS MYANMAR'S FEMALE STAR AS MALE FIGHTER THANT ZIN'S SOLO SUCCESS STORY

A social media discussion has emerged following the announcement of Myanmar female fighter Naw Ohn Mar Soe joining the prestigious Tiger Muay Thai gym. This partnership with an internationally renowned training facility is seen as a significant step in her professional fighting career.

Meanwhile, the conversation has drawn parallels to male Myanmar fighter Thant Zin's career path. His recent ONE Championship record shows impressive performance with two consecutive victories in 2024. His latest wins include a technical knockout victory over Jai Singh at ONE Lumpinee 52 in February 2024, and a knockout win against Thai Provincial Administrative Organization Piak Uthai at ONE Lumpinee 76 in August 2023. His most recent appearance resulted in a loss against Takeru Segawa at ONE Lumpinee 81 in September 2024.

Social media users recalled that Tiger Muay Thai had previously shown interest in working with Thant Zin. While some fans expressed regret about this unrealized collaboration, others defended his independent path, noting his successful progression in ONE Championship without major gym affiliations.

A Facebook user emphasized that Thant Zin has already established his path in ONE Championship, while another suggested that fighters of his caliber don't necessarily need to actively seek gym affiliations - rather, official offers should come to them.

This discussion highlights the different approaches to career development for Myanmar fighters in the international arena, whether through prestigious gym affiliations or independent paths.

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.