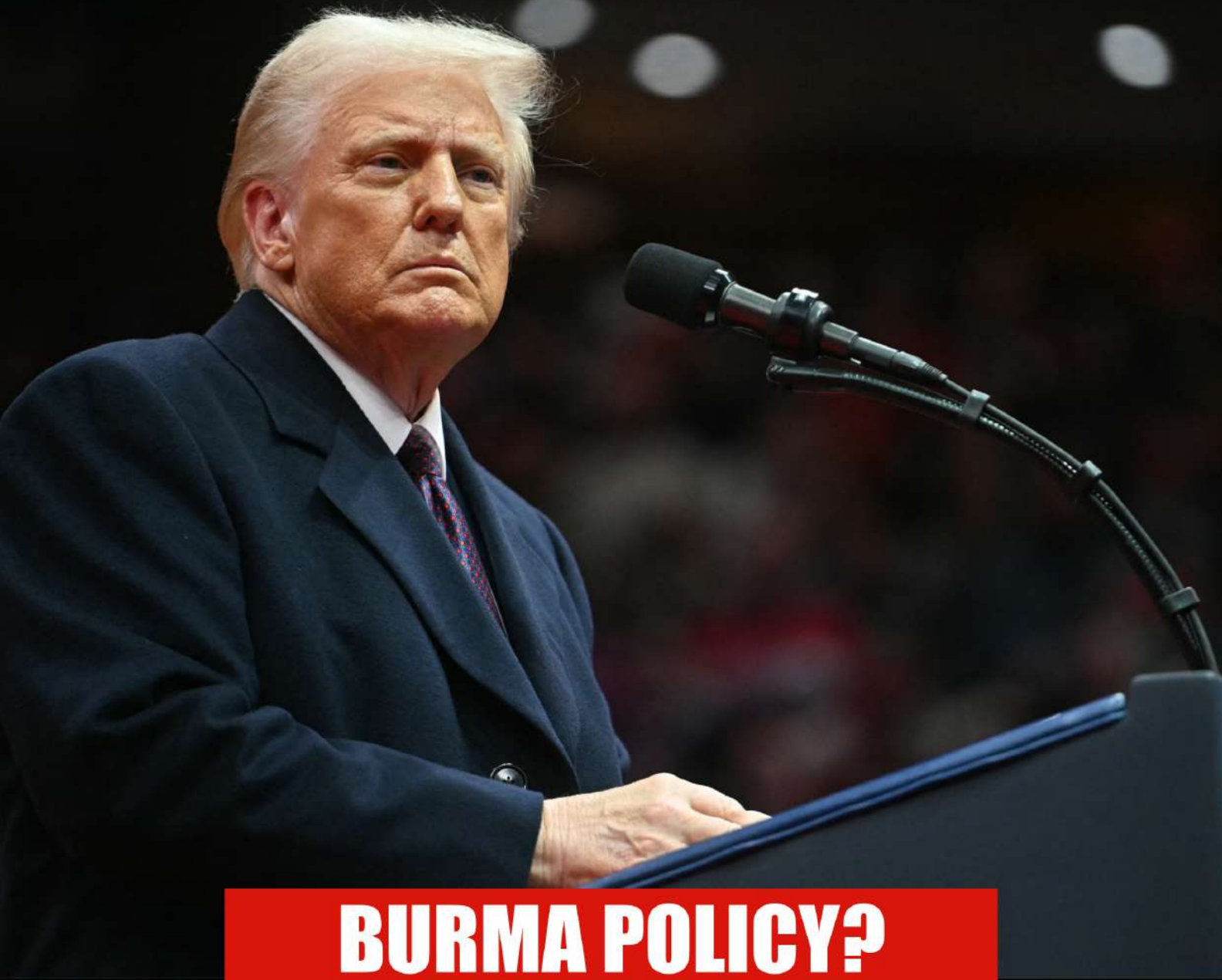


ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



BURMA POLICY?

Questions over continuity on US Myanmar policy, refugees temporarily blocked

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.

MYANMAR'S POST-COUP CRIME SPLURGE

Even in non-conflict areas of Myanmar, citizens are fearful of the breakdown of law and order. Since the 2021 military coup, crimes and lawlessness are in an upswing.

In a newly-released documentary by MyanmarDocs entitled "Drowning in Crime", testimony from a number of witnesses and experts show how normal life is becoming increasingly unsafe as individuals, gangs and organized crime organizations threaten life, limb and property as the foundations of Myanmar society break down.

The collapse of the rule of law following the 2021 military coup has led to increased violent crimes such as robberies, assaults, and homicides. The weakened judicial and law enforcement systems leave citizens vulnerable to violence and crime with little recourse.

Myanmar faces a variety of crime-related threats, deeply intertwined with the ongoing political, economic, and humanitarian crises, worsening fear for many people.

The situation is made worse by the increasing unemployment rate, dire economic environment, and increasing use of illegal drugs and drug trafficking. Part of the problem lies in the police and local authorities not carrying out their duty to crack down on crime. As witnesses interviewed in the documentary say, theft of property, including motorcycles and mobile phones are unlikely to be reported partly because the police do not look into the case, and some people fear going to the police to report a crime.

Myanmar has long had a problem with serious crimes such as human trafficking and drug dealing, but the situation is getting worse. In addition to the

growing "petty crime" wave, Myanmar is a source and transit country for human trafficking, particularly affecting women and children. Traffickers exploit vulnerable individuals for forced labour, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse, often targeting those displaced by conflict or economic hardship. This has hit the headlines with the increased number of people kidnapped to work in scam centres. Cybercrime, including online scams and fraudulent activities, has risen sharply in Myanmar. Criminal networks exploit the country's limited cyber-security infrastructure, and scams often target both domestic and international victims.

Myanmar has long been a major producer of methamphetamine and opium, with crime syndicates operating large-scale drug production facilities, particularly in border regions like Shan State. The drug trade fuels organized crime, corruption, and violence, impacting both public safety and community health.

Numerous armed groups and militias operate in Myanmar, often engaging in extortion, illegal taxation, and resource exploitation. These groups contribute to instability and create unsafe conditions for civilians, especially in ethnic minority regions.

All these threats are exacerbated by the ongoing political instability, economic collapse, and widespread displacement of people, creating an environment where criminal networks thrive and ordinary citizens face heightened risks. As commentators in the documentary lament, seriously tackling this crime splurge depends on the ousting of the military junta and a return to some form of democratic and societal norms.

EDITORIAL

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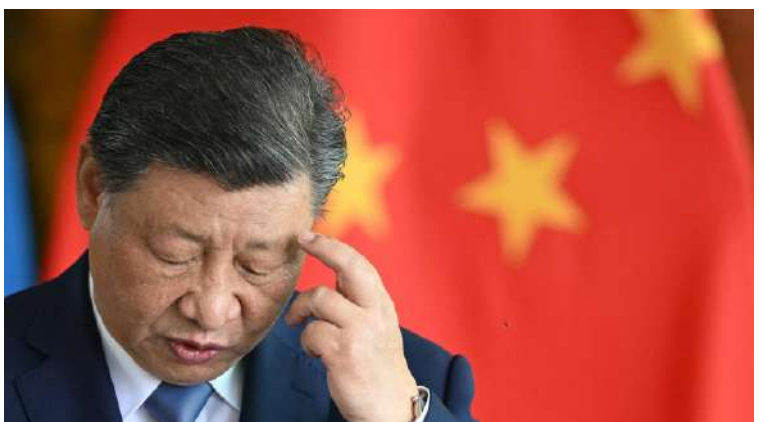
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Cover photo of US President Donald Trump by AFP





US President Donald Trump is taking a number of radical steps in line with his election promises. Photo: AFP

BURMA POLICY?

**QUESTIONS OVER CONTINUITY
ON US MYANMAR POLICY,
REFUGEES TEMPORARILY
BLOCKED**

Uncertainty hangs over how US President Donald Trump's new administration looks set to proceed with both its Myanmar policy and approach to Burmese refugees on the path to US asylum and citizenship.

Since US President Trump officially took office on 20 January, his administration has moved fast on a slew of election promises – from starting to close the border with Mexico to taking down elements of the “Woke” agenda infusing government and societal institutions.

For Myanmar analysts, the new government's approach to the Myanmar crisis is being watched with concern, given that under the Joe Biden administration Washington took a tough line on the Myanmar military who illegally seized power in a 2021 coup. Are any changes in store?

MYANMAR CIVIL WAR 'TOP PRIORITY'

In her appearance at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 21 January, North Country Representative Elise Stefanik outlined her intentions for action with some of the largest and smallest nations in the world. The Senate was preparing to vote on whether to confirm her as President Trump's newly-appointed ambassador to the UN. Ms Stefanik brought up Myanmar during her testimony before the committee.

"When it comes to standing up for human rights, the civil war in Myanmar needs to be among the top priorities," she stated.

Many Myanmar people consider US policy towards Myanmar to have been strong on words, though ineffectual, but the Trump administration has a chance to change it.

Even though laws like the 2022 BURMA Act permit the delivery of non-lethal aid to resistance organizations in Myanmar, the Biden administration mostly evaded carrying out congressional directives. The Trump administration has a significant chance to examine and put into action a more proactive and, consequently, successful plan to end the conflict in Myanmar peacefully and speed up the restoration of democracy. Trump came to office under a promise to end wars – though his main focus was Ukraine and the Middle East.

However, there are concerns that the Trump administration may reduce US involvement in Myanmar.

Myanmar is currently experiencing tremendous violence and humanitarian hardship as a result of the military junta's illegal coup in 2021 and the resulting Spring Revolution. Increased fighting between the junta's forces and armed opposition groups has



Will the US government stay committed to a strong Burma policy? TNLA fighters in Shan State. Photo: AFP

resulted in large-scale displacement of people, serious human rights violations, and an increasing number of civilian deaths. In addition, the junta continues to hold thousands of political prisoners, including the country's former leaders Aung San Suu Kyi and former president Win Myint – both jailed under what critics view as trumped up charges.

A serious humanitarian catastrophe is taking place in Myanmar. Millions of people are in dire need of aid, and the coup has worsened already-existing poverty and inequality. Given these circumstances, the military junta should be placed under more pressure from the international community to put an end to the violence and make room for the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid.

FREEZING AID?

The new US administration has frozen virtually all foreign aid, according to a memo issued on 24 January, making exceptions only for emergency food, and military funding for Israel and Egypt.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio sent an internal memo days after President Trump took office vowing an "America First" policy of tightly restricting assistance overseas. The US has long been the world's biggest foreign aid donor.

"No new funds shall be obligated for new awards or extensions of existing awards until each proposed new award or extension has been reviewed and approved," said the memo to staff seen by AFP. A 90-day review process has been proposed.

The sweeping order appears to affect everything from development assistance to military aid - including to Ukraine, which received billions of dollars in weapons under Trump's predecessor Biden as it tries to repel Russia's invasion. The order includes a hold on support for Myanmar human rights groups and independent media who have been receiving US aid.

BURMESE REFUGEES

Concerns have been voiced about the status of Burmese refugees destined for the USA.

US President Trump has halted arrivals of refugees already cleared to enter the United States, according to a memo seen 22 January, as he quickly pursues a sweeping crackdown on migration.

Following an executive order signed hours after Trump took office, "all previously scheduled travel of refugees to the United States is being canceled," said a State Department email to groups working with new arrivals.



Internally displaced people in Mong Vang in Shan State. Millions of people are displaced due to the junta's war. Photo: AFP

The memo asked the UN International Organization for Migration not to move refugees to transit centers and said that all processing on cases has also been suspended.

Refugees already resettled in the United States will continue to receive services as planned, it said.

Trump in each of his presidential campaigns has run on promises to crack down on undocumented immigration. But the refugee move also targets a legal pathway for people fleeing wars, persecution or disasters.

In his executive order, he said he was suspending refugee admissions as of January 27 and ordered a report on how to change the program, in part by giving "greater involvement" to states and local jurisdictions, which he said were being "inundated".

This process and assessment may take 90 days or more to complete.

SHIFT IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT

New Secretary of State Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants, said 22 January that the State Department will "no longer undertake any activities that facilitate or encourage mass migration."

"Our diplomatic relations with other countries, particularly in the Western Hemisphere, will prioritize securing America's borders, stopping illegal and destabilizing migration and negotiating the repatriation of illegal immigrants," Rubio said in a statement.

Biden had embraced the refugee programme as a way to support people in need through legal means.

In the 2024 fiscal year, more than 100,000 refugees resettled in the United States, the most in three decades.

The Democratic Republic of Congo and Myanmar have been among the top sources of refugees in recent years.

Senator Jeanne Shaheen, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, voiced alarm at Trump's moves and said that acceptance of refugees was "a core American value".

"The US Refugee Admissions Program has a long history of bipartisan support and is a life-saving tool for the most vulnerable refugees, all while making Americans safer by promoting stability around the world," she said.

The State Department memo said that Afghans who worked with the United States until the collapse of the Western-backed government in 2021 could still arrive through their separate resettlement programme.

But Shaheen voiced concern that Afghans were also being left in limbo with flights cancelled.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that there are 37.9 million refugees in the world, among some 122.6 million displaced people.

Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president and CEO of Global Refuge, which advocates for refugees, said that Trump's decision was "devastating" to people who had already lost so much.

"Refugees go through one of the most rigorous vetting processes in the world, and it's heartbreaking to see their dreams of safety derailed just days before, or in some cases, just hours before they were set to begin their new lives here," she said.

The United Nations stressed 24 January that seeking asylum is a "universally recognised" human right, following the decisions by US President Trump to suspend all refugee admissions and halt the US asylum programme.

"All states are entitled to exercise their jurisdiction along their international borders (but) they need to do so in line with their human rights obligations," UN rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva when asked about the decisions.

"The right to seek asylum is a universally recognised human right."

WAITING

At this stage, it is unclear how many Burmese refugees are in the pipeline for a new life in the USA. As one Western analyst noted, there are those long-standing refugees who have been in Thailand for years, if not decades and were preparing to come. And then there are a number of recent arrivals who fled Myanmar after the military coup and are seeking asylum in the USA.

Reporting: Mizzima, AFP



Photo: Nick Fewings

MYANMAR JUNTA ENGAGES IN PEACE TALKS AND CEASEFIRES WITH CHINESE MEDIATION

On January 18, the Myanmar military junta and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) signed a ceasefire agreement in Kunming, China, marking the second direct meeting between the two sides in the country. This follows several previous negotiations, collectively referred to as the "Haigan meetings," where the junta and various Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) reached minor agreements under Chinese mediation.

The ceasefire agreement comes in the aftermath of the junta's significant territorial losses, including the fall of its Northeast Regional Command Headquarters in Lashio. While some reports speculate that the MNDAA may withdraw from Lashio within six months, the armed group has not officially responded to these claims. Military analysts remain skeptical of any potential retreat, pointing out the strategic importance of the city.

Despite the ceasefire, neither the junta nor the MNDAA have made any official statements regarding the agreement. The only confirmation came from the Chinese government on January 20. The specifics of the agreement remain undisclosed, fueling speculation about its actual scope and implications.

A MNDAA official responsible for Lashio's restoration dismissed the possibility of returning the city to the junta. He stated, "Lashio is stable, and the agreement does not include handing it back. We lost many lives taking this city, and there is no point in giving it up."

Meanwhile, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) has agreed to engage in peace talks with the junta following pressure from China. However,



Arakan Army fighters in Rakhine State.
Photo: AA

TNLA spokespersons indicate that no date or venue has been set. "Given the current situation, direct talks between us and the junta are impossible," said a TNLA representative. "However, due to Chinese arbitration, a meeting might take place. We are prepared, but as of now, no circumstances allow for such a discussion, and we cannot disclose further details."

China, which shares a long border with Myanmar, has been pushing both the junta and EAOs to negotiate in an effort to restore stability and resume border trade. The recent ceasefire between the junta and MNDAA is seen as part of Beijing's broader strategy to contain the conflict and protect its economic interests in the region. However, the effectiveness of these diplomatic efforts remains uncertain as armed resistance continues across Myanmar.

Arakan Army expands its area of operation

The Arakan Army (AA) continues its military offensive against junta forces, expanding its operations into Myanmar's central plains. The group recently seized two junta bases on the Rakhine State-Magway Region border, located approximately 40 miles from Ann City, which fell to the AA on December 20. Local sources report that the junta reinforced these bases with around 300 troops before their eventual fall.

Additionally, the AA launched an attack on the Moehti base, situated on the border of Rakhine State and Bago Region, on January 21. After five days of intense fighting, the AA successfully captured the base. Similar operations in Ayeyarwady Region led to the seizure of two junta-controlled positions—Point 263 on



Older men and former veterans are now being recruited by the junta. Photo: Supplied

January 26 and Point 369 on January 21.

The AA's rapid territorial gains underscore its growing military strength, while also raising concerns about potential escalations in the ongoing conflict between ethnic armed groups and the junta.

Meanwhile, the human rights watchdog Fortify Rights has filed a complaint with the International Criminal Court (ICC), urging action against the AA over allegations of war crimes. The organization accused the AA of torturing and executing two prisoners of war (POWs) in Kyauktaw Township in February 2024.

AA spokesperson Khine Thukha acknowledged the incident, stating that AA soldiers committed the crime out of personal vengeance after the POWs allegedly killed their family members. "This incident is totally against our policy. We do not accept this kind of unlawful action. We will take action against whoever commits such crimes," he said. He emphasized that the AA remains committed to fighting the junta while avoiding similar incidents in the future.

Older men subject to military draft

The Myanmar junta has introduced a new security initiative targeting men aged 35-65, requiring them to participate in local defense efforts rather than military conscription. The policy, implemented on August 16, 2023, is framed as a measure to protect communities under the directive of the People's Security and Counter-Terrorism Central Committee. These security units are responsible for safeguarding residential areas and counter-terrorism activities.

A source from Naypyidaw revealed that under this directive, men across Myanmar are being compelled to undergo basic military training and join local security forces. The junta has promised to provide arms, equipment, and food provisions based on regional security needs.

In Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, the junta has already established these so-called "People's Security Teams" (Yalapha) in most wards. Composed mainly of veterans, former firefighters, and ex-government staff, these units are tasked with duties such as enforcing guest list checks and preventing perceived threats.

Reports suggest that the junta authorities in Mandalay are coercing older men into joining these teams by offering incentives such as monthly rations and exemptions from military conscription. Analysts believe this strategy is aimed at strengthening the junta's local control while reducing reliance on its overstretched military forces.

Although framed as a security measure, this forced recruitment has sparked concerns about further militarization of civilian life in Myanmar. Critics warn that such policies could lead to greater unrest as communities are drawn deeper into the junta's conflict with resistance forces.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA ENFORCES MILITARY CONSCRIPTION LAW, RESTRICTS TRAVEL FOR SUMMONED INDIVIDUALS

The Military Council's People's Military Service Law, officially issued on 23 January, imposes travel restrictions on individuals summoned for military service, barring them from leaving the country without permission from the Central Military Service Organization.

The law further stipulates that those who have passed medical examinations for conscription and seek exemption, service reduction, or deferment will not be permitted to travel abroad until their applications are approved by the Central Military Service Organization.

Additionally, the law includes a directive for basic education schools to incorporate lessons on international military law and the junta's military laws into their curriculum, in coordination with relevant ministries, to raise public awareness.

According to the regulation, ward and village tract administrators must compile a list of eligible individuals for military service each year by 31 December, working alongside list-collection teams. The compiled data must then be submitted to the township committee, which will issue summons for registration.

Those selected for conscription are required to register as military personnel and sign an enlistment contract. If an individual fails to report for registration, their family will be contacted for an explanation. A family member must provide valid proof of the person's absence or their whereabouts and report on their behalf.

Failure to comply will be considered evasion of military service, constituting a violation of Section 23(1) of the Military Service Law.

The newly enacted law consists of 10 chapters, outlining the responsibilities of various military conscription levels, procedures for list collection and registration, summoning processes, and military service benefits.

Although the junta formally implemented the Military Service Law in February 2024, recruitment efforts had already been underway before the law's bylaw was officially issued.

The military has currently conducted conscription in nine batches since enforcement began, drafting thousands of individuals.



General Aung San's statue in Naypyidaw.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA ARRESTS 32 CIVILIANS IN PAST TWO MONTHS FOR ONLINE CRITICISM

The Myanmar military junta has arrested 32 civilians, including a child, in the past two months, in what activist groups say is a blatant violation of freedom of expression. The arrests, reported by the youth activist group, Athan, on 21 January, occurred between November and December 2024.

Among those detained were a child, a religious leader, a businessman, and 29 civilians, including two women.

The Ayeyarwady Region recorded the highest number of arrests, with 21 individuals detained. Three arrests occurred in Yangon Region, two each in Mon State, Mandalay Region, Shan State, and Tanintharyi Region.

All detainees were charged under Section 505 (a) of the Penal Code, according to Athan's statement.

The group highlighted that life under military rule has been marked by socio-economic decline and a broader humanitarian crisis. Despite strict restrictions on freedom of speech, expressions of dissent such as criticism of military leaders, satire, and political commentary persist.

"Military authorities are targeting and silencing those who dare to speak out, post on Facebook, or even reactions with love emojis on TikTok. This is an

organization that disregards human rights entirely. Violating these rights has become their easiest way to suppress dissent," said a member of Mandalay's anti-regime strike group.

The activist added that many individuals remain in custody without public acknowledgement, arrested simply for criticizing the regime.

Reports from groups like Athan reveal that the junta has ramped up social media surveillance, restricted internet access, and arrested individuals critical of the regime.

Pro-military Telegram channels have further fuelled the crackdown, encouraging the arrest of critics online.

In December 2024, Athan reported an escalation in the junta's suppression of digital rights and freedom of expression throughout the year. Data from the Myanmar Internet Project, a research group, on 7 January 2025, indicated that 374 individuals were arrested in 2024 for criticizing the military online.

Additionally, another research group, Data for Myanmar disclosed on 3 December 2024, that 1,840 individuals had been arrested nationwide between 2022 and 31 October, 2024, for criticizing the military regime on social media platforms following the coup.



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National Unity Government
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NUG TO INTENSIFY REVOLUTION IN MYANMAR DURING 2025 WITH ETHNIC ALLIES AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

The National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar has pledged to collaborate closely with revolutionary forces and ethnic allies to escalate the fight against the military junta in 2025, according to U Kyaw Zaw, spokesperson for the NUG Presidential Office.

In a public and international address on 21 January, U Kyaw Zaw emphasized the government's commitment to ending the junta's human rights violations, halting cross-border crimes and online scams, and rebuilding Myanmar's economy to alleviate the people's hardships.

"To end the terrorist military junta's atrocities, protect civilians, and rebuild our nation, the NUG, alongside ethnic allies and revolutionary forces, is determined to accelerate the revolution in 2025," said U Kyaw Zaw.

He revealed plans for strengthened joint military operations with allies in 2025, highlighting the possibility of achieving significant political agreements

during the year. Additionally, he urged the international community to take decisive steps to sever the junta's financial lifelines to limit its capacity for terror.

U Kyaw Zaw expressed unshakable confidence in the success of the Spring Revolution.

"No one can stop the success of our people's revolution. With the determination and unity of the people, victory is inevitable," he said.

In an interview with Mizzima on 15 January, he disclosed plans for the NUG to establish ministries within Myanmar to enhance coordination with allies and accelerate the revolution's progress.

The NUG's renewed focus and collaboration efforts aim to bring the military dictatorship to an end while laying the foundation for a democratic and stable Myanmar.



NUG UNION MINISTER ATTENDS HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS CONFERENCE

On 21 January, U Aung Myo Min, the Union Minister for the Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government (NUG), attended a conference entitled "Improving the Support and Protection of Human Rights Defenders to Strengthen Civic Space." This event was organized by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.

This three-day conference was held in the United Kingdom in January 2025 and was attended by senior officials from the UN human rights mechanisms, EU member states envoys for human rights, special delegates from foreign ministries, business leaders promoting human rights, and human rights defenders.

At the conference, the Union Minister highlighted the lack of adequate protections for human rights

defenders operating on the ground, despite the rights and protection mechanisms enshrined in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

The Union Minister specifically pointed out the arbitrary arrests and human rights violations faced by human rights defenders in Myanmar, as well as the targeting and repression of human rights defenders and their families.

The Union Minister urged EU member states to focus on the situation of human rights defenders in Myanmar and to make specific efforts within UN mechanisms to address protection concerns. He also labelled the terrorist military junta committing crimes against international law as a threat to human rights defenders.



TOLL ON REVOLUTIONARY FORCES MOUNTS IN MYANMAR

The ongoing conflict in Myanmar continues to exact a devastating toll. The Spring Revolution Database (SRD) research group reported that 1,144 members of the revolutionary forces lost their lives in 2024, bringing the total number of casualties since the 2021 coup to 5,005.

The majority of these deaths – 956 individuals – occurred within the People's Defence Force (PDF), while 73 were from the National Unity Government's Ministry of Defence (MOD). The report also documented 67 deaths among ethnic armed groups, 43 from local resistance forces, 3 from the Urban Guerrilla Forces, and 2 from the People's Administrative Organization.

The total of 5,005 casualties among revolutionary forces from 2021 to 18 January 2025, was also confirmed.

In addition to the high number of casualties, SRD reported that 11,751 individuals were arrested under the Civil Service Law in 2024. The majority of arrests occurring during daylight hours and 1,071 arrested at night.

SRD is a research group documenting war crimes committed by the junta during the Spring Revolution. Mizzima has not independently verified SRD's reported death toll.

SRD emphasized the difficulty in obtaining accurate casualty figures for all groups involved in the conflict, particularly ethnic armed groups such as the Arakan Army (AA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Kachin Independence Army (KIA), and Karen National Union (KNU).

The research group urged the public to submit information, photos, and videos to help document unrecorded casualties.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) of the National Unity Government reported that 14,093 junta soldiers, police, and their alliances were killed and 7,363 were injured from 2021 to the end of 2024.

SIX MONTHS OF MYANMAR JUNTA ATTACKS DESTROY NEARLY 700 HOMES IN NATOGYI TOWNSHIP



Photo: AFP

Myanmar's military junta has destroyed nearly 700 houses in Lat Wae Myin Ni village, Natogyi Township, Myingyan District, Mandalay Region, through a series of attacks involving airstrikes, artillery fire, and arson over the past six months.

According to a compiled list covering the period from 10 July 2024 to 23 January 2025, the actual number of destroyed homes is likely higher, a source from Myingyan District told Mizzima.

"The junta dropped two 500-pound bombs on the village centre on 23 January, completely wiping out some houses. The blast was so powerful that windows in homes a hundred yards away were shattered. Every day, they conduct attacks, dropping at least two bombs, sometimes three or five, while also shelling the village with Howitzers and fire bullets," the source said.

At least ten houses were destroyed in a single airstrike on 23 January at around 5:30 pm when two jet fighters dropped 500-pound bombs on the village.

Over the six-month period, junta airstrikes and artillery fire killed six civilians, while five elderly villagers, unable to escape, were burned alive when the junta torched the village, which has approximately 2,500 homes, according to local reports.

"The villagers are fleeing as the junta attacks the village almost daily. Those who remain are forced to hide in bomb shelters. The junta claims the village

harbours hundreds of PDF [People's Defense Forces] members and weapons factories, which prompted their assault. However, since they set fire to the village last year, there haven't been any PDFs present," a Lat Wae Myin Ni resident said.

In addition to the attacks, junta troops have reportedly looted homes, stealing furniture and scrap metal and transporting them away in military vehicles.

The escalation of attacks began on 10 July 2024, after a junta patrol unit was ambushed near the village, resulting in four junta casualties. Since then, the military has shelled the village nearly every day. Despite the lack of further guerrilla activity in the area, the junta continues its assaults out of apparent resentment, according to a Myingyan District source.

Locals also allege that the junta has been coordinating these attacks with Pyu Saw Htee pro-military militias, including Thidar Yu Mon, a notorious militia leader in Myingyan District, as well as Pyu Saw Htee groups from Lay Sone, Lae Thit, and Kyauk Kan villages.

The sustained attacks have forced many civilians to flee, leaving them homeless.

In central Myanmar's Anyar region, where the junta has suffered significant military losses, its forces are increasingly targeting civilians in retaliation.

Photo: Supplied



CHINA MEDIATES CEASEFIRE WITH MYANMAR JUNTA, EASES TRADE RESTRICTIONS BETWEEN WA AND KOKANG REGIONS

The United Wa State Army (UWSA) Commander-in-Chief's office announced on 20 January that trade routes through the Kokang region have reopened under instructions from the Chinese government.

China's decision to allow the free flow of goods between the Wa region and Kokang coincides with reports of a formal ceasefire agreement between the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Myanmar junta.

According to the UWSA statement, restrictions on the movement of people, vehicles, and goods through key areas have been lifted, restoring normal transportation.

It is said that the flow of goods has been blocked for nearly five months and were reopened following instructions from the Chinese Embassy in Myanmar.

The suspension of trade was enforced last year following warnings from Chinese authorities, who pressured the MNDAA's leadership to withdraw from Lashio. This blockade included essential commodities such as fuel, medicine, and food.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry confirmed that the ceasefire agreement was achieved through China's mediation efforts, leading to eased trade restrictions and improved conditions in the region.



Photo: Supplied

CHAUNGTHA BEACH RESIDENTS EVACUATE AS FIGHTING INTENSIFIES ALONG AYEYARWADY REGION BORDER

Residents of Chaungtha Beach are evacuating as fighting intensifies along the Ayeyarwady Region border, according to local reports. The evacuations began on 15 January.

A local hotel operator stated that many hotels have started packing up their belongings, with around half now closed. The beach has seen no visitors.

"About half of the residents have already left. Some have moved items that are difficult to transport and are now waiting for updates. Meanwhile, several hotels are reducing staff, shutting down generators, and ceasing operations," the hotel operator said.

A resident still in Chaungtha Beach explained that financial constraints are making it difficult to evacuate.

"We're not staying here by choice. We know something might happen, though we're unsure of the scale. We're staying because if we leave now, we'll have to pay for rent and food elsewhere, and we're worried we'll run out of money if the situation escalates. That's why people are holding on, waiting patiently, and trying to stay as long as they can," the resident said.

Bawmi, the current site of the clashes, is located about 73 miles from Chaungtha Beach, a journey of over three and a half hours by car. The resident added that Chaungtha Beach feels like a closed-off area, raising concerns that the fighting could escalate and lead to road closures.

"The fighting is happening in Bawmi, between the Thabaung and Pathein areas, so we're trapped in the middle. If the situation worsens and the road is closed, we won't have any way out. It's a junction, so we're worried that if the road is blocked, we won't be able to reach Pathein or Yangon," the same resident said.

A car rental service company posted on social media that during a trip to Chaungtha on 21 January, only one car was seen traveling toward the beach on the Pathein-Chaungtha road. At the same time, vehicles carrying internally displaced persons (IDPs) were leaving Chaungtha, loaded with beds, cabinets, clothing boxes, and bicycles.

Another post described Chaungtha Beach as deserted and barren, with hotels closed and in the process of moving their belongings. However, locals noted that the hotels have not been officially closed, so they are hesitant to say they are shut down.

"Hotels without guests are moving their belongings. They haven't been officially closed yet, so if you ask, they'll say they're not closed. They don't dare to admit it, but here, everyone knows whether they're closed or not," said another Chaungtha resident.

Chaungtha Beach social media groups and the Chaungtha Hotel Service page recently advised people to avoid visiting the area at this time.

MYANMAR MILITARY AIRSTRIKES ON NAWNGHKIO KILL OVER 10 CIVILIANS

The junta launched two consecutive airstrikes on Nawngkhio, a town in northern Shan State under the control of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), reportedly killing over 10 civilians.

According to the TNLA, a junta jet dropped two bombs near the Nawngkhio police station at approximately 11 am on 22 January. One of the bombs struck the Parami 2 tea shop near the police station, causing extensive casualties, TNLA spokesperson Lway Yay Oo and local residents confirmed.

"Civilians were killed in the airstrikes this afternoon. The Military Council is deliberately targeting civilians. Over 10 civilians lost their lives in the attacks on 21 and 22 January, and more than five were injured," said Lway Yay Oo.

A local resident detailed the destruction, saying, "The bomb directly hit the tea shop. Nearly everyone inside was injured except the baker. Among the victims were women and children selling betel quid in front of the shop. Several of the injured are in critical condition."

On 21 January, TNLA reported that the junta conducted airstrikes near the Nawngkhio Township

Municipal Office and the General Administration Office, killing one person and injuring two others. The attack also damaged a residential building and the municipal office.

Battles continue in rural areas, although there is no active fighting in downtown Nawngkhio. TNLA and allied forces are engaging junta battalions near Taungkham village.

The TNLA expressed a willingness to engage in peace talks with the junta in late 2024, emphasizing concern for local communities affected by airstrikes and pressure from the Chinese government. However, TNLA maintains its right to self-defense.

"The Military Council has not reached out for talks, and a meeting between the two sides seems unlikely," Lway Yay Oo said.

Airstrikes in TNLA-controlled areas persist. On 13 January, a junta jet bombed a toll gate near Pan Pauk village in Kyaukme Township, even though there was no active fighting in the area.



Photo: AFP

OPEN LETTER CALLS ON FRANCE, GERMANY, AND SPAIN TO PRESSURE AIRBUS TO END TIES WITH MYANMAR JUNTA

On 21 January, 343 international and local revolutionary groups and civil society organizations issued an open letter addressed to the governments of France, Germany, and Spain, all shareholders in Airbus SE, calling on Airbus to use its influence to stop the continuing transfer of aircraft and related equipment by AVIC to the military junta in Myanmar, or to consider divesting.

The revolutionary forces and civil society organization signatories include Generations' Solidarity Coalition of Nationalities (GSCN), Justice for Myanmar (JFM), Burma Campaign UK, and the Burma Women's Union (BWU).

The text of the letter is as follows.

Almost four years after the February 2021 attempted coup in Myanmar, the military junta continues to commit war crimes, crimes against humanity and other gross human rights abuses against the people of

Myanmar with total impunity. This campaign of terror is only possible through the junta's continued access to arms, including combat aircraft, and related technical maintenance, repair and overhaul assistance.

A key supplier of military aircraft and maintenance to the junta is the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC).

As you will surely be aware, Airbus is a key investor and partner of AVIC. With ongoing credible documentation and reporting at the United Nations of the human rights crisis in Myanmar and the role of AVIC in supplying arms to the junta, Airbus must know that its collaboration with AVIC is highly problematic. Yet Airbus has maintained its collaboration with AVIC, as well as its investments in multiple AVIC subsidiaries through the Hong Kong publicly listed company, AviChina Industry & Technology Company Limited (AviChina).

Airbus is the biggest international shareholder of AviChina. As such, Airbus has significant influence over AviChina's strategic business decisions.

AviChina's most recent annual report for fiscal years 2022-2023 states that the company "principally operates through its subsidiaries" and that AviChina group is "mainly engaged in the development, manufacture, sales and upgrade of civil aviation products and defense products such as provision of helicopters, trainer aircraft, general-purpose aircraft and regional jets for domestic and overseas customers; and the co-development and manufacture of aviation products with foreign aviation products manufacturers." The group's principal products include the K-8 trainer aircraft and the Y-12 multipurpose aircraft, according to the same annual report. Both aircraft have been commissioned by the Myanmar military since its coup attempt and continue to be frequently documented in use for airstrikes on civilians.

We welcome your Governments' repeated condemnation of the Myanmar military's ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity. However, we are of the view that these condemnations are seriously undermined, if not even contradicted, by Airbus' significant financial and technical collaboration with AVIC. As shareholders in Airbus, you have an independent responsibility to ensure that Airbus' financial and strategic links do not enable atrocity crimes in Myanmar.

Moreover, Airbus is taking a risk by providing financial support to a junta arms dealer, as Myanmar has been subject to a European arms embargo. This restriction, renewed in 2018 by the Member States, specifies that it is forbidden for a European entity to:

"Provide financing or financial assistance related to military activities, including in particular grants, loans and export credit insurance for any sale, supply, transfer or export of arms and related materiel, as well as equipment which might be used for internal repression, or for the provision of related technical

assistance, brokering and other services directly or indirectly to any person, entity or body in, or for use in Myanmar/Burma".

In other words, by owning shares in AviChina, Airbus could be in violation of the arms embargo, which your governments are responsible for implementing.

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you, as shareholders in Airbus, to take meaningful and concrete action to block the Myanmar military junta's access to military aircraft, spare parts and related maintenance, repair and overhaul services which continue to be provided to the junta by AVIC subsidiaries and partners.

We specifically ask you to:

Ensure that Airbus acts in accordance with its human rights responsibilities by using its leverage to stop AVIC's business with the Myanmar military.

Ensure that Airbus takes steps to divest from AviChina and end its business relationship with AVIC if transfers of AVIC aircraft, associated equipment and support to Myanmar continue.



Photo: Supplied

BWU SAYS 478 WOMEN KILLED AND 412 INJURED IN VIOLENCE IN MYANMAR IN 2024

On 20 January, the Burmese Women's Union (BWU) released the 2024 Women's Information Factsheet. The short document provides numbers of dead and injured women in Myanmar in 2024 due to the ongoing violence in the country based on the BWU's monitoring, collection, and reporting of data.

In 2024, escalating violence has led to the tragic loss of 478 lives among women, with an additional 412 women suffering injuries.

The situation reflects the ongoing human rights abuses, nearly four years after the attempted military coup on February 1, 2021. Women face a grim reality marked by significant threats, including sexual violence and various violations categorized as war crimes.

The Burmese Women's Union (BWU) has been actively monitoring these incidents through reliable media sources, although the true scope of the crisis may be even more severe due to data access challenges. The details reveal that military actions, such as artillery strikes and airstrikes, are leading causes of these fatalities and injuries, particularly in regions like Sagaing, Shan, and Rakhine.

These statistics underscore the urgent need for attention and action to address the violence faced by women in Myanmar.

MYANMAR JUNTA SAYS IT DEPORTED OVER 50,000 SCAM CENTRE WORKERS TO CHINA

Myanmar's ruling junta said Tuesday last week it had deported to China more than 50,000 people suspected of involvement in online scam operations since October 2023, as it made a rare call to neighbouring countries to intervene.

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.

An editorial published in the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper Tuesday detailed the extent of the criminal activities -- including online scams and gambling -- publicly for the first time.

It said the junta had caught and deported over 55,000 foreigners involved in border scams to their home countries since October 2023, over 53,000 of them to China.

The second-largest contingent -- over a thousand individuals -- was from Vietnam, followed by Thailand with over 600. The rest came from around 25 other countries, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar.

The article added those responsible were not Myanmar nationals or ordinary foreign civilians but "fugitive offenders" who illegally entered Myanmar from neighbouring countries.

The junta called on its neighbours to "participate in combating online scams and online gambling".

AFP has contacted Thai and Chinese authorities for comment.

Myanmar's northern border with China was previously a hotbed for online scam centres often run by militias aligned with the ruling junta.

But a sweeping offensive by an alliance of ethnic rebels cleared many of the scam centres out.

Local Myanmar media have reported that scam bosses who escaped the offensive have since set up shop further south along the border with Thailand.

Myanmar's junta and Thai military officials have agreed to "jointly eradicate online gambling and online scams", according to Myanmar state media.

Bryony Lau, deputy Asia director of Human Rights Watch, on Friday called the compounds "one of the most pressing regional crises the region is facing".

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military junta ousted democratically elected civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from office in a 2021 coup.

AFP



INDIA FOR MYANMAR STRONGLY CONDEMNS UNLAWFUL BRIBES AND CORRUPTION BY THE JUNTA AUTHORITIES

On 21 January, the NGO India for Myanmar strongly condemned the unlawful demands for bribes and corrupt practices by the junta authorities in Myanmar resulting in Indian citizens remaining detained even after completing their sentences.

The position statement on this issue reads as follows.

According to Khonumthung News on January 15, 2025, it has been revealed that some Indian citizens detained in Kalay Prison, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, have completed their prison sentences. Despite this, they remain in jail as they are unable to pay bribes demanded by prison authorities and other officials under the control of the military junta.

It is deeply disheartening to note that even after serving their full sentences and fulfilling any associated fines, junta-controlled authorities refuse to release these individuals, instead seeking bribes and offering baseless excuses. This violates basic legal principles

and constitutes a severe human rights violation. As India for Myanmar, we are profoundly distressed by these actions.

Therefore, India for Myanmar strongly condemns the unlawful demands for bribes and corrupt practices by the junta authorities. We urge the Government of India to stand in solidarity with the democracy movement in Myanmar and take decisive action against the junta's unlawful treatment of Indian citizens and the people of Myanmar.

The delay in defeating the Myanmar military coup and the failure of the democracy movement pose significant risks to both the internal and external security of India. This is a critical moment for India to fully support the people of Myanmar. Such cooperation will benefit both nations by contributing to the restoration of peace, political stability, and the establishment of a new federal state in Myanmar. We urge the Government of India to work collaboratively with Myanmar's resistance groups to achieve these shared goals.



LOIKAW PRISON CONDITIONS DETERIORATE DRAMATICALLY UNDER MYANMAR JUNTA'S ADMINISTRATION

Following Operation 1111 by the Karenni Revolutionary Joint Forces in November 2023, human rights violations in Loikaw Prison, Karenni State, have significantly worsened, according to former political prisoners.

Before Operation 1111, prisoners received meals as per prison standards. However, over a year after the operation, the food quality has drastically declined, according to a recently released inmate from Loikaw Prison.

"Previously, prisoners received good meals four times a week, including dishes like fried eggs. However, during the conflict, they were deprived of any meat and given boiled leaves without salt, raw beans. They were fed fish paste mixed in a plastic bag and chickpea soup mixed with inedible mustard green stalks. This led to severe malnutrition," said a former female political prisoner.

Some prisoners' families report that the inadequate feeding methods persist in Loikaw Prison. Additionally, since Operation 1111, prisoners have been denied access to visits, exacerbating their difficulties.

"To be honest, they treat the political prisoners as enemies. They are also suffering from the war, so

they are more hostile towards us," said a former female political prisoner.

There are about 120 political prisoners in Loikaw Prison, including eight women.

Operation 1111 was launched in Karenni State on 11 November 2023. The Karenni Revolutionary Joint Forces announced over the following months that it had taken control of six towns, including MeSe, Demoso, Ywa Thit, Shadaw, Mawchi, and Moebye.

Although they controlled about 80 percent of Loikaw, the junta has retaken control of the city since early June 2024.

The Political Prisoners' Network of Myanmar (PPNM) reported on 21 May 2024, that at least 50 prisoners in Loikaw Prison are unable to walk, and some are paralyzed in their lower limbs, due to malnutrition and restricted physical activity.

A recent outbreak of diarrhoea in Mandalay's Obo Prison was also reported by the PPNM on 23 January, citing a lack of medical care provided to prisoners.



Photo: AA

ARAKAN ARMY SEIZES KAMYINKAN MILITARY CAMP AMID INTENSIFIED CLASHES

The Arakan Army (AA) has reportedly taken control of Kamyinkan military camp, a strategic base of the Myanmar junta located near the border of Ann and Ngape townships in the Rakhine mountain ranges, according to a local military source.

"I can confirm that Kamyinkan has been captured. Details of the situation will likely be announced by the AA," the source said.

The camp, which housed over 100 personnel, fell under AA control on 21 January. In response, the military junta launched airstrikes, sources reported.

Fighting has been ongoing since 11 January near other military bases along the Ann-Ngape border, including areas near Yesan and Kyatyasan villages along the Ann-Padan road, according to an AA statement on 20 January.

"There have been clashes in the Paneyesan and Kyatyasan areas in recent days, but it is currently quiet. It is unclear whether junta forces remain in the area. Military activity has not subsided, and the extent of further escalation remains uncertain," a local military source said on 23 January.

The captured camps are among the junta's remaining strongholds in the Ann-Ngape border region.

Due to the ongoing conflict, some junta troops retreated from Ann Township into Ngape Township, where they were intercepted and attacked by resistance forces along the Ann-Padan road.

On 19 January, resistance forces ambushed a group of 15 fully armed junta soldiers fleeing Ann Township. The attack resulted in three deaths, and resistance fighters seized three firearms along with military supplies, according to a statement by the Asho Chin Defence Force (ACDF).

As the AA continues its offensives in the region, the Military Council has reportedly reinforced security measures in Ngape Township, local resistance sources said.

"With the escalating situation, troops from the 99th Light Infantry Division have arrived under the pretext of a security operation. Several battalions under its command have been deployed," the source said.

On 20 January, the Arakan Army also announced that intense clashes between its forces and the military junta persist in the Rakhine mountain ranges and along the borders of Rakhine State with Bago, Magway, and Ayeyarwady regions.

MYANMAR'S ARAKAN ARMY ADMITS TO BEHEADINGS OF CAPTURED ARMY SOLDIERS

The Arakan Army (AA) said on Friday its members beheaded two prisoners in a rare admission of deadly violence as it fights the ruling junta to maintain control of Myanmar's western borderlands.

The incident, which "violated military discipline", occurred in February last year during an AA offensive on Kyauktaw township in Rakhine State, according to the militant group's spokesman Khaing Thu Kha.

"Our local (AA) militias were unable to control their anger and committed crimes... in retaliation for the terrorist Myanmar army soldiers who had unjustly arrested, tortured, and killed their families," he told AFP.

In a two-minute clip that circulated on social media, around seven men - some wearing AA uniforms and holding firearms - kicked and beat two shirtless men on the ground.

In another video, the same alleged killers were seen beheading the captives with machete-like knives.

Khaing Thu Kha admitted on Friday that the videos were authentic and the perpetrators were members of the AA ethnic armed group.

Rakhine State in Myanmar's west is riven with ethnic and religious divisions.

It came under the global spotlight after a bloody 2017 army crackdown that forced some 740,000 Rohingya Muslims over the border into Bangladesh.

The military junta took control of the country in a 2021 coup against the democratically elected Aung San Suu Kyi's civilian government.

The AA says it is fighting for more autonomy for the ethnic Rakhine people, a population that is also accused of aiding the military in their expulsion of the Rohingya.

The militant group claimed complete control of a key region along the Bangladesh border in December, piling further pressure on the junta battling opponents elsewhere across the country.

The human rights organisation Fortify Rights has called on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate war crimes committed by the AA in connection with the beheadings, in a report published Thursday.

Khaing Thu Kha said the AA had identified and punished all those involved in the incident and added the group did not accept unlawful killings.

AFP



Arakan Army fighters. Photo: AA

FORTIFY RIGHTS URGES ICC TO INVESTIGATE FILMED EXECUTION OF PRISONERS OF WAR BY ARAKAN ARMY

Fortify Rights called on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate war crimes committed by the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine State, Myanmar, in a 23 January news release. The call comes in response to video footage allegedly showing AA soldiers torturing and executing Myanmar Army prisoners of war.

The text of the news release continues as follows.

New leaked video footage shows several AA soldiers and plain-clothed men cutting and hacking the throats of two detainees in front of a shallow dirt pit in the ground.

“Torturing and summarily executing civilians or captured enemy soldiers are war crimes,” said Ejaz Min Khant, Human Rights Associate at Fortify Rights. “Captured enemy soldiers should always be treated with dignity as prisoners of war and afforded the protections of the Geneva Conventions, and those responsible for war crimes against detainees should be prosecuted.”

Fortify Rights analyzed two leaked video recordings of the possible executions and believes they are authentic. The two victims do not appear to be dead by the end of the videos but are unlikely to have survived the incident due to the nature of their injuries and the attack. Fortify Rights was unable to verify the exact location of the incident.

The first video, which lasts two minutes and 52 seconds, appeared online on December 25, 2024.

A second video of the same incident, filmed from a different camera, is three minutes and 20 seconds long and was sent to Fortify Rights on January 19, 2025.

The longer video begins by showing eight men—one in full military dress and three in partial military dress—standing over two captives on the ground, one of whom has been stripped to his underwear. Several of the standing men are armed with military-grade firearms, including those in civilian dress, and several hold long, machete-like knives. At least one perpetrator is wearing a full AA uniform with visible AA insignia, and all those speaking in the videos appear to be native Rakhine speakers. As two perpetrators attempt to cut the clothing off one victim, others kick the second victim in the head, face, and back at least a dozen times as he lies helpless and half-clothed on the ground.

In the longer video, one of the perpetrators can be heard saying, “Is the Battalion Commander coming?” Another responds, “Why should we care if he comes? ... No, nothing will happen if he comes. He [the Battalion Commander] gave us these people to do this.” This dialogue suggests an AA commander may have given orders for the two captives to be killed, raising questions of command responsibility.

Several perpetrators violently kick the backs of the two victims before two men—one of whom is wearing a full military uniform with a lit cigarette in his mouth—force the two victims to kneel, facing the cameras and a shallow dirt pit. “Hey, start slaughtering,” says one person in the video. “Move them near the pit.” Two perpetrators then saw and hack at the victims’ throats and then push one of them into the shallow pit. Others then take part in stabbing, cutting, and kicking the victims. There are at least ten people visible in the videos, in addition to the two victims and the two people filming.

Throughout the footage, the captors can be heard taunting the two prisoners, asking them what it felt like to kill Rakhine people. One person filming the scene instructs the armed men: “Don’t kill them at once, kill them one by one, slaughter them by cutting their throats. ... Good, good, keep doing it like that.”

“The perpetrators position themselves to be filmed while they casually commit war crimes for the camera,” said Ejaz Min Khant. “This shows a deep and disturbing culture of impunity developing within the ranks of the Arakan Army.”

One man wearing a longyi — a traditional Myanmar sarong-like garment worn by men and women — can be heard at the beginning of the video, saying: “Motherfucker, can’t you stand up, can’t you stand up. Stand up, old man.” Then, the man recording the incident can be heard saying: “Your voice isn’t the same. It’s different when you kill our Rakhine.” Later in the video, someone else can be heard saying: “Look at

the camera over there, sit up, keep sitting, go down in the pit, sit here... Whoever wishes to kill them, feel free and carry on."

The dialogue in the videos suggests the two victims may have been Myanmar junta soldiers; however, Fortify Rights was unable to identify their identities or affiliations.

The AA has publicly committed to ensuring justice for war crimes. For example, on February 29, 2024, AA spokesperson Khaing Thukha told journalists, "We will take decisive action to get justice for the victims of war crimes." More recently, on December 23, 2024, Khaing Thukha said the AA would "systematically and thoroughly investigate" possible war crimes committed by captured Myanmar junta soldiers, and he said the AA is committed to ensuring due process rights and proportionate and suitable punishments.

The brutal executions documented in these films are part of a pattern of war crimes committed by the AA and the Myanmar military junta, Fortify Rights said. Fortify Rights called on the AA and all parties to armed conflict in Myanmar to cooperate with international justice mechanisms, including the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, a body established by the U.N. Human Rights Council in 2018 to collect and preserve evidence of atrocity crimes in Myanmar for future prosecutions.

Since launching a deadly coup d'état in February 2021, the Myanmar military junta has carried out a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population nationwide. Revolutionary forces like the AA have also committed atrocity crimes. For example, on August 5, 2024, AA troops massacred Rohingya civilians as they attempted to cross the Naf River, which separates Myanmar from neighboring Bangladesh. According to a Fortify Rights investigation, AA drones, artillery, and gunfire killed over one hundred Rohingya men, women, and children. The AA publicly denied responsibility for those killings.

In October 2024, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, reported to the General Assembly that he was "concerned by allegations of Arakan Army forces committing grave human rights abuses in northern Rakhine State."

On November 27, 2024, the ICC chief prosecutor announced that his office was seeking an arrest warrant for junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in connection with his role in the forced deportation of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya civilians from Myanmar to Bangladesh in 2017, noting: "This is the first application for an arrest warrant against a high-level Myanmar government official that my Office is filing. More will follow."

In 2019, the ICC ruled that it has jurisdiction over the forced deportation of Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh, as the latter is a state party to the Rome Statute, and forced deportation is a crime against humanity. While a crucial advancement to end impunity in Myanmar, the court's current jurisdiction over crimes in the country is limited and does not cover ongoing atrocities nationwide.

However, Fortify Rights said ICC member states can and should immediately refer the situation in Myanmar to the Chief Prosecutor under Article 14 of the Rome Statute.

In August 2021, Myanmar's democratic National Unity Government (NUG) submitted a declaration to the ICC giving the court jurisdiction under article 12(3) of the court's statute, also known as the Rome Statute. On February 9, the ICC formally acknowledged receipt of the NUG's declaration. Article 14 of the Rome Statute gives ICC Member States the right to refer crimes under the court's jurisdiction directly to the ICC chief prosecutor if there is a reasonable presumption that the court would have jurisdiction, and the NUG's 12(3) declaration satisfies that requirement.

Fortify Rights said today that the ICC should investigate AA war crimes using powers already conferred by the NUG. Failing this, ICC member states should refer these crimes to the Chief Prosecutor directly under Article 14 of the Rome Statute.

International humanitarian law, also known as the laws of war, protects prisoners of war from torture and summary executions. Common Article 3 of the four 1949 Geneva Conventions, which applies in situations of non-international armed conflict and to state and non-state actors alike, protects "members of armed forces who have laid down their arms" and those no longer playing an active part in the hostilities because of injury, detention, or other cause. Article 8(2)(c)(i) of the ICC's Rome Statute also explicitly prohibits, as a war crime, summary executions in the context of non-international armed conflict.

International law also prohibits torture, murder, and mutilation. Violations of Common Article 3 constitute war crimes, and those responsible for such crimes should be held accountable under international law.

"These types of atrocity crimes will continue as long as impunity prevails," said Ejaz Min Khant. "ICC member states should act now and refer the situation to the court, sending a message to all warring parties that atrocity crimes will be prosecuted and punished according to international law."

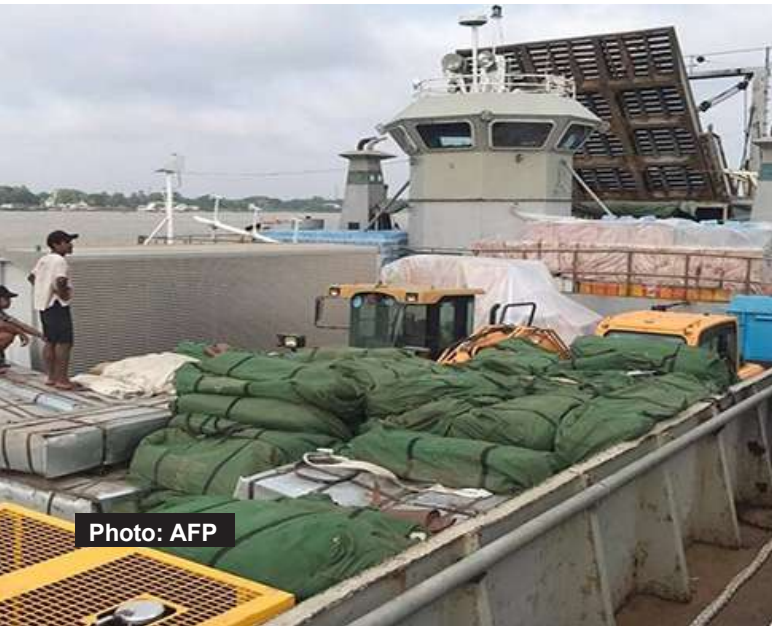


Photo: AFP

RISING COMMODITY PRICES IN SITTWE FORCE RESIDENTS TO SURVIVE ON RICE PORRIDGE AMID ESCALATING CRISIS

Soaring prices of essential goods, including meat, fish, and fresh produce, have pushed many residents of Sittwe, Rakhine State, to rely on plain rice porridge for survival, local sources report.

“Those who can afford it eat regular meals, while others depend on donations from monasteries. If there is nothing, some go hungry. A family living in poverty now requires at least 20,000 kyats daily to survive without even buying meat. Many are surviving on rice porridge. With no jobs and frequent arrests, people are unable to work, and the number of beggars is growing,” said a local resident.

The cost of meat has skyrocketed, with mutton priced at 120,000 kyats per viss, beef at 80,000–90,000 kyats, pork at 70,000 kyats, and a whole chicken at 80,000 kyats. Rice costs between 200,000 and 250,000 kyats per 50 kg. sack. Additionally, onions are priced at 17,000 kyats per viss (about 1.6 kgs), while small eggs cost 1,100 kyats each, and large eggs are 1,200 kyats.

“Even those who occasionally manage to buy meat can rarely find chicken anymore. Supplies from Yangon are scarce, and when they do arrive by air, the meat is neither fresh nor sufficient. Prices have surged because fewer cargo ships are coming—just one per month compared to three or four previously,” another resident said.

Seafood prices have also risen due to high taxes imposed on fishing boats by the military junta, which now demands 1 million to 1.5 million kyats for fishing rights. Fish prices range from 8,000 to 20,000 kyats per piece (approximately 160 grams), while prawns cost up to 30,000 kyats for the same amount, according to a Sittwe housewife.

Merchants attribute the extreme price hikes to military-imposed restrictions, political instability, and delays in granting docking permits for private cargo ships.

“Fresh goods are mostly flown in, while ship deliveries are inconsistent. A ship used to arrive every 15 days, but it’s been nearly a month since the last shipment. Normally, two to four shipments occur monthly, but there are none now. If the political situation worsens, ships will not be allowed to dock. Goods are being sent to Manaung instead, leaving Sittwe and Kyaukphyu under tight control,” said a merchant.

Cargo ships can only depart from Yangon with approval from the Rakhine State government and Naypyidaw authorities. Since December, no permissions have been granted, leaving ships stranded in Yangon and pushing freight costs to 400 million kyats per trip.

In Sittwe, which relies heavily on air and sea transport for basic supplies, private shipping services were suspended in August 2024 and resumed in November. The ongoing conflict has forced two-thirds of Sittwe’s population to flee, leaving behind those unable to afford to leave.

The junta has fortified Sittwe with heavy artillery and uses airstrikes to prevent advances by the Arakan Army (AA), which has reportedly blocked some waterways around the city to a certain extent, according to military sources.



Photo: AFP

BROUK RELEASES REPORT, ICJ ORDERS TO PROTECT ROHINGYA IGNORED FOR FIVE YEARS

Legally binding order to protect the Rohingya people in Burma from further harm issued by the International Criminal Court of Justice (ICJ), also known as the World Court, five years ago continue to be ignored by the Burmese military and other armed groups says the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) in a report released on 23 January.

The text of the press release by BROUK reads as follows.

Five years after the International Court of Justice (ICJ), known as the World Court, issuing a legally binding order to protect the Rohingya in Burma from further harm, the orders of the court are still being ignored by the Burmese military and other armed groups in Burma.

A new report by Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, 'The Genocide Never Stopped - Five Years on From the World Court's Order to Protect the Rohingya,'

provides a detailed legal analysis of ongoing violations of the ICJ's provisional measures order to prevent genocide. The report is based on in-depth research, including firsthand sources on the ground.

The report finds that the British government, as the penholder on Myanmar at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), has failed in its responsibility to urgently convene a meeting of the Council. The UNSC has the authority and obligation under the UN Charter to enforce the Court's binding orders in the face of non-compliance.

"The International Court of Justice's binding legal orders were meant to protect the Rohingya, yet the Burmese military continues to defy them, while the Arakan Army is actively committing atrocities against the Rohingya. The international community's complete failure to enforce these orders is enabling the continued genocide of the Rohingya," said Tun Khin, President of Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK.

In addition to failing to uphold international law and enforce the Court's orders, the international community has also failed to adequately respond to UN warnings in November 2024 of an imminent famine in Burma's Rakhine State, which could leave up to 2 million people facing starvation. Urgent action is required to open and trade routes from neighbouring Bangladesh.

"The approach of the United Kingdom, United States, EU and rest of the international community towards the Rohingya crisis can be summed up in one word: failure", said Tun Khin. "We have seen a failure to act on warnings to prevent genocide, failure to provide adequate support to refugees in Bangladesh, failure to enforce court orders to prevent ongoing genocide, and now a failure to act on warnings of famine."

Atrocity crimes including acts of genocide

This latest report from Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK is the tenth in its series documenting repeated and systematic breaches of the ICJ's order to protect the Rohingya. Covering the period 24 May 2024-31 December 2024, the report details numerous human rights violations, many of which constitute atrocity crimes, including acts of genocide committed by the Burmese armed forces against the Rohingya, and war crimes perpetrated by the Arakan Army. The report shows that the Burmese military is in clear violation of the ICJ's provisional measures, while the Arakan Army has committed serious human rights violations and war crimes against the Rohingya.

The Burma military and its administrative structures continue to deny the Rohingya their identity and access to citizenship while maintaining a policy of mass internment in central Rakhine State, where more than 145,000 Rohingya are arbitrarily detained. The junta's policies of systematic persecution have severely restricted Rohingya communities' access to livelihoods, healthcare, and humanitarian aid. These restrictions, compounded by an almost complete blockade on aid and trade to areas under Arakan Army control, have further deepened their suffering, resulting in even more extreme impacts in northern Rakhine State, particularly among Rohingya IDPs. Acute famine conditions have already taken hold.

Human rights violations inflicted on the Rohingya include:

- The Burmese military continuing to deny the identity of the Rohingya and to deny them citizenship.
- The mass internment of 145,000 Rohingya, half of them children. 112,000 of them are in areas still under Burmese military control.
- Continuing the 'slow death' policies denying Rohingya access to means to generate income, severe restrictions on humanitarian aid and now a virtual blockade on trade and humanitarian aid to all areas under Arakan Army control – exacerbated by the intense fighting – meaning even more extreme impacts in northern Rakhine State, particularly among Rohingya IDPs. Acute famine conditions have already taken hold.
- Restrictions on freedom of movement, which are now also placing limitations on the ability of Rohingya to flee areas of conflict.
- Arakan Army replicating discriminatory policies and human rights violations previously endured under the Burmese military.
- Displaced Rohingya facing multiple extortion demands, including women and girls threatened with being transferred to military compounds, where they face sexual violence and rape by Burmese military soldiers, to coerce them to pay.
- A communications blackout implemented by both the Burmese military and the Arakan Army, making it very difficult for the full scale of human rights violations taking place to be exposed.
- 70,000 Rohingya have crossed into Bangladesh in 2024, fleeing conflict and starvation.

"The scale of suffering and misery being inflicted upon the Rohingya is matched only by the international community's apathy and inaction," said Tun Khin. "International human right laws and mechanisms were designed precisely to prevent atrocities like those being committed against the Rohingya, yet the British government and other UN Security Council members have chosen not to act. The British government must immediately convene a Security Council meeting to address Burma's failure to uphold the ICJ's order to protect the Rohingya."



Photo: Supplied

NEARLY 50 ROHINGYA FOUND ON POPULAR THAI ISLAND: POLICE

A group of 49 Rohingya migrants travelling by boat from Bangladesh to Malaysia was found on Tuesday last week near a beach on Thailand's popular island of Phuket, police told AFP.

The mostly Muslim Rohingya experience persecution in their predominantly Buddhist homeland of Myanmar, with many fleeing to refugee camps in Bangladesh or risking their lives on perilous sea journeys to try to reach Malaysia or Indonesia through Thailand.

The group was discovered by residents near Phuket's Ta Chat Chai temple in a "weak and frail" state, according to local media reports.

"The community found 49 Rohingyas and we took them to the police station," senior police officer Sopit Ruangsri told AFP.

The group told police via a translator that they had left Bangladesh with 75 others in an effort to reach Malaysia, but claimed many were assaulted and died during the journey, Sopit said, without giving further details.

They are now in a temporary shelter under the Thai authorities' care and would be sent to "a third country", although officials have not yet specified where.

The police, in collaboration with the interior ministry, have provided food, water and medical aid to the group.

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

AFP



Chinese President Xi Jinping. Photo: AFP

CHINESE LEADERSHIP UNSURE ABOUT NEW YEAR PROSPECTS

SUN LEE

On December 31, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered his annual televised New Year address, sparking a flurry of interpretations from commentators. Some highlighted Xi's mention of Chinese reunification as a veiled threat against Taiwan, while others focused on his economic remarks, viewing them as a nervous response to Donald Trump's reelection as US president.

However, these perspectives miss the broader context. Xi's address underscores the growing insecurity of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) hold on power. This insecurity is evident in Xi's comments, which, bolstered by the party's control of Chinese media, seemed to gaslight the Chinese populace.

Xi's address was primarily focused on China's economic success. He emphasized that the Chinese economy is thriving, with the total GDP expected to

surpass 130 trillion yuan (\$17.7 trillion), marking a 4.9% increase over the past year. Chinese media reports have amplified this message. China Daily, the CCP-owned newspaper, lauded Xi's "heartening speech" and highlighted China's "remarkable" growth rate. An article published on January 1 noted that other developed economies struggled to achieve average growth rates of 1.5%, underscoring China's economic achievements.

Xi's address painted a rosy picture of China's economy, but the reality is that growth has slowed, dropping from 5.2% in 2023 to 4.9%. While this rate is impressive compared to other developed economies, it falls short of China's past performance, where annual growth rates exceeded 10% in the 2000s, with GDP growth hitting around 13% in some years.

In his 2024 address, Xi acknowledged the economic

challenges and promised interventions to boost growth and create jobs to address high youth unemployment. However, despite these efforts, China's economic growth continues to slow, and youth unemployment remains a significant issue.

Understanding why Xi and the CCP admitted to economic challenges when China's growth rate was higher, yet celebrated economic success when growth had slowed, can be perplexing. However, it makes sense when viewed through the lens of "goal-shifting" – a tactic that goes beyond the usual positive spin governments put on their country's economic performance.

Goal-shifting is a form of political gaslighting, where an established goal is "shifted" to one that is easier to achieve. This allows an unfavourable outcome by the original goal's standard to be presented as an achievement by the new goal's standard.

For instance, China's 2024 GDP growth of 4.9% might seem disappointing compared to the 5.2% growth in 2023. However, by shifting the goal to China having higher GDP growth than other developed economies – a feat that was never truly in doubt – China's 2024 growth rate can be framed in Chinese media as "remarkable." This reframing allows the CCP to present a slower growth rate as a significant achievement, maintaining a positive narrative despite the underlying economic challenges.

It seems the CCP is leveraging its control over Chinese media to highlight the economic message in Xi's address. By doing so, they are gaslighting the Chinese populace, shifting economic goals to downplay the struggling economy. Simultaneously, the CCP is portraying the relative strength of Chinese growth compared to other countries as a testament to the party's economic management.

Since the 1980s, the CCP has relied on economics and nationalism to legitimize its rule. High growth rates lifted over 800 million people out of poverty. However, with growth slowing over the past decade, the CCP has increasingly leaned on nationalism to maintain its legitimacy.

The CCP and China's nationalist movement are deeply intertwined. The CCP instills nationalistic values in schools and backs nationalist projects like historical societies, patriotic statues, and museums across China. This creates a mutual dependency, with nationalist groups having a vested interest in supporting the CCP.

However, this relationship poses long-term risks for the CCP. It cannot restrain nationalist groups without undermining its own nationalist credentials. This has led to instances where nationalist groups have defied the CCP's wishes, including launching cyber attacks both domestically and internationally.

The CCP's twin-pillar model, which it has relied on for decades, is faltering. In his previous New Year address, Xi Jinping took the unprecedented step of acknowledging China's economic struggles. Hesitant to stir nationalist sentiment, the CCP tried to rely on the economic pillar by betting on a reversal of economic fortunes in 2024. This reversal did not materialize.

As a result, the CCP has become increasingly insecure. In Xi's 2025 New Year address, he adjusted the goals for assessing China's economic performance. Meanwhile, the party encouraged media reports that supported Xi's address, portraying China's slowing growth and worsening economic woes as a "remarkable" economic achievement.

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



A market in Xinjiang, China.
Photo: AFP

HAN MIGRATION CREATES ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH PROBLEMS IN XINJIANG

SUN LEE

The restive region of Xinjiang in northwestern China has been under tremendous pressure due to large-scale and unsustainable migrations of the Han population from the mainland. It has not only led to cultural suppression and demographic unbalance in the ethnic minority region but has also caused environmental problems such as water resources depletion, forest degradation and pollution. All this has made local Uyghur people unhealthy and reduced their lifespan.

The China Communist Party (CCP) government in Beijing has often been criticised for suppression of the ethnic minority Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. Over one million are jailed while the overall population is subjected to intense surveillance, religious restrictions, forced labour, inhuman torture, and forced sterilization,

among others. Over tens of thousands in Xinjiang were killed, kidnapped even as many are reported to be missing. Several governments including the US called it a genocide.

In order to assimilate the Xinjiang population with the CCP doctrine, Beijing has resorted to different tactics including Han migration to dilute ethnic concentration and neutralise cultural identity. While this has led to social unrest, it also had a severe impact on the local environment and ecology and the locals' health.

Xinjiang is of the most ecologically fragile regions in China but saw unabated environmental destruction at the hands of the migratory Han population who despised local Uyghur Muslims and had support from

the Beijing government, said Nimrod Baranovitch of University of Haifa. "The Uyghur discourse about water pollution in Xinjiang not only blamed the Han Chinese settlers in Xinjiang but also the Chinese government," he said.

Baranovitch said the Uyghurs believed that the mass migration of Hans stopped their access to natural resources but also caused widespread exploitation even as environmental degradation continued to occur. "Han migrants do not care about the well-being of the environment because they are only interested in stealing the region's natural resources and because they will leave once the material opportunities are exhausted," he quoted his respondents as saying.

Han settlers turned to agriculture activities in Xinjiang and started cultivating a water-guzzling cotton crop which needs extensive irrigation. It led to overextraction of water from rivers and underground, which depleted groundwater water tables and reduced the availability of water to Uyghurs.

The shortage of water can be detrimental for Xinjiang as it is drought-prone area with little rains, said researchers from Beijing-based Chinese Academy of Sciences. "The problem of agricultural water occupying the ecological environment water is prominent of Xinjiang. The carrying capacity of water resources in Xinjiang is at risk of severe overloading, and water resources have become a bottleneck for the region's socioeconomic development," said the researchers, Yan Han and Shaofeng Jia.

The influx of Han migrants also promoted industrial development, especially, in the thermal power generation. Moreover, the vast reserves of coal in Xinjiang and need to meet national energy requirement led to construction of huge number of coal power plants. Now Xinjiang has become an important location for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has added to the environmental damage. "Of course it is damaging to the environment. But there is nothing we can do about it," said a local driver.

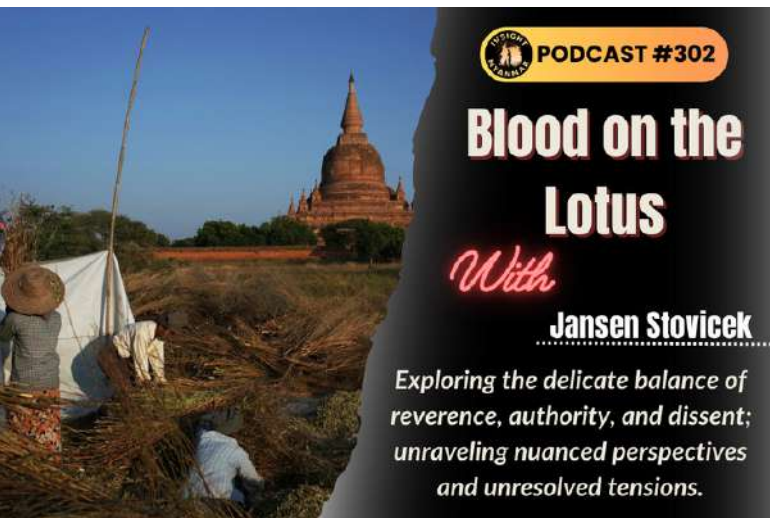
The migration of Han has led to massive forest degradation in Xinjiang. Extensive areas of forests have been cut to obtain land for agriculture activities and timber production for factories. Moreover, wood being

the primary source of cooking and heating added to the problem. In 2020, Xinjiang had 1.59 million hectares of forest. According to the Global Forest Watch, it has seen a substantial loss of forest since 2000.

The surge in population due to Han migration and subsequent pressure on natural resources and environmental degradation have an adverse effect on the health of local Uyghur people. The worsening air and water pollution, deforestation and environmental degradation have turned Xinjiang into one of the unhealthiest regions in China. Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, is the one of the most polluted cities in China and globally.

Xinjiang province is one of the unhealthiest regions in China due to the presence of toxic metals in high concentration in the soil, said Santosh Kumar Karn of Xinjiang Institute of Ecology and Geography. "Here soil and water having high concentration of multi-metals especially arsenic content in the soil and water (which) is a major threat to the people who suffer regularly from arsenic contamination (and) therefore multiple diseases and illness are a common phenomenon," he said.

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



BLOOD ON THE LOTUS

Born into a family of Chinese ancestry in Myanmar, Thabarwa Sayadaw describes his early life as being shaped by significant hardships under the military regime. Like many others from marginalized communities, he faced severe restrictions due to his lack of full citizenship rights. These limitations barred him from pursuing higher education and forced him to navigate life through alternative means. He eventually turned to entrepreneurship and opened a convenience store franchise. His business ventures thrived—no small feat before the transition period, when corruption was rampant—but the success came at a cost. The immense stress involved in running the business led him to experience a series of nervous breakdowns, pushing him to seek solace in meditation.

Thabarwa's early engagement with intensive practice began within the Mogok and Thae Ingu traditions, but it was his immersion in vipassana meditation at the Dhamma Joti Vipassan... Center, established in the tradition of S.N. Goenka, that had the most profound impact on him. This transformative experience inspired him to seek full ordination as a monk, a decision that would alter the course of his life. He established his first meditation center in downtown Yangon, occupying part of a residential building. However, his vision quickly expanded, and over time, Thabarwa's humanitarian work began to attract a larger following. His work led to the creation of his flagship monastery in Than Lwin, where he and his disciples began providing shelter, food, and care to those on the margins of society. His mission continued to expand, and the focus on serving the poor, elderly, disabled, and displaced has become a defining feature of his work.

The success of Thabarwa's charitable efforts, however, cannot be separated from the broader political context in Myanmar. Under the military regime, Thabarwa described his centers operating under constant threat. The military's tight control over public and religious life made it difficult for monasteries like his to secure donations or even operate openly. At one point during our interview, Thabarwa shared that his center's very existence was threatened by the authorities, and that local officials once attempted to shut it down for good, citing illegal construction and lack of proper permits. "A government officer reported that the Thabarwa center is opening illegally and making construction without permit. It was really dangerous because many people were staying at the center," he recalled in the interview. For a period, the center operated discreetly, always under the looming threat of closure.

However, the country's transition to greater societal freedoms after the 2012 reforms marked a critical turning point for Thabarwa's mission. With the introduction of a free press and increased personal liberties, the center's welcoming embrace of marginalized communities gained public visibility and legitimacy, and with that, validation and support. Thabarwa acknowledged in that same interview that the freedom which journalists were then able to operate played a crucial role in ensuring his center's survival. The increased media attention brought greater stability to his growing network of centers, which eventually allowed him to expand internationally, thus allowing his mission to grow and thrive in ways that were previously impossible under military rule.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/1/1/blood-on-the-lotus>



Young people at Yangon International Airport preparing to leave Myanmar. Photo: AFP

JUNTA ISSUES CONSCRIPTION BY-LAWS, RESTRICTS YOUTH FOREIGN TRAVEL

The Myanmar military junta released implementing by-laws for its Public Military Service Law on January 23, 2025, including strict foreign travel restrictions for young people and mandatory military service requirements.

The regulations officially bar eligible youth from leaving the country without permission. The junta plans to register and medically examine all eligible citizens at the township level, with those passing health checks being registered for military service.

Those approved for service must remain on standby and cannot travel abroad, regardless of whether they have undergone military training.

According to the junta, approximately 14 million people are eligible for conscription - 6.3 million men and

7.7 million women. The rules mandate service for men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27, with extended age limits for those with professional qualifications.

Government employees under the junta must also serve, but can only receive either their civil service salary or military wages, not both. While military officers transitioning to civilian roles can receive both salaries, this privilege is not extended to conscripted civil servants.

The by-laws stem from the Military Service Law enacted in February 2024, which allows for up to two years of mandatory service.



Soe Lin Oo. Photo: ONE Championship/
social media

SOCIAL MEDIA BACKLASH AS MYANMAR FIGHTERS FACE TOUGH LOSSES AT ONE 170 IN BANGKOK

Myanmar fight fans expressed disappointment and concern on social media following the defeats of both Myanmar fighters Soe Lin Oo and Thant Zin at ONE 170 in Bangkok.

Facebook users particularly criticized Thant Zin's performance, with comments highlighting his lack of stamina and mental toughness after his second-round technical knockout (TKO) loss to Thai fighter Suriyanlek.

Several fans pointed to fundamental issues in both fighters' preparations.

Regarding Thant Zin, a Facebook user wrote, "He lacks both endurance and mental strength. No game plan, no strategy - fighting like it's a local match needs to stop, hoping for a stronger comeback after proper training."

While criticism of Soe Lin Oo's decision loss to Seksan was more measured, fans noted his limited kicking game despite showing good resilience.

Some commenters contextualized both losses within Myanmar's limited fighting infrastructure, comparing it to Thailand's professional support system where "fighters can become millionaires."

These defeats mark consecutive losses for both Myanmar fighters in ONE Championship, prompting calls from fans for improved training and mental preparation before their next appearances.

OPPOSITION NUG GOVERNMENT MEETING DRAWS MIXED SOCIAL MEDIA REACTIONS

The opposition National Unity Government's (NUG) latest meeting, where NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La and Prime Minister Mahn Wai Khaing Than discussed progress in the Spring Revolution, has sparked varied responses on social media.

Some users expressed strong support for NUG's leadership. A Facebook user named Hnin Cherry praised their guidance of the revolution, commenting, "Deeply grateful to the NUG Interim President and Prime Minister for steering this crucial phase of the Spring Revolution with dedication and wisdom."

However, others voiced criticism over perceived slow progress. A Facebook user urged more decisive military action, stating "Why are you still focusing on organizing now? NUG should wage war more decisively. You've been promising various actions since 2021 with little results."

Some users expressed skepticism about the meeting's productivity. Another Facebook user sarcastically suggested "Why don't you publish a book after each meeting?"

The meeting covered strengthening trust with ethnic armed organizations, countering the junta's election plans, and addressing ASEAN's role in the crisis.

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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