

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

## The National Security Case for U.S. Support for the Burma Resistance



**Daily suffering caused by war in Burma's ethnic states**

**Myanmar junta chief's election talk: A time-buying manipulation**

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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.

# THE HEART IS IN THE HOME AND THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE OF DISPLACEMENT

We all instinctively understand that the heart is in our home. And it is therefore upsetting that millions of people around the world – including Myanmar – have been driven from their homes by war, displaced within the country or forced to flee as refugees.

This is one of the main drivers of emigration around the world that is causing so much angst and conflict as people seek safety or a better life abroad. It is a divisive issue, one highlighted by the new US government administration under President Trump as it seeks to tackle the rampant influx of illegal aliens, a significant portion of whom are fleeing wars. In addition, a large percentage of the people on the move around the world are economic migrants seeking a better life abroad.

A recent report by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) tabulates that a total of 122 million people are currently displaced primarily by war, and that this total could surge by 6.7 million in 2025-2026.

In Myanmar, a multi-front civil war has intensified and resulted in 3.5 million people displaced, and nearly 20 million people, or a third of the population, is in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the DRC. It predicts the country will see another 1.4 million forced displacements by the end of 2026.

Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Yemen and Venezuela were also expected to see a surge in displacements due to armed conflict, droughts and flooding, the legacy of war, and socio-economic instability.

The recent visit of the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to the refugee camps in Bangladesh housing close to a million minority Rohingya people – driven out of Myanmar by war – reminds us that remedies need to be sought to allow people a dignified return to their home. But the ongoing civil war in Myanmar is blocking such an outcome, and even with peace, a solution to the “Rohingya crisis” will arguably not be easy.

Recent cuts and reductions in international aid – notably by the USA and UK - highlight the need to double down on a crucial question: How can the world’s displacement crisis be seriously tackled?

The ongoing wars around the world need to be ended. Current efforts to end the wars in Ukraine and Israel should be lauded if they are serious and provide an equitable solution for the populations. At the same time, other conflict hotspots need serious attention, primarily in the Middle East, Latin America and western and central Africa.

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**Cover photo of an American soldier in Afghanistan by AFP**





Myanmar should matter to the US government when it considers its sphere of influence in Asia. Photo: AFP

# THE NATIONAL SECURITY CASE FOR U.S. SUPPORT FOR THE BURMA RESISTANCE

**ANTONIO GRACEFFO**

Each year, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) releases the Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, outlining the most pressing threats to U.S. national security. For the past decade, China has consistently been identified as the most comprehensive and systemic challenge to the United States and the international rules-based order, due to its military expansion, economic coercion, cyber operations, and efforts to undermine global institutions.

The Taiwan Strait is the primary focus of U.S. intelligence and defense efforts, as a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is widely considered the most likely trigger for a direct military conflict between the United States and China. Given Beijing's growing military capabilities and explicit commitment to reunification—by force if necessary—U.S. defense strategy increasingly prioritizes deterrence and preparedness in the region.

Burma (Myanmar) is an often-overlooked lynchpin in China's strategic calculus, critical to Beijing's ability to invade Taiwan or sustain a prolonged war with the United States. While the humanitarian case for the U.S. aiding Myanmar is strong, the national security argument is even more compelling—yet U.S. policymakers continue to ignore it. Several national security concerns warrant U.S. intervention in Burma, including countering China and Russia, strengthening

maritime defense relations with India, and combating transnational crime and narco trafficking. This article will focus on the strategic challenge posed by China, with the other issues addressed in subsequent pieces.

More than 3.5 million people are internally displaced, and at least 4 million have fled Myanmar's ongoing civil war, which in various forms has raged for over 70 years, under various versions of a military government. With no electricity, running water, internet, or phone service in large areas of the country—and a military junta that routinely bombs civilian populations—the humanitarian crisis is among the worst on the planet. Yet most international aid is either funneled to Thailand to assist refugees or sent to the junta-controlled government, ensuring it never reaches those in dire need.

Despite this, those inside Myanmar—civilians, displaced persons, resistance fighters, politicians, and religious leaders—share the same plea: they need American help. Humanitarian groups struggling to provide subsistence-level food rations to millions in displacement camps wonder how many lives they could save if even a fraction of the billions of U.S. aid dollars funneled into non-essential causes elsewhere were redirected to Myanmar. Resistance group heads—leading fighters, some only armed with muzzleloaders, hunting rifles, homemade weapons, and Vietnam War-era surplus—are painfully aware of the billions of dollars'



A decade ago, the US government showed serious interest in supporting democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi. Photo: AFP

worth of state-of-the-art U.S. military equipment abandoned in Afghanistan. And those building a civil government in Myanmar's liberated ethnic states question why the U.S. recognizes and supports Kurdish autonomy in Iraq but refuses to extend the same recognition to them.

Providing aid, recognition, and military support to Myanmar's emerging civilian government is not just a humanitarian imperative—it is a matter of U.S. national security. Strengthening Myanmar's resistance would weaken China's strategic foothold in the region, disrupt Beijing's plans for Taiwan, and prevent the junta from serving as a proxy for Chinese expansionism. Ignoring Myanmar not only condemns millions to suffering but also cedes ground to America's greatest geopolitical adversary.

The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) is a critical component of Beijing's long-term strategy for a Taiwan invasion, as it provides a secure, land-based trade and energy route that bypasses the vulnerable Malacca Strait. In a conflict scenario, the U.S. and its allies could impose a naval blockade on China's maritime trade routes, particularly at the Malacca Strait, which handles over 80 percent of China's energy imports. The CMEC offers China an alternative by rerouting energy and goods through Burma's Kyaukphyu Port leading to China's Yunnan Province, reducing the impact of a blockade.

China relies on imports for over 70 percent of its oil, with most shipments transiting through the Malacca Strait. A naval blockade would cripple its war effort. However, CMEC's pipeline network—including oil and gas pipelines from Kyaukphyu to Kunming—creates a secondary energy supply chain, mitigating this vulnerability and ensuring continuous energy flow even in wartime. Beyond energy security, the CMEC allows China to move critical war supplies and industrial goods inland through Burma instead of relying solely on eastern seaports like Shanghai, which would be prime targets for blockades or bombing in a Taiwan war scenario.

While officially framed as an economic project, the CMEC's infrastructure—including railways, highways, and ports—has clear dual-use potential for military logistics. These routes could facilitate People's Liberation Army (PLA) troop movements, supply chains, and broader Indo-Pacific operations if needed. Kyaukphyu Port further solidifies China's direct military and commercial foothold in the Indian Ocean, allowing it to sustain operations beyond the first island chain should its eastern seaboard come under threat.

The completion of the CMEC depends on continued Chinese and Russian support for Myanmar's military junta. China provides financial backing, while both China and Russia supply weapons, including attack helicopters, jets, and drones—now responsible



The Myanmar resistance has been making serious advances in its fight against the military junta. Photo: AFP



for the majority of civilian casualties. The Myanmar resistance forces, including ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), have no way to counter the junta's airpower, perpetuating the war, prolonging suffering, and delaying the establishment of democracy.

Beyond its impact on Myanmar, a completed CMEC strengthens China's geopolitical leverage in the region, allowing Beijing to counterbalance U.S. and Indian naval forces in the Bay of Bengal while securing an alternative maritime access point. In a potential Taiwan war, the CMEC would safeguard China's energy and trade flow while expanding its strategic reach—making it an essential component of Chinese leader Xi Jinping's broader war strategy and his vision for a Chinese-led international order.

To counter China, strengthen U.S. national security, and support democracy in Myanmar, the United States must take decisive action. Washington should work to prevent China and Russia from supplying the junta with aircraft, fuel, and weapons while ensuring that international aid does not flow to the regime. Instead, the U.S. should recognize the elements of civilian

government – including the National Unity Government (NUG) - forming in the liberated zones and ethnic states, providing direct state-to-state assistance to these entities—who are best positioned to meet the needs of internally displaced people. Additionally, the U.S. should provide military aid to the EAOs. They, together with People's Defence Forces, currently control over 70 percent of Myanmar's territory, but they need support to retake key cities. Once this is achieved, they can begin rebuilding the country and preparing for truly democratic elections.

Supporting democracy in Burma, dismantling the junta's grip on power, and countering China should be U.S. priorities—not just on humanitarian grounds, but as an essential matter of U.S. national security.

*Antonio Graceffo is an American economist, China analyst and author who has lived in several Asian countries.*

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Both sides in the Myanmar war are now using drones to devastating effect. Photo: AFP

# MYANMAR JUNTA DRONE WARFARE BUILDS PRESSURE ON THE RESISTANCE

The Myanmar junta's drone warfare has become a significant challenge for resistance forces across multiple conflict zones. Since late 2024, the military has increasingly deployed technologically advanced drones in battles across Kachin, Northern Shan, Rakhine, Karenni, and Karen states, among other areas.

Most recently, on March 18, the junta launched a kamikaze drone attack on the residence of Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Chief of Staff General Saw Johnny, highlighting the growing role of drone strikes in targeted assaults.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing's visit to China in November 2024 placed a strong focus on drone technology, particularly through engagements with Chinese drone manufacturers. Following his visit, the junta began deploying a greater number of Chinese drones, originally intended for agricultural use, for military operations.

A spokesperson from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) cited drone attacks and airstrikes as key obstacles to capturing Bhamo, the second-largest city in Kachin State. The junta's increasing use of night-vision drones has further intensified the challenges faced by resistance forces, who now contend with aerial threats both day and night.

According to The Irrawaddy, some junta troops have undergone drone training in Tianjin, China, home to China's Army Military University and the Chinese People's Armed Police Force Command Academy. Additionally, junta sources have warned that military forces have begun deploying advanced Russian-made drones, which are reportedly more sophisticated than their Chinese counterparts. Unlike the modified Chinese drones previously used, the new Russian drones operate with minimal noise, enhanced camera capabilities, and round-the-clock surveillance functions.

Alongside these developments, the junta has expanded ammunition production to match the requirements of its newly acquired drone arsenal, further escalating its technological warfare capabilities.

### **As the dust settles after the Myanmar junta leader's visit to Russia and Belarus, what were the outcomes?**

During Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing's visit to Russia from March 3 to March 9, over ten business and investment agreements were discussed, covering sectors such as the Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ), nuclear energy, technology, telecommunications, mineral mining, agriculture, food, transportation, labour exports, trade, banking, education and tourism.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Photo: AFP

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Vladimirovich Mishustin stated that Russian companies are prepared to collaborate on the Dawei SEZ project, emphasizing its strategic importance in supporting micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and boosting trade volume. Russian President Vladimir Putin also highlighted the energy sector as a key area of cooperation between the two countries during a joint press conference. Over 90% of Myanmar's fuel consumption in the past year was reportedly supplied by Russia.

Min Aung Hlaing expressed satisfaction at the Russia-Myanmar Economic Forum, acknowledging Russia's involvement in the Dawei SEZ project. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) had already been signed in February during Russian Economic Minister Maxim Reshetnikov's visit to Myanmar. The 195-square-mile Dawei SEZ includes a deep-sea port, fuel refinery, industrial zone, and power plants. Its strategic location offers an alternative to the Malacca Strait shipping route.

In the nuclear energy sector, Russia and Myanmar signed an MoU for the construction of a Small Modular Reactor (SMR) in Myanmar. While the junta has not disclosed the exact location and details, its spokespersons stated that the facility is expected to generate 110 megawatts of electricity.

In education, both countries agreed to facilitate the recognition of academic qualifications to enable more Myanmar students to study in Russian universities. The tourism sector was also a focus, with Myanmar launching the "Welcome Russia" initiative aimed at attracting Russian tourists through promotions by celebrities, singers, journalists, online influencers and travel bloggers.

Regarding Belarus, while no specific agreements were publicly disclosed, MoUs were signed for cooperation in sports, tourism, legal affairs, agriculture, and food safety. Belarus also committed to supplying tractors to Myanmar and receiving Myanmar students for science and modern education programmes.



The Myanmar military has stepped up its drive to force military conscription. Photo: Supplied

## What are the restrictions the Myanmar junta is putting on workers going abroad to work?

The Myanmar junta has tightened restrictions on workers seeking employment abroad, requiring additional government approval before departure. As of March 17, workers holding PJ-type passports must obtain permission from the junta-controlled Ministry of Labour before leaving the country. Previously, workers only needed an Overseas Workers Identification Card (OWIC) alongside their passport and airline ticket.

Under the new directive, which was initially introduced on March 10, workers must apply for a consent letter from the Labour Ministry at least five days before departure. The ministry will then send a list of approved workers to international airports in Yangon and Mandalay. According to a labour agent in Yangon, "OWIC, passport, and airline ticket are no longer sufficient—without the Labour Ministry's approval, workers will be stopped at the airport."

Daily approvals are reportedly capped at 100 to 120 workers. An agent noted, "The restrictions are tightening because too many workers have been

leaving the country." The junta's crackdown follows concerns expressed in a February 11 cabinet meeting, where the junta leader complained that Myanmar has not been receiving expected foreign currency from overseas workers.

The junta had already halted general worker departures on February 14. While skilled workers and those traveling under government-to-government (G-to-G) programs can still leave after clearance from relevant ministries, all other general labourers are now barred from working abroad.

Meanwhile, labour rights activists are warning Myanmar workers currently abroad not to return for the upcoming Thingyan water festival, fearing they may face difficulties leaving the country again. Activists have specifically urged young people of conscription age to avoid returning, warning that the junta is desperate to replenish its military ranks through forced recruitment.

One labour agent advised, "If you are in the conscription age group, don't even think about coming back—you may not be able to leave again."

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Medics quickly move an injured person from a clinic due to the danger of junta airstrikes. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

## DAILY SUFFERING CAUSED BY WAR IN BURMA'S ETHNIC STATES

**ANTONIO GRACEFFO**

**A** 17-year-old boy named Pupa sat up in bed at the only rehabilitation and prosthetic center in Karenni State. He smiled—a youthful smile despite the fact that he was recovering from having his leg amputated. He was a victim of a government drone attack, just like his friend sitting beside him, who was also missing a leg from the knee down.

The war, which has only intensified since the Burmese military coup when he was just 13, has stolen his childhood. And now, as he transitions into adulthood, he will do so with one less leg.

The rehab center was filled with people who had lost limbs to government airstrikes and mortar attacks, but increasingly, most of the casualties came from drone strikes. One man was missing both hands. Another, only 19 years old, had broken his back in an explosion and was now paralyzed from the waist down. Yet another had lost one and a half legs.

Worst of all, Pupa was not the youngest. A twelve-year-old had lost the use of his hand after suffering a head injury when shrapnel from a Burma Army bomb struck his skull.

While we were visiting the clinic, government planes began crisscrossing the sky above. Patients and nurses immediately began shouting for everyone to get into the bomb shelter. People missing limbs hobbled

on crutches, helping one another reach the relative safety of the concrete bunker. Sitting inside, waiting for the jets to leave, it felt perverse—crippling these people wasn't enough for the government. Even after permanently maiming them, the government subjected them to live in daily fear of being bombed again.

The jets flew off, dropping ordnance a few kilometers away. We jumped into our vehicles with the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) and rushed toward the site of the explosions, hoping to assist any wounded. The KNDF soldiers carried weapons, but they were useless against airstrikes and drones. All they—or anyone else—could do was try to give a warning as soon as an attack appeared imminent, help people into shelters, and then respond to the casualties afterward. At no point in that process was there any step toward ending the war.

Responding to an airstrike in Burma is relatively straightforward—you find the impact zone by looking for crowds of civilians and militia, discussing what happened and checking for wounded or dead. When we arrived at the scene, people told us the government had clearly been targeting the local clinic. By some miracle, they had missed. No one was injured, though a few nearby houses and shops had taken superficial damage.

A man came running toward us, angrily brandishing a massive piece of shrapnel.

"This went through my house!" he shouted. "Through the room where my wife and child were sitting!"

His family was unharmed, but his anguish was unmistakable. As the father, he had no way to protect them. That shrapnel could have just as easily flown half a meter in another direction, killing his wife and daughter.

We headed back to the KNDF base as the sun began to set. Most of Burma has no electricity, phone, or internet service, and the ethnic states largely lack running water. As darkness falls, the few solar-powered lights that have been absorbing energy throughout the day flicker on. However, most people rely on rechargeable flashlights, which they carry everywhere in the evening. Cooking is done over open fires, and water must be purchased or carried long distances from rivers—many of which are drying up as the land waits for the return of the rainy season.

At the sound of airplanes or drones, people instinctively extinguish their lights and seek shelter. The internally displaced people (IDPs), already isolated, receive almost no external support. International aid either stops at the border or is handed over to the junta's State Administrative Council (SAC), which refuses to distribute it to displaced populations. As a result, camps vary drastically in their access to resources. Some receive the UN-recommended 16 kilograms of rice per person, while others receive that amount per family. Some get sporadic distributions of soap, cooking oil, and fish paste—others get nothing at all. The displaced survive on meager rations, unable to properly bathe or wash their clothes. With a high concentration of people in these camps, water is becoming scarce. It must now be purchased, but most IDPs have no income.

The next morning, as we drove through the city, we passed entire neighborhoods of abandoned houses. Their former residents now live in temporary bamboo shelters. They don't dare reclaim their homes—before the area was retaken by the KNDF, government forces laid landmines. The KNDF lacks the equipment and manpower to conduct demining on the scale required. Even under the best circumstances, it will take years.

Just as international laws and bureaucratic restrictions prevent aid from reaching the displaced, most international demining NGOs will only operate with permission from the internationally recognized government—which, in this case, is the SAC, the very regime that laid the mines in the first place. Some military

veterans and mine experts from foreign countries have offered, as individuals, to provide training. But even then, another obstacle remains: transporting demining equipment across borders is illegal.

Drones have increasingly become the leading cause of injuries and deaths. These drones are no longer coming only from China but also from Russia, North Korea, and Iran. The people desperately need drone jammers, but transshipping them is illegal. Once again, this underscores how international law is followed to the letter but not the spirit. The SAC faces no difficulty acquiring as many drones and aircraft as it can afford, yet the pro-democracy resistance forces are prohibited from purchasing demining, anti-drone, or anti-aircraft systems to defend civilians.

In a further act of hypocrisy, the UN routinely issues statements condemning the junta and urging it to stop killing civilians. Yet, at no point has the UN called for a relaxation of the laws that prevent ethnic resistance forces from obtaining life-saving military equipment.

Two days earlier, while I was photographing a church, we heard mortar rounds landing closer and closer to our position. When one landed uncomfortably near, we decided to leave the area. Later, we learned that those mortars had killed five resistance soldiers. Over the next day and a half, we would attend three of their funerals.

Mothers, wives, and children clung tearfully to framed photos of the deceased, placed beside the bodies laid out for the wake. If a soldier was Catholic, a priest presided over the funeral; if he was Buddhist, monks were called. But regardless of religion, villagers and comrades paid their respects. I watched two soldiers—one Catholic, one Baptist—kneel in prayer, lighting candles beside the body of their fallen Buddhist friend.

One grieving mother, whose son had been killed in a government drone strike, told us she had lost six children since the coup began. The soldiers whose funerals we attended all had relatives who had also been killed in the conflict.

Funerals happen with such regularity that they have become a grim routine. At various times, both a military commander and a priest confided in me that they had attended too many. A doctor admitted that he was similarly distressed by the number of young, healthy legs he had been forced to amputate.

Everyone in Burma—or at least in the ethnic states where the fighting is fiercest and has been ongoing for the longest—suffers from trauma. In candid moments, young soldiers spoke of their struggles: the nightmares,

## CORE DEVELOPMENTS

the sleepless nights haunted by the faces of those they had been forced to kill, and the friends they had lost. Every funeral and every amputation serves as a stark reminder that anyone—soldier or civilian—could be next.

For Burma's suffering to end, several critical steps must be taken, according to analysts and NGOs.

First, a humanitarian corridor is needed, along with permission from the Thai government to send truckloads of supplies—medicine, food, and essential equipment—into Burma. Additionally, permission must be granted for the transport of sensitive equipment, such as demining tools and drone jammers, which are crucial for civilian protection. Direct financial support should also be provided to ethnic organizations on the ground. These local networks understand the needs of their people, operate with low overhead, and can reach those most in need far more effectively than large international organizations.

Under the current system, most large-scale international aid is either directed toward refugees

in Thailand or funneled through the military junta. However, the junta effectively blocks aid from reaching the internally displaced people (IDPs) in liberated areas, which now encompass roughly 80 percent of Burma's territory. To address this, ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and their respective civilian governing bodies must receive international recognition. This would enable them to access government-to-government aid and secure a voice at the United Nations.

Finally, the United States and the West must enforce meaningful sanctions and embargoes against Burma's military government. It is imperative to cut off the regime's access to weapons, jets, drones, and fuel—particularly from China and Russia, which continue to supply the junta. Without external military support, the junta's ability to wage war against its own people would be severely weakened, bringing Burma one step closer to peace.

*Antonio Graceffo is an American economist, China analyst and author who has lived in several Asian countries.*



Two resistance fighters. Photo: Antonio Graceffo



# CHINESE-RUN ONLINE MONEY LAUNDERING CONTINUES IN DKBA-CONTROLLED AREAS OF MYANMAR DESPITE CRACKDOWN

**MIZZIMA SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HAN HTOO ZAW**

Investigations have revealed that Chinese nationals continue to operate online money laundering schemes in the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)-controlled areas of Kyaukhet, Walle, and Minletpan villages near Myawaddy, Karen State.

On 5 March, a DKBA official held a press conference announcing that 443 victims of human trafficking involved in online fraud operations would be repatriated. The group includes individuals from Ethiopia, Kenya, Indonesia, and Laos, but no Chinese nationals were among them.

Earlier, on 12 February, the DKBA handed over 261 foreign nationals to Thailand, again excluding any Chinese detainees. This has raised concerns that Chinese mafias linked to these illicit operations continue to operate in the region.

"I don't know if they came before or after us, but we have warned them that illegal activities will not be tolerated. Despite this, they have constructed massive buildings here, larger than anything seen in Karen State. These people are not kind, they are inhumane, only focused on making money. We have made it clear that they cannot continue like this anymore," said Major General Saw San Aung, DKBA's Chief of Staff.

In February, the Chinese government launched Operation Zinyaw, a campaign targeting cross-border online money laundering networks known as Kyar Phyant, which have proliferated along the Thai-Myanmar border in Karen State.

As part of the operation, China's Vice Minister of Public Security and Commissioner of the Criminal Investigation Bureau traveled to Thailand and visited Myawaddy via Mae Sot. However, discussions were limited to meetings with the Myanmar Military Council and the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF), with no engagement with the DKBA.

"We don't speak Chinese, and China isn't our government, so they don't communicate with us. If they want to talk to the current government, they will. They don't care about us, and we don't care about them either. We are shaping our own future," DKBA's Major General Saw San Aung said.

According to locals in Kyaukhet and Walle, the once-visible Chinese presence in the villages has diminished, yet online scam operations persist.

When a Mizzima team visited Kyaukhet on 5 March, they observed active Chinese scam sites despite DKBA's claims of an ongoing crackdown.

During the 5 March press conference, DKBA only permitted journalists to photograph designated areas while restricting access to other locations. DKBA soldiers guarding a suspected online money laundering hub prevented reporters from filming and even confiscated their phones, issuing threats.

Despite increased scrutiny and crackdowns, the persistence of these operations suggests that Chinese-run online money laundering remains deeply entrenched in DKBA-controlled areas.



Photo: AFP

## JFM CALLS FOR INVESTIGATION INTO UN SPECIAL ENVOY FOR MYANMAR'S CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Justice for Myanmar (JFM) issued a statement on 9 March calling on United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres to investigate possible conflicts of interest of Ms. Julie Bishop, the UN Special Envoy for Myanmar. The call centres around her alleged involvement in the mining sector and connections with Chinese companies which are also involved in Myanmar.

The statement is as follows.

Julie Bishop, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General on Myanmar, is engaged with businesses including Energy Transition Minerals (ETM), where she was recently appointed as a Strategic Advisor for a controversial uranium and rare earths mining project in Greenland linked to Chinese state-owned companies with involvement in Myanmar.

Julie Bishop was appointed UN Special Envoy to Myanmar in April 2024. The role should involve working for a resolution to the crisis in Myanmar and therefore trust and integrity are crucial for her engagement with democratic actors, civil society and affected communities.

Yet Julie Bishop's involvement in the mining sector and links to Chinese state-owned companies raise serious questions over her ethical conduct and ability to successfully carry out her mission.

Justice For Myanmar calls on the United Nations Secretary General António Guterres to open an investigation into conflicts of interest over Julie Bishop's business activities.

Julie Bishop's links to Chinese state companies through the ASX-listed ETM were first reported by the Saturday Paper.

Julie Bishop was appointed Strategic Advisor to ETM in January 2025 through her business advisory

firm, Julie Bishop and Partners. According to the company announcement, Julie Bishop's role is to advise the board "to advance the Kvanefjeld Project towards development, in parallel with the ongoing legal process."

ETM's Kvanefjeld mining project, located in southwestern Greenland, has been opposed by local people over environmental and health concerns, and was suspended after the Greenland government imposed a ban on uranium mining in 2021.

In a widely criticised decision, ETM is seeking US\$11.5 billion in compensation through legal proceedings against the governments of Greenland and Denmark. The amount is almost 4 times Greenland's gross domestic product.

One key partner in the Kvenfjeld project is Shenghe Resources, a Chinese partly state-owned rare earths mining conglomerate. Shenghe Resources is a major shareholder of ETM, controlling 9% of the company and has a seat on the ETM board, which Julie Bishop is advising. Shenghe Resources has anti-dilution rights in ETM at up to 19.9%.

In 2018, Shenghe Resources and ETM signed a memorandum of understanding for the import of rare earth concentrates containing uranium from Kvanefjeld into China and to create a strategic development plan for the project. The following year, Shenghe formed a joint venture with subsidiaries of China National Nuclear Corporation to create a legal means for those imports.

Another ETM partner is China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), a Chinese state-owned construction conglomerate which is in the design team for the Kvanefjeld project.

## Myanmar links to ETM's Chinese partners

Shenghe Resources is a major Chinese producer, processor and supplier of rare earths with a market capitalisation of over US\$2.7 billion. Myanmar is the largest supplier of heavy rare earths to China, according to a 2022 Global Witness report that documented the devastating impact of rare earth mining on ecosystems, livelihoods and local water supplies in Kachin State. Global Witness found a high risk that revenues from rare earth mining fund the Myanmar military's abuses.

Rare earth mining in Myanmar is dominated by Chinese companies operating on Kachin State's border with Yunnan province. The industry rapidly expanded over the past decade, mostly in areas which until recently were controlled by the Kachin Border Guard Force (BGF) led by Zahkung Ting Ying, under Myanmar military command.

The Kachin Independence Army defeated the Kachin BGF and took over these areas in late 2024, disrupting mining operations and leaving the future direction of the industry in Myanmar uncertain.

Shenghe Resources' corporate disclosures suggest they may have sourced rare earths from Myanmar. Shenghe Resources did not respond to questions from Justice For Myanmar.

CCCC remains active in Myanmar and is linked to China-Myanmar Economic Corridor projects. In 2018, it signed a US\$1.5 billion agreement for the controversial New Yangon City project, which the junta reportedly plans to resume.

The Myanmar corporate registry shows a CCCC branch office and at least two other CCCC subsidiaries in Myanmar: Myanmar China Harbor Engineering Company Limited, and China Road and Bridge (Myanmar) Company Limited.

China Harbor Engineering is part of the Kyauk Phyu deep sea port consortium, which the junta has tried to proceed with. In January, the company signed memorandum of agreements for the development of port facilities in Yangon at a ceremony presided over by a sanctioned junta minister.

In 2016, China Road and Bridge was awarded a contract for the improvement of the Eindu-Kawkareik road in Karen State, which was opposed by civil society, fuelled conflict and served the Myanmar military's strategic interests.

The junta also engaged with China National Nuclear Corporation last year and is seeking support for nuclear energy development.

### Julie Bishop's other business links

Julie Bishop is registered as a lobbyist for Twinza Oil Limited, an Australian private oil and gas company with assets in Papua New Guinea and an office in Singapore.

Twinza Oil's majority owners are the Clough family and the Hong Kong and London-based Kerogen Capital.

The company has a deep and problematic history in Myanmar, having signed a production sharing contract with the former military junta in 2006 for the Yetagun East Block, off the Tanintharyi coast. The company has since withdrawn from Myanmar.

Twinza founder Bill Clough, who currently sits on the company's board of directors, was a major investor in the now defunct Myanmar Times newspaper, which was linked to military intelligence.

In August 2024, Julie Bishop signed a consultancy agreement with Summit Gold Limited, another Australian resources company, to advise on a gold mining project in Papua New Guinea.

Julie Bishop has also done work for Mineral Resources (MinRes), an Australian mining company that is a partner of the Chinese state-owned China Baowu Steel Group.

A China Baowu Steel Group subsidiary is developing the Tagaung Taung nickel project in Myanmar, which finances the military junta.

Julie Bishop's links to numerous companies, including those owned by the Chinese state with interests in Myanmar, create unacceptable conflicts of interest that must be fully investigated.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "We have serious concerns about UN Special Envoy Julie Bishop's business activities, including her appointment as an advisor for a China-backed mining project in Greenland that has been rightfully resisted by indigenous people.

"China is one of the Myanmar military's biggest arms suppliers and also provides the military with major sources of revenue, including from the mining sector.

"Through its supply of arms and funds to the Myanmar military, the Chinese government is aiding and abetting ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"Any commercial ties between the UN Special Envoy and the Chinese state are therefore alarming and call into question her ability to carry out her mission with integrity.

"The fact that the companies Julie Bishop is linked to have a history of dirty deals with the Myanmar military makes her activities even more questionable.

"Julie Bishop's apparent disregard for the rights of Greenlanders raises further concerns about the extent she will uphold the rights of Myanmar people.

"We urge the United Nations Secretary General to urgently open an investigation into Julie Bishop's business activities, consider the appropriateness of her continued UN engagement, and disclose the findings."



Ko Htein Lin and Sean Turnell at a meeting in the US. Photo: Sean Turnell

## AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S SON BEGINS U.S. TOUR TO URGE INTERNATIONAL ACTION ON MYANMAR CRISIS

**K**o Htein Lin, also known as Kim Eric, the younger son of Myanmar's democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, has launched an eight-city tour across the United States, calling for urgent international intervention to address Myanmar's escalating humanitarian and political crisis.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been held in solitary confinement by the military junta for over four years without access to medical care or family contact, raising serious concerns about her well-being.

Now in her 80s, she remains in military custody as the junta continues its crackdown on civilians, carrying out airstrikes and mass killings that have displaced millions.

According to reports from international organizations, more than 3.5 million people in Myanmar are currently homeless, and 15 million are facing severe food shortages.

During his tour, Ko Htein Lin is set to meet with Myanmar nationals and democracy advocates in New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., Fort Wayne, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sedona, and Austin. His visit aims to rally global support for his mother's release,

as well as that of other political prisoners, while urging stronger measures against the military junta.

Arriving in New York on 11 March, Ko Htein Lin has begun discussions with Myanmar communities in the U.S. as part of an 80th birthday campaign for Aung San Suu Kyi. His key demands include increasing pressure on the junta's financial networks, halting arms sales to the regime, and ensuring more effective humanitarian aid delivery to the people of Myanmar.



Ko Htein Lin and Sean Turnell. Photo: Sean Turnell



## UN CHIEF PROMISES TO DO 'EVERYTHING' TO AVOID FOOD CUTS TO ROHINGYAS IN BANGLADESH

UN chief Antonio Guterres said on 14 March that the organisation would do "everything" to prevent food rations being cut for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Guterres met with Rohingya refugees in the camps in Cox's Bazar for a show of solidarity and broke the fast for the Islamic holy month of Ramadan with the mostly Muslim persecuted minority.

Many of the one million refugees that live in the squalid relief camps escaped war in neighbouring Myanmar after the 2017 military crackdown and are now threatened by dire humanitarian aid cuts.

Guterres said "dramatic" cuts in humanitarian aid announced by the United States and other countries meant there was a "risk to cut food rations in this camp".

"I can promise that we will do everything to avoid it and I will be talking to all countries in the world that can support us in order to make sure that funds are made available to avoid a situation in which people would suffer even more and that some people would even die," Guterres said.

More than 100,000 participated in the fast-breaking sunset meal with Guterres, with a few of them holding placards that said, "No more refugee life" and, "We are Rohingyas, not stateless."

Guterres said it was "essential" that peace is reestablished in Myanmar, the "rights of the Rohingyas are respected", and that "discrimination and persecution like the one we have witnessed in the past, will end".

He was accompanied by members of Dhaka's interim government, including its chief advisor, Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus.

US President Donald Trump imposed a freeze on foreign aid in January pending a review, sending shockwaves through the humanitarian community.

Aid funding shortfalls would require a cut in monthly food vouchers from \$12.50 to \$6.00 per person at the camps, the UN World Food Programme announced this month.

Successive aid cuts have already caused intense hardship among Rohingya in the overcrowded settlements, who are reliant on aid and suffer from rampant malnutrition.

The UN children's agency UNICEF said youngsters in the camps were experiencing the worst levels of malnutrition since 2017, with admissions for severe malnutrition treatment up 27 percent in February compared with the same months in 2024.

UNICEF's representative in Bangladesh Rana Flowers said that cancelled US grants for Bangladesh accounted for around a quarter of her agency's Rohingya refugee response costs.

Bangladesh has struggled to support its refugee population, and Dhaka has said it is exploring ways to secure additional aid for Rohingya refugees.

Guterres, who held talks with Yunus earlier on Friday in Dhaka, said he appreciated the "close cooperation" between the UN and Dhaka.

Rohingya living in the camps around Cox's Bazar are not allowed to seek employment and are almost entirely dependent on limited humanitarian aid to survive.

Bangladesh is still reeling from its own political crisis after a student-led revolution last year culminated in the overthrow of long-time ruler Sheikh Hasina and her government.

Guterres expressed his "solidarity with Bangladesh's reform and transition process".

AFP



## ARTILLERY SHELL LANDS NEAR THAI BORDER VILLAGE AMID MYANMAR CLASHES

Thai news outlets reported that an artillery shell was discovered along the Thai-Myanmar border near Ban Na Pa Paek village in Mok Cham Pae Sub-district, Mae Hong Son District.

According to the Khaosod news agency, locals discovered a 120 mm mortar shell on a cabbage farm near Ban Na Pa Paek village on 11 March.

Reports from Thai media and local sources indicate that clashes erupted on the Myanmar side on the same day between the military junta and the Karenni Army (KA).

Residents near Huai Makhuea Som and Ban Na Pa Paek villages in Mae Hong Son District reported hearing gunfire and artillery shelling from the Myanmar side.

"The shell landed on the Thai side. I heard that the fighting between the Karenni Army (KA) and the junta took place along the Thai-Myanmar border. Some reports suggest that senior junta members themselves ordered the artillery to be fired toward Thailand," said a source from Karenni State.

Sources claim that the Myanmar junta intentionally fired the shell that landed on the Thai side, though Mizzima is still working to verify this information.

In response to the incident, the Thai army has heightened security along the border, and the Mae Hong Son District Chief has advised residents to exercise caution while traveling near border areas due to the ongoing clashes, according to media reports.

Photo: AFP

## LOCALS CALL FOR HALT TO GOLD MINING OPERATIONS IN MYITKYINA DUE TO ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

Residents of five villages under the Arlam Village Tract in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State, are demanding an end to gold mining operations using heavy machinery, citing severe environmental degradation.

Gold mining activities have intensified within the boundaries of Arlam, Aubyit, Dumgan, Lamung Zup, and Tanghpe villages.

"There was gold mining before, but it has worsened since October 2024. Now, heavy machines are involved. With so many machines digging, the riverbanks are already being destroyed," said a resident from Tanghpe.

According to locals, these areas were free from gold mining before the coup. However, since late 2023, small-scale operations have expanded into large-scale mechanized mining.

Reports indicate that the gold mining is not conducted by official companies or organizations but by local businesspeople who have applied for permits to mine sandstone.

"They don't apply for gold mining permits but instead request permission for sandstone extraction under a legal pretence. However, while extracting sandstone, they also mine sand, rocks, and gold," said a local resident.

Arlam Village Tract, located along the Myitkyina-Sumprabum road and on the banks of the Ayeyarwady

River, consists of about 1,000 households with a population exceeding 8,000.

The use of heavy machinery in gold mining has led to the shrinking of village lands, causing destruction to riverbanks, property, and the environment, according to villagers.

Despite ongoing clashes between junta forces and ethnic armed groups in the area, gold mining operations have continued without interruption.

On 11 February, residents of the five affected villages submitted a letter to the junta-appointed Chief Minister of Kachin State, urging a halt to gold and sandstone mining within their village boundaries. However, they have yet to receive a response.

"We want to demand an end to the large-scale gold mining using heavy machinery along the riverbank. No matter which government is in power, we don't want gold mining here. The villages are already being destroyed, and that's why we are protesting against the mining operations," a villager from Tanghpe stated.

Since the military coup in 2021, mechanized gold mining has expanded across Kachin State, including the Myitsone area. Locals fear that these operations will alter river flows, damage ecosystems, and increase the risk of natural disasters.



## NUMBER OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE IN KNU TERRITORIES SURPASSES 1.1 MILLION DUE TO ESCALATING CONFLICT

The number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Karen National Union's (KNU) controlled areas increased by 51,555 in February, bringing the total to over 1.1 million, according to the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP). The surge in displacement is attributed to intensified clashes and airstrikes carried out by the military junta.

CIDKP reported that IDP numbers rose across all seven KNU brigade and districts in February, with KNU Brigade 3 in Nyaunglebin District (Klerlwehtu in Karen) experiencing the highest increase of 20,000 due to heavy fighting.

Other districts also saw significant rises, including 6,224 in Brigade 1 (Thaton District), 10,169 in Brigade 2 (Taungoo District), 2,873 in Brigade 4 (Myeik-Dawei District), 3,525 in Brigade 5 (Hpapun District), 1,899 in Brigade 6 (Doplaya District), and 6,797 in Brigade 7 (Hpa-An District), according to CIDKP data.

Before February, the total number of displaced individuals stood at approximately 1,071,057. However, due to ongoing military offensives, artillery shelling, and airstrikes, the figure has now surpassed 1,122,612.

Fighting is currently taking place across all seven KNU brigades, with the most intense clashes occurring in Brigade 3, according to sources from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).

A source from KNU Brigade 3 states that battles are ongoing in Kyaukkyi, Mone, Nyaunglebin, and Phyu townships. The conflict, which began escalating late last year, has intensified significantly in recent months.

"Brigade 3 has expanded its territory in Bago Region, and its administration is strengthening. As it is closer to Naypyidaw, the junta is deploying heavy artillery, jets, and drones, leading to an increase in displaced persons," said Naw Wah Khu Shee, director of the Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN).

Similar clashes have erupted in other areas, including Thandaunggyi and Htantabin townships in Brigade 2, as well as Bilin Township in Brigade 1. Additionally, fighting continues along the Tanintharyi-Maw Taung Road in Brigade 4, near Ka Taing Ti camp in Hpapun Township under Brigade 5, and around the Asia Highway in Kawkareik Township within Brigade 6.

KNU's seven brigades and districts cover regions spanning southeastern Myanmar, including parts of Karen and Mon States and Bago and Tanintharyi Regions.

The CIDKP, along with organizations such as the Karen Office of Relief and Development (KORD), the Karen Women's Organization (KWO), and KPSN, is providing displaced communities with essential aid, including food and other necessities.





# TENSIONS RESURFACE BETWEEN MYANMAR AND INDIA OVER KABAW VALLEY DISPUTE

**T**ensions in Myanmar-India relations have resurfaced due to the Kabaw Valley dispute, in a border region between the two nations.

The Kabaw Valley dispute is a longstanding territorial issue between India and Myanmar, involving a region that was historically part of Manipur but was transferred to Myanmar in 1834, where it remains under its control.

On the night of 12 March, the Myanmar military junta's propaganda channel, Myawaddy TV, aired a statement by Major General Zaw Min Tun, alleging that certain Indian politicians were acting purely out of political interests, potentially harming bilateral relations.

His remarks were a response to renewed calls from Indian lawmakers to reintegrate the Kabaw Valley into Manipur State. The controversy was reignited after a debate in India's upper house of parliament on 10 March.

During the "Zero Hour" session, when MPs can freely ask questions before financial meetings, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Sanajaoba of Manipur cited historical agreements, including the 1826 Treaty of Yandabo and the 1834 Kabaw Valley Agreement, as grounds for India to reclaim the region or seek compensation.

In response, the Myanmar junta reaffirmed that the Myanmar-India border extends over 1,600 km, with more than 1,400 km already demarcated, including the Kabaw Valley.

Major General Zaw Min Tun also referenced a memorandum of understanding signed between Myanmar and India in May 2014.

"We want to emphasize that Myanmar's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected. Regarding this issue, Myanmar will continue to take necessary actions and communicate accordingly," Major General Zaw Min Tun said.

However, this dispute is not new. The BJP included reclaiming the Kabaw Valley in its 2013 election campaign, triggering protests in Kalay and Mingin Townships in Myanmar.

Similar demands resurfaced in 2014, and the current tensions under military rule have further angered local communities.

On 12 March, Salai Dokhar, a leader of "India for Myanmar," stated that the demand to reintegrate the Kabaw Valley into Manipur was unrealistic.

In late February, an Indian Mizoram MP reportedly entered Myanmar and met with the Chinland Council (CC) and the Chin National Front (CNF), urging Chin State to integrate into India.

Observers warn that such activities could further erode trust between Myanmar and India and complicate border issues.

Moreover, as bilateral relations become increasingly strained, the Kabaw Valley issue remains more than just a historical dispute, it is a politically charged matter with significant regional implications.

The Indian MP leading the latest push for the Kabaw Valley's reintegration is a royal descendant of Manipur and a BJP member who was elected to Manipur's lower house in 2020.



Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR TROOPS UNDER ARMED ATTACK FLEE ACROSS BORDER: THAI MILITARY

A group of Myanmar soldiers fled across the Thai border on 14 March after an assault by an ethnic armed group ousted them from their base, Thailand's military said.

Myanmar has been riven by civil war after the military seized power in a 2021 coup, with the junta fighting an array of armed ethnic organisations and pro-democracy partisans.

Fighters from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) attacked the Pulu Tu frontier military base in the early hours of Friday, the Thai military said.

"The Myanmar military defended the base but ultimately the KNLA successfully seized control," it said in a statement.

"Several Myanmar soldiers were killed and some fled across the border into Thailand."

The statement did not specify how many Myanmar soldiers had crossed the border into Thailand's Tak province but said they had been "provided humanitarian assistance".

KNLA forces seized the base around 3:00 am (2030 GMT Thursday), according to a spokesman for the organisation's political wing, the Karen National Union.

The KNLA fighters took the base after Myanmar troops "abandoned their guns and ran into Thailand", it said.

A spokesman for the Myanmar junta could not be reached for comment.

The Pulu Tu base is around 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of the border town of Myawaddy, a vital trade node that became a battleground between anti-junta fighters and the military last year.

The region is also the epicentre of the scam-centre boom in Myanmar, where thousands of foreign nationals trawl the internet for victims to trick with romance or investment schemes.

Many workers say they were trafficked into the centres and thousands have been repatriated through Thailand in recent weeks under mounting international pressure.

The KNLA has been fighting for decades to establish greater autonomy for the Karen people living along Myanmar's southeastern flank.

It is among dozens of ethnic armed organisations, already active before the coup, which have proved the most effective fighting forces against the junta.

While the military has suffered substantial territorial losses, analysts say it remains strong in Myanmar's heartland, with an air force capable of inflicting punishing losses on its adversaries.

The junta issued a conscription order a year ago to boost its embattled ranks, allowing it to call up all men aged 18-35 for military service.

AFP



Photo: Supplied

## FUNDING CUTS FORCE WFP TO STOP FOOD AID TO ONE MILLION IN MYANMAR

The World Food Programme will be forced to cut off one million people in war-torn Myanmar from its vital food aid because of "critical funding shortfalls", it said on 14 March.

The United States provided the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) with \$4.4 billion of its \$9.7 billion budget in 2024 but Washington's international aid funding has been slashed under President Donald Trump.

Myanmar has been gripped by civil war following a 2021 military coup, plunging it into what the United Nations describes as a "polycrisis" of mutually compounding conflict, poverty and instability.

It is controlled by a shifting patchwork of junta forces, ethnic armed groups and pro-democracy

partisans that have fractured the economy, driven up poverty and complicated the supply of aid.

The WFP says more than 15 million people in the country of 51 million are unable to meet their daily food needs, with more than two million "facing emergency levels of hunger".

"More than one million people in Myanmar will be cut off from WFP's lifesaving food assistance starting in April due to critical funding shortfalls," it said in a statement.

"These cuts come just as increased conflict, displacement and access restrictions are already sharply driving up food aid needs," it said.

The statement did not mention the United States by name or any other donor countries.

But the WFP's Myanmar director Michael Dunford told AFP the organisation was "short of the funding because a whole range of different donors have not been able to meet our requirements".

"This includes the US, but it's definitely not only the US," he said.

Without immediate new funding, the WFP said it will have to cut aid to vulnerable groups including children under five, pregnant and breastfeeding women and the disabled -- assisting only 35,000 of them.

The UN warned last year that Rakhine state in Myanmar's west faces an "imminent threat of acute famine".

WFP said the upcoming cuts would hit 100,000 internally displaced people in Rakhine -- including members of the persecuted Rohingya minority -- who will "have no access to food" without its assistance.

"The people, as we inform them of the reduction in the ration levels, are very anxious," said Dunford.

"They're asking us, 'Well what are we going to do now?'"

### 'Lean season'

Trump's scheme to slash federal spending has been spearheaded by Elon Musk, his top donor and the world's richest person, and the targeting of US foreign aid contributions has put the humanitarian community into a tailspin.

The US president has claimed the US Agency for

International Development (USAID) is "run by radical lunatics", while Musk has described it as a "criminal organisation" that needs to be put "through the woodchipper".

USAID has a \$42.8 billion budget, with health and emergency programs in around 120 countries, and is a major contributor to the WFP.

In neighbouring Bangladesh, UN chief Antonio Guterres on Friday met Rohingya who fled Myanmar and are also threatened by aid cuts.

One million Rohingya live in a string of camps along the border after escaping a 2017 military crackdown which some rights groups describe as a genocide.

Funding shortfalls will require a cut in monthly food vouchers in the camps from \$12.50 to \$6.00 per person at the camps, the WFP announced this month.

The cuts inside Myanmar will come just ahead of the "lean season" between the planting and harvesting of rice, maize and vegetables, which lasts from July to September.

The WFP says it "urgently needs \$60 million to maintain its life-saving food assistance to the people of Myanmar this year".

AFP



## JUNTA PUSHES AHEAD WITH RUSSIAN-BACKED DAWEI SEZ AMID LOCAL OPPOSITION

Vice-Senior General Soe Win has called for immediate preparations for the Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ), which is set to receive investment from Russia. Speaking at a Central Committee meeting on Special Economic Zones on 11 March, he stressed the need to advance the project swiftly.

He also instructed that Myanmar, Thailand, and Japan engage in negotiations to formally resolve the dissolution of the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) previously established for the project.

Soe Win stated that investment opportunities for the Dawei SEZ emerged following Junta Chief Min Aung Hlaing's recent visit to Russia and Belarus, adding that rapid development is expected soon.

International reports confirmed that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed on 23 February during the Russian Minister of Economic Development's visit to Naypyidaw, laying the groundwork for Russian investment in the project.

However, civil society organizations and political groups in Tanintharyi have strongly opposed the project.

In a statement released on 10 March, they rejected the SEZ, arguing that Myanmar's current lack of political stability and rule of law will lead to further displacement and human rights violations. They also highlighted the worsening socio-economic crisis caused by the junta's repression and violence.

The National Unity Government (NUG) has also dismissed the legitimacy of such investments, announcing in 2021 and 2022 that it would not recognize any new deals approved by the military regime.

The Dawei SEZ project was initially launched in 2008 as a joint effort between Myanmar and Italian-Thai Development (ITD). However, in December 2020, the NLD government suspended all project agreements with ITD, citing the company's repeated delays, failure to meet financial obligations, and lack of transparency in funding. The Dawei SEZ Management Committee subsequently halted all work permits for nine initial projects.

Despite ongoing political turmoil and local resistance, the junta appears determined to push forward with the Russian-backed SEZ.



Photo: AFP

## MIN AUNG HLAING MEETS CHINESE SPECIAL ENVOY IN NAYPYIDAW TO DISCUSS BILATERAL COOPERATION

**M**yanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing held a meeting with Mr. Deng Xijun, China's Special Envoy for Asian Affairs, in Naypyidaw on the afternoon of 11 March. According to junta-controlled Myawaddy Television, the meeting took place at the SAC Chairman's Office.

Discussions focused on China's cooperation with Myanmar in implementing the junta's Five-Point Roadmap, preparations for the planned elections, peace efforts, and combating narcotics. Additionally, both sides addressed joint measures against online fraud and gambling, as well as trade regulations at the Myanmar-China border.

The two officials also explored ways to enhance bilateral relations and expand cooperation, with China expressing its intention to provide assistance for Myanmar's peace process and socio-economic development. The talks reportedly included China's potential role in supporting the junta's election preparations.

Also present at the meeting were Joint Secretary-General Ye Win Oo, Council Member Lt-Gen Yar Pyae, Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Than Swe, Union Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Tun Tun Naung, and other officials. The Chinese delegation included representatives from the Chinese Embassy in Myanmar.

The Chinese Embassy in Myanmar has not yet issued a statement regarding Mr. Deng Xijun's visit.

The meeting followed Min Aung Hlaing's recent trip to Russia from 3 to 9 March, during which he signed at least 25 memorandums of understanding (MoUs) and agreements with Russia and Belarus.

Meanwhile, on 10 March, Mr. Deng Xijun also held separate discussions with U Than Swe, the junta-appointed Union Minister for Foreign Affairs.

# MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF'S ELECTION TALK: A TIME-BUYING MANIPULATION

**IGOR BLAZEVIC**

**M**in Aung Hlaing's recent statements about planned elections are nothing more than disinformation, manipulation, and an attempt to buy time and legitimacy. This is not a serious announcement of the junta's actual intent to hold elections.

During his trip to Russia and Belarus, Min Aung Hlaing knew he would attract increased media attention, including from international outlets. Seizing the opportunity, he planted fake news about election plans in the open media space.

However, if we carefully analyze his words, he did not actually say the junta would hold elections. What he really announced was that elections will not take place in 2025 and will instead be postponed to some vague and unspecified period—"December 2025... January 2026." The uncertainty and vagueness in his statement make it clear: this is not a promise of elections, but rather a way of saying - We are postponing again; it will happen sometime in the future.

Min Aung Hlaing cannot afford to relinquish his dual role as Commander-in-Chief and head of government. If he loses full control, he will likely be imprisoned or eliminated by his own military.

Even if the junta were to stage a completely fraudulent election—with fake voting, forced participation in a highly limited territory, with almost nobody participating and with only military-backed parties, corrupt individuals, and fake entities "running" - Min Aung Hlaing still cannot allow it to happen.

Even a completely staged illusion of an "election" would create a parliament and a government, introducing two new centres of power: a President and a Speaker of Parliament. While these would be military-controlled government and military-controlled parliament, they would no longer be entirely under Min Aung Hlaing's personal control.

He cannot allow this to take place. He is deeply hated across the country, but more importantly, he is also despised by the military's own rank and file. If he ever relinquishes his combined power as Commander-in-Chief and head of government, it will pave the way

for his removal by the military establishment itself.

So, what will he do? Exactly what he has been doing. He will continue delaying and pretending to move toward elections while avoiding them. He will talk about elections when it serves his interests—like now, when he wants media attention—or when he is pressured by external actors, such as China, which sees elections as a way to remove him. But once the fog from this propaganda dissipates, he will shift the conversation back to ceasefires and peace—just as he has repeatedly alternated between talking about elections and a national census in the past.

Meanwhile, Min Aung Hlaing will continue waging war against the nation.

His real objective in Russia and Belarus was not about elections—it was about securing time, weapons, and money to prolong his war. He is looking for more drones, weapons, and technical expertise. He is also searching for new revenue streams, including ways to send Myanmar "workers" abroad—who will likely end up as cannon fodder on the front lines in Ukraine, much like North Koreans did. He is also negotiating the sale of Myanmar's economic assets or pieces of its sovereignty in exchange for a little bit cash.

And so, during his trip and on the way back, he talked about elections—not because he intends to hold them, but to buy time. He wants to divert attention away from his war efforts, which is why he has thrown this fake news about "planned elections" into the public discourse.

My advice: do not be distracted by this fake narrative about elections. Stay focused on Min Aung Hlaing's war efforts, and stay focused on the struggle for liberation.

The junta is desperate to buy time—to resupply troops, equip them with more drones and ammunition, strengthen defensive lines, and recruit more soldiers. Giving Min Aung Hlaing a break would be a serious mistake.

*Igor Blazevic is a European democracy activist with years of experience in Myanmar.*

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE MYANMAR JUNTA'S PROMISE OF ELECTIONS

Myanmar's military junta has announced plans for elections in December or January -- scheduling the first poll since it seized power in a bloody 2021 coup that plunged the country into civil war.

But with the junta overseeing the vote, much of the country out of government hands, and the most prominent opposition figure -- Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi -- in jail, the prospects for democracy seem bleak.

Here is what we know so far:

### What is the promised poll?

Junta chief General Min Aung Hlaing announced the dates on Friday during a state visit to Belarus.

The junta seized power after making unsubstantiated allegations of electoral fraud, ousting Suu Kyi's civilian government and ending a rare experiment with democracy.

"We had to declare a state of emergency and temporarily take responsibility for the country," Min Aung Hlaing said according to state media.

"Therefore, we plan to hold a free and fair election soon, under the law."

Min Aung Hlaing said 53 parties had registered to run in the polls.

"We have already decided to move toward a multiparty democratic system as requested by the people," he said.

But Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), which won a landslide the last time the country voted, will not be on the ballot.

In 2023, the junta-stacked election commission announced the NLD would be dissolved for failing to re-register under a tough new military-drafted electoral law.

"We want the NLD to come back," a senior party member in Myanmar told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"Only then will the situation be good for both sides and the country will have international support."

### How could it be held?

Since the 2021 coup the junta has been battling an array of pro-democracy guerillas and fighters from ethnic minorities.

Estimates of the extent of government control now vary widely.

But a census to prepare for the vote said data could not be collected from an estimated 19 million of the country's 51 million people, in part because of "significant security constraints".

Ethnic armed groups and pro-democracy fighters have vowed to block the election in their territory.

Analysts say they could attack voting centres or

conduct offensives ahead of polling day.

Saw Thamin Tun, a leader of the Karen National Union -- whose armed wing has fought the Myanmar military for decades -- predicted any new government installed under Min Aung Hlaing would not end the fighting.

"His new government will continue to say to our ethnic armed groups to come and have peace talks," he said.

"If we do not fall in line under his new government, his army will attack us again."

### Why plan it now?

The military has ruled Myanmar for most of its post-independence history.

Morgan Michaels, research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank, told AFP that powerful factions within the divided military were pushing for the election as a way of weakening Min Aung Hlaing.

Currently president and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, under the country's 2008 constitution the same person cannot hold both positions, so he would be expected to choose between them, Michaels explained.

"There is internal pressure to do it because internally the military is upset with his leadership and there is a desire for him to be pushed aside," he said.

But Ko Ko Gyi, head of the People's Party, one of the groups which will participate in the poll, said it was time for a vote because "the state's problems cannot be solved with arms".

"I believe the election method is the best way to transform this conflict," he said.

"We cannot expect elections to be perfect but we will try to make them as good as possible."

### How might it be seen?

International monitors have long panned the junta's proposals for elections.

"A genuine election in Myanmar is impossible under current conditions," said a February joint statement from three monitors including the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

"It will deepen divisions, fuel violence, entrench authoritarian rule and exacerbate the crisis caused by the military coup."

There is also widespread scepticism in Myanmar and abroad that the vote will go ahead as planned.

The country is in a state of emergency, which was extended by six months in January, and no exact date has been set.

"I'll believe it when I see it," said Michaels.

AFP





## BELGIAN JOURNALIST ARRESTED IN INDIA AFTER ILLEGAL ENTRY INTO MYANMAR

A foreign journalist who illegally travelled to Myanmar was detained by Indian authorities after being found with two empty cartridges, including one from an AK-47 rifle, at Lengpui Airport near Aizawl in Mizoram state.

The individual, identified as Simon Clément, had reportedly crossed into Myanmar without authorization before returning to India, where he was arrested on 5 March, according to reports from the Northeast (NE) Daily and the Hindustan Times on 8 March.

"I can't imagine why he carried the empty cartridges. It's unlikely he didn't know they couldn't be taken on a plane. And there are places where foreigners are restricted even within Mizoram. Now that he's entered Myanmar, it's like he's guilty," a Myanmar national in Mizoram told Mizzima.

He added that some foreign journalists illegally travel to Chin State, where clashes are ongoing, through Mizoram, prompting Indian authorities to tighten security checks at border crossings and Lengpui Airport.

Clément has been charged under Section 14 of the Foreigners' Act, 1946, and Section 25 (1-B) of the Arms Act, 1959, which could result in a prison sentence of two

to five years if convicted. Additionally, he faces charges under India's Foreigners Act for his unauthorized entry into Myanmar.

According to NE Daily, Clément was initially detained at Side Ram Police Station in Aizawl District and appeared in court on 8 March. The following day, an Aizawl district court ordered his judicial custody, leading to his transfer to the central jail in Aizawl.

India's central government has designated states such as Mizoram as Protected and Restricted Areas, requiring even Indian citizens to obtain an Inner Line Permit for entry.

Reports indicate that Clément had entered Myanmar without proper travel documents. Police confirmed his profession as a photojournalist.

According to Indian media, the Journalism Fund Europe describes Clément as a Belgian freelance photographer who captures the experiences of people impacted by conflicts and wars worldwide. His work consists of both photography and written reports covering conflicts in the Middle East, Mexico, and other regions.

## MYANMAR JUNTA DROPS BOMBS FROM POWERED PARACHUTES ON VILLAGES IN MANDALAY REGION, DAMAGING HOMES

An unexploded bomb dropped by powered parachute. Photo: Supplied

**A**t 1:45 am on 11 March, junta troops carried out an aerial attack using powered parachutes, dropping bombs on villages in Taungtha Township, Mandalay Region. The attack damaged six houses but resulted in no casualties, according to local residents.

The junta troops dropped eight bombs on Villages No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, and No. 5 in Zarat Gyi Village Tract without any prior fighting in the area.

"No one was hurt because the loud sound of the powered parachutes alerted residents, prompting them to flee or take cover in bomb shelters," said a local villager.

Following the attack, the Public Action Committee (Taungtha) urged residents to dig bomb shelters

systematically and stay vigilant. The group advised people to immediately seek shelter upon hearing the sound of aircraft, as airstrikes in the township remain ongoing.

"Some houses were damaged, but fortunately, no injuries were reported. We urge people to remain cautious, dig proper bomb shelters, and use them whenever they hear aircraft sounds," the committee stated regarding the Zarat Gyi Village Tract attack.

An earlier airstrike on 9 March hit a community hall at the Aye Kyin Kyin village pagoda compound in Taungtha Township, causing severe damage. The attack resulted in the death of a woman and left a man critically injured, according to the Public Action Committee (Taungtha).



Photo: Supplied

## MIZORAM CHIEF MINISTER RAISES CONCERNS OVER IMPACT OF INDIA-MYANMAR FREE MOVEMENT REGIME

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma has voiced concerns over the adverse effects of the India-Myanmar Free Movement Regime (FMR), citing security issues such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and cross-border escapes following crimes.

During the 9th session of the Mizoram State Assembly on 11 March, he responded to an opposition MP's query about the government's stance on the FMR.

The Chief Minister stated, "The freedom of movement has had negative consequences. Cases involving drugs and weapons have been discovered as well, and if a murder occurs here, people can flee to Myanmar. This has become unacceptable to the people. The central government has abolished the FMR and restricted entry and exit due to necessity."

He stated that while Myanmar refugees should be given shelter, unrestricted border crossings have led to serious criminal activities, making the central government's restrictions necessary.

The FMR was established following India's independence to allow ethnic communities residing along the border to move freely between the two nations. However, the central government has now revised the policy, implementing a regulated system where border passes, issued by the Assam Rifles, are required from 1 January 2025. Movement will also be limited to a 10-kilometer radius from the state's border.

A Myanmar citizen in Mizoram told Mizzima, "As the Chief Minister said, drug seizures are increasing,

and the majority of the suspects are from Myanmar, so the restrictions on movement are hurting us."

A Myanmar citizen in Mizoram acknowledged that rising drug seizures, often involving Myanmar nationals, have contributed to the restrictions. He expressed concerns that a few individuals engaging in illegal activities have led to broader negative perceptions and hardships for others.

The Chief Minister also informed the Assembly that over 2,000 foreigners had entered Mizoram between June and December 2024. Some reportedly crossed into Chin State for training purposes, while a US ambassador made a day trip without notifying the state government.

He clarified that while the state government does not seek to reinstate the Protected Area Permit (PAP) initially imposed in 1958, it does not oppose its re-implementation. The PAP requires non-Indian foreigners to obtain prior permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs to visit Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland, aiming to regulate foreign entry into sensitive border areas.

Additionally, Indian media reported that on 5 March, a Belgian journalist was detained at Mizoram's Lengpui Airport for illegally entering Myanmar via India. He was found in possession of two empty cartridges and charged under the Indian Foreigner's Act.



Burying the dead following the shootings.  
Photo: AFP

## MNDAA ACCEPTS COMPENSATION REQUESTS FOR PROTESTERS KILLED IN MYANMAR GOLD MINING CLASH

Colonel Naw Bu, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) Information officer, stated that the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) Mong Koe District Office has accepted requests from the families of those killed by MNDAA troops during protests against gold mining in Mong Si village, Kutkai Township, northern Shan State.

"The details must be submitted to higher authorities for approval. While the requests have been accepted at the Mong Koe District level, the public's demands can only be fulfilled with authorization from senior officials," said Colonel Naw Bu.

On 5 March, a violent confrontation erupted in Mong Si village, where many Kachin ethnic groups reside. The clash occurred between local residents opposing gold mining at the source of the Nam Lam River and MNDAA troops providing security for mining operations. Reports indicate that six civilians were killed, and six others injured in the shootout.

In response, on 6 March, locals called for compensation for the victims, an end to violence against civilians, and a complete halt to gold mining in the area. They also demanded that MNDAA troops responsible for the killings publicly admit their actions, that no group should harm residents, and that all decisions affecting the community be made with local consultation.

Regarding the MNDAA's response to these demands, Colonel Naw Bu said, "The compensation amount must be approved by higher authorities.

However, they have agreed to stop gold mining activities."

Some residents confirmed that the MNDAA has accepted the community's primary demands, though uncertainty remains regarding accountability for those killed.

"The most important thing for us is that the MNDAA has promised no other group will mine gold here," said a local from Kutkai Township.

Gold mining at the Nam Lam River water source has long been a contentious issue. Previous attempts were made by the KIA in 1998 and 2023, and by the Myanmar military and Kachin Defence Army (KDA) in 2009, but each was successfully resisted by locals.

Following MNDAA's control of Mong Si during Operation 1027, the group attempted gold mining in the area in 2024. While the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) had previously controlled Mong Si during the operation, the MNDAA now holds control over Tamoenye and Mong Si, while the KIA governs Nam Phek Ka.

Residents in northern Shan State emphasize that the MNDAA must genuinely address their concerns and curb excessive use of force by its troops. Additionally, territorial disputes among the KIA, TNLA, and MNDAA remain unresolved in Kutkai Township.



## MYANMAR JUNTA TO RESUME ISSUING OVERSEAS WORKER IDENTIFICATION CARDS, IMPOSES STRICTER SCRUTINY

**M**yanmar's junta announced on 11 March that it will resume issuing Overseas Worker Identification Cards (OWIC) on 20 March, following a suspension that began in February.

OWIC cards will be reissued to individuals who have received job approvals from the junta's Ministry of Labor in chronological order, as well as to those traveling abroad independently.

The junta initially halted OWIC issuance on 31 January without prior notice, citing reasons such as verifying the list of overseas workers, repairing card machine software, consolidating OWIC card centres, and establishing a unified location for contract signings between employers and workers.

Despite resuming OWIC issuance, the junta has tightened scrutiny, particularly for those eligible for military service.

"They said we can reapply now since the suspension was temporary, but the screening process will be stricter. They will carefully check the military service list and only approve those who are not on it," said an overseas employment agency owner.

From the first week of February, men aged 18 to 35 who fall within the mandatory military service bracket, have been barred from obtaining OWIC cards and working abroad, according to employment agencies.

The junta's statement also outlined new travel procedures for those holding OWIC cards and PJ (Passport for Job) passports. Travelers must apply for permission via [migrantdeparture@gmail.com](mailto:migrantdeparture@gmail.com) at least five days before departure.

The list of approved travellers will be published on the Safe Migration Telegram channel starting 17 March and forwarded to relevant airports. Even those with valid OWIC cards and PJ passports will not be allowed to leave the country without Ministry of Labor approval.

These restrictions have caused significant difficulties for overseas job seekers and employment agencies.

The military service law, enacted on 23 January 2025, nearly a year after its approval by junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on 10 February, 2024, mandates registration for all eligible individuals. The law prohibits travel abroad without permission, requiring those who pass medical examinations to remain available for conscription.

The mandatory service period is set at two years but can be extended to five years in a state of emergency. The age requirement for service is 18-35 years for men and 18-27 years for women, while professionals such as doctors and engineers may be conscripted up to 45 years for men and 35 years for women.



Photo: Antonio Graceffo

## ON THE DAY OF PRAYER FOR BURMA, REMEMBER: IDPS ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE

### ANTONIO GRACEFFO

**M**arch 9 marked the annual Day of Prayer for Burma, an initiative founded by David Eubank, the head of Free Burma Rangers (FBR). The day serves as a moment to reflect on the ongoing suffering of the Burmese people, especially those facing the ravages of war. As David Eubank has shared, "We need God's help to change the hearts of the dictators and help freedom, justice, and reconciliation come to everyone in Burma."

Rangers and friends of FBR were invited to write their own prayers or testimonies for the annual Day of Prayer magazine. In this spirit of reflection, I am reminded of those most vulnerable among us—the internally displaced persons (IDPs)—who are often overlooked in the discussion about Burma's humanitarian crisis.

While the world focuses on refugees, it's critical to remember that IDPs are not refugees. Unlike refugees, who benefit from international protection and aid, IDPs are left without support, their safety and well-being at the mercy of the ongoing conflict. The following is a reflection on their plight and why they must not be forgotten.

When an airstrike hits your village, fleeing is a rational choice. But what happens when the place you flee to is bombed too?

Maria, a Catholic Karenni mother of four, shared her story: "We ran to the jungle first, but there were always mortars and airstrikes." Eventually, she and her family reached Daw Noe Ku IDP camp, now home to over 5,000 people. The camp has been targeted too—its Catholic church, school, and college have all been destroyed. Unlike U.N.-refugee camps, IDP camps in Burma receive minimal outside support and lack U.N. protection. The Burma army is free to bomb them, leaving their security precarious.

Peter, who fled to the camp with his wife and infant son after the coup, said, "Last night, planes flew over, so

everyone slept in the riverbed." For the IDPs, the sound of an airplane always signals danger. Makeshift bomb shelters—simple holes in the ground—are scattered around bamboo huts. Maria wishes to return to her village but knows it's too dangerous. "The situation in the camp isn't stable either. We always have to be alert for airstrikes," she said.

Life in the camp is far from easy. Oo-Re, a section head, explained, "TBBC (Thai Burma Border Consortium) provides 14 kilos of rice per person per month." This aligns with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) general guidelines for subsistence-level food assistance in emergency settings. To help residents ration their supplies, Oo-Re said they distribute the rice twice a month, giving 7 kilos each time.

There is also a secondary food distribution when extra supplies are available, explained Oo-Re. "This may include Indian beans, salt, and sometimes cooking oil or Mama noodles," he said. However, he added, "but not every month. Sometimes canned fish, but almost no meat." While a diet of rice can sustain life, it lacks sufficient nutrition. There are no paying jobs in the camp, leaving residents unable to afford extras like eggs or other supplements.

"Some families have relatives in Thailand who can send money," Oo-Re explained, "but others have no one, so they get nothing." For those receiving financial support from Thailand, the arrangement often comes at a significant cost—families are split apart, with fathers or older sons working illegally as construction or farm laborers. These jobs, which pay 300 baht per day (around \$9 USD) for only a few days of work each month, and for some, come with constant risks of arrest and deportation.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a significant issue among internally displaced persons (IDPs). "Because of the war, we have so many people who were killed or wounded, losing a leg... We get trauma from that," explained Oo-Re. "We cannot forget what we see here and what made us flee."

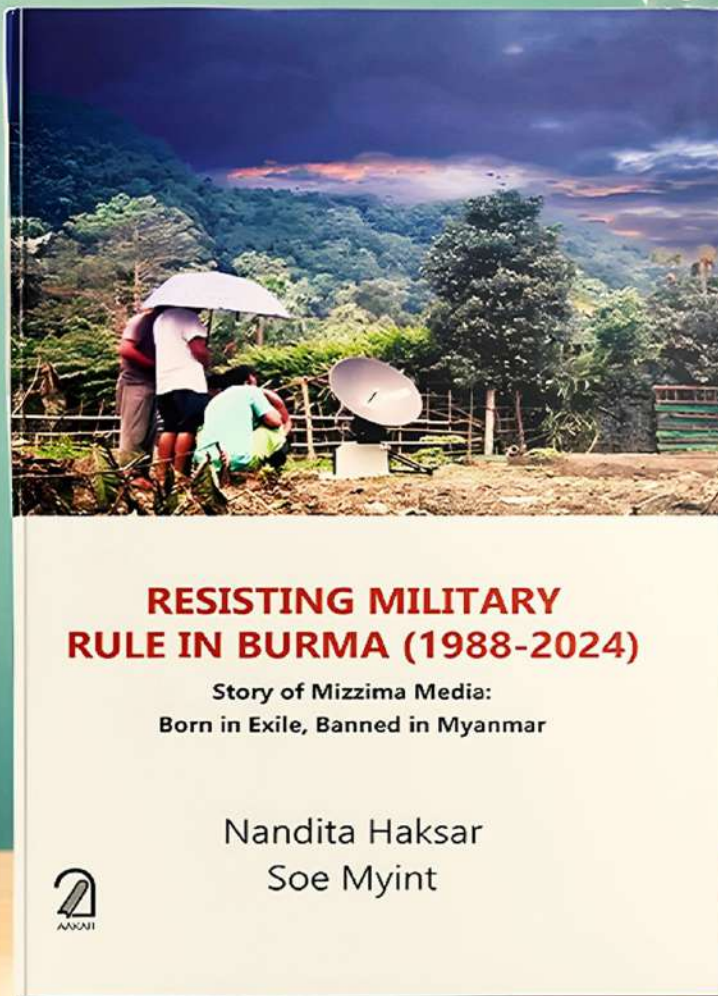
On the Day of Prayer for Burma, I urge everyone to pray for the IDPs. While international media often highlights the refugee crisis, few people truly understand what it means to be an IDP. They are among the most vulnerable of all displaced populations, lacking support and protection from any organization. Pray that the United Nations acts immediately to provide material aid, including food, medicine, and physical security, to these forgotten individuals. IDPs represent a neglected and dire humanitarian crisis that urgently demands attention.

*Antonio Graceffo is a journalist and China analyst whose career involves decades living in various Asian countries.*

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

# STORY OF MIZZIMA MEDIA: BORN IN EXILE, BANNED IN MYANMAR

by *Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint*



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Derek Mitchell, left, when he was US ambassador, with Aung San Suu Kyi. Photo: AFP

## THE USUAL SUSPECTS

**DEREK MITCHELL**

“There is absolutely something different about Myanmar,” says Derek Mitchell, speaking to the Insight Myanmar Podcast. “When I was ambassador, and people would come visit, they always said it was the most fascinating place they’d ever been in their lives. I think everybody who does work on Myanmar has a story about what it was that connected them, that when you when it touches you—even diplomats—they always look back on the Burma assignment as being somehow special. There’s something about the place and about the issue that sticks with people. So when it goes through its unfortunate cycles of tragedy, I always say it breaks the heart of every person that touches it, because the country deserves so much better.”

Derek Mitchell’s engagement with Myanmar began unexpectedly in the early 1990s. It wasn’t through deliberate career planning but rather a serendipitous encounter: unemployed at the time, he attended a human rights event featuring Aung San Suu Kyi, who had just received an award. Inspired, he picked up a copy of her book, *Freedom from Fear*, that evening and

read it cover to cover. He never thought that Burma would be relevant to his career; however, years later, he became very involved with the country.

His first visit there occurred in 1995, after Aung San Suu Kyi’s release from house arrest. Meeting her in person profoundly impacted him. At the time, Myanmar was under strict military rule, defined by political repression and ethnic conflict. And even though Mitchell’s career went in a different direction at that time, Myanmar remained a place of deep personal significance. He followed developments, read diplomatic cables, and maintained an interest in the country’s slow and complicated transformation.

His role in shaping U.S. policy towards Myanmar began when he was appointed as the first Special Representative to the country in 2011, during a pivotal moment when U.S. policy towards Myanmar was shifting. Since 1988, sanctions had been the dominant tool used by the United States to pressure the military regime, seen as both a punishment and a moral stance against repression. However, by the late 2000s,



a reassessment began. The Obama administration sought a more flexible approach, testing whether engagement could drive reform. Mitchell was tasked with determining whether Myanmar's new government, led by President Thein Sein, was genuinely committed to reform, or merely a tactical move to ease international pressure.

Upon his arrival in the country, Mitchell saw that the Thein Sein administration exhibited a different tone from past, military-led governments. There were gestures of openness—political prisoners were being released, civil society restrictions were easing, economic and political modernization were underway, discussions on peace processes with ethnic groups were underway, and overtures were being made to Aung San Suu Kyi. However, the military administration at that time, controlled by Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, still exhibited a rigid, traditional, military mindset and showed no interest in the Thein Sein government's reforms. They continued to operate autonomously, particularly in ethnic conflict zones, where offensives continued despite government-led peace initiatives. However, in spite of this contrast to past and present military administrations, skepticism remained about Thein Sein's government. "There was a lot of risk in those days," he says. "We weren't certain of anything and were certainly aware that they could be playing games with us."

Mitchell played a key role in developing a U. S. "action-for-action" policy, wherein the U.S. would incrementally ease sanctions as Myanmar demonstrated tangible reforms. A turning point came when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited in 2011, signaling a new phase in engagement. "Diplomacy is not just being reactive, but being forward-leaning and trying to help shape outcomes you're looking to achieve," Mitchell points out. This visit, accompanied by the release of hundreds of political prisoners and initial ceasefire efforts, set the stage for stronger diplomatic relations. Then in 2012, Mitchell was appointed as the country's first Ambassador to Myanmar after more than two decades.

However, the process of engagement was not a smooth one because within Myanmar, deep divisions persisted between the civilian government, the military, and ethnic nationalities, with those underlying tensions bubbling just under the surface. Moreover, when Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) transitioned from an opposition party to a participant in government, new issues arose: although by that time a symbol of freedom against tyranny, Aung San

Suu Kyi was often resistant to outside advice and displayed a firm, at times inflexible, political approach. Famously, she downplayed her icon status, portraying herself as just another politician, and this concerned Mitchell because he felt it could indicate a lack of understanding about the strong leadership role she needed to play to unite the country across its many divisions, transcend party politics and help wrestle the country out from under the military's influence. More concerning for him still, her political instincts did not always align with democratic pluralism. She focused primarily on consolidating her party's power rather than building inclusive institutions that could bridge Myanmar's ethnic and political divides. "You have to be able to get along with people you don't agree with," he says. "That's the art of politics; you find a way."

The 2015 elections were a critical moment. The NLD won by a landslide, and the peaceful transfer of power was a milestone in Myanmar's democratic transition. However, the 2008 Constitution enabled the military to retain significant control, guaranteeing them 25% of parliamentary seats and control over key ministries. While many hoped that Suu Kyi's leadership would usher in a new era of inclusive governance, ethnic minorities remained wary. Her administration prioritized national unity, but many in the country's ethnic communities hoped for a more federalist approach.

As Ambassador, Mitchell advocated for active engagement on the part of the US; he felt this was a more effective means of fostering sustainable reform. While sanctions carried a moral weight and signaled opposition to the military regime's actions, Mitchell believed they were insufficient in achieving long-term change on their own. As he put it, "We have to recognize that Myanmar is a country, not a cause," emphasizing the need for pragmatic, sustained engagement rather than symbolic gestures. His experience in the 1990s had shown him that isolation did not necessarily lead to democratic progress and instead risked ceding influence to other actors, like China. He believed that engagement, coupled with a measured easing of sanctions, could allow reform-minded figures in Myanmar's government to gain leverage within their own system and continue working toward democratic progress.

The wisdom of this approach to sanctions was not universally accepted within the Obama administration; some wanted sanctions lifted more quickly. Aung San Suu Kyi's shifting positions also played a key role in the sanctions discussion—she initially supported them as

a means of pressuring the military, but later advocated for their removal to encourage economic growth and demonstrate the benefits of democratic governance. Mitchell's approach sought to find a balance between her divergent perspectives, so any easing of sanctions would not undermine efforts to hold the military accountable while also supporting the country's democratic transition and economic transformation. This was especially relevant following the NLD's 2015 election. Mitchell points out that if Myanmar had remained under a "do not invest" sign, it could serve to undermine public confidence in democratic rule.

Tragically, the Rohingya crisis marked a significant turning point in both the country's modern history and U.S. relations. It shattered remaining optimism about Myanmar's path forward, exposing the fragility of reforms and the military's enduring grip on power. Mitchell, who had repeatedly visited Rakhine State during his tenure, had long warned of an escalation in the decades-long tensions there. The Rohingya were marginalized and denied citizenship, and he saw their status as uniquely vulnerable. "I realized that was a ticking time bomb, and that it could go off at any time," he recalls. Mitchell relays how he had constantly urged both Myanmar's civilian leadership and the international community to take preventative action. However, he notes that these warnings were met with political inertia and bureaucratic caution. Then, after attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) in 2017, the military's brutal response quickly mushroomed into what was later classified as genocide.

Looking back, Mitchell sees the Rohingya crisis as not just an ethnic conflict, but a microcosm of Myanmar's broader struggles with nationalism, identity, and the role of diplomacy in a state where the military still retained ultimate control, and where deep-seated ethnic tensions could be weaponized for political ends. He reflects that the 2021 coup reveals in retrospect how fragile Myanmar's democratic transition really was, noting that while reforms had created a veneer of civilian governance, the military's grip on power had never truly been loosened. Mitchell acknowledges that, despite international engagement and support for democratization, Myanmar's political transformation was always vulnerable to reversal. The institutions that were meant to ensure democratic governance had been systematically weakened or co-opted, leaving civilian leaders with limited real authority. "We thought we had more time," he says sadly. "We thought we were helping build something sustainable, but the foundations were weaker than we hoped." While he still holds to the basic tenant that engagement can encourage reforms, he

points out that on their own, they are unable to fully dismantle the fundamental power structures that upheld military dominance.

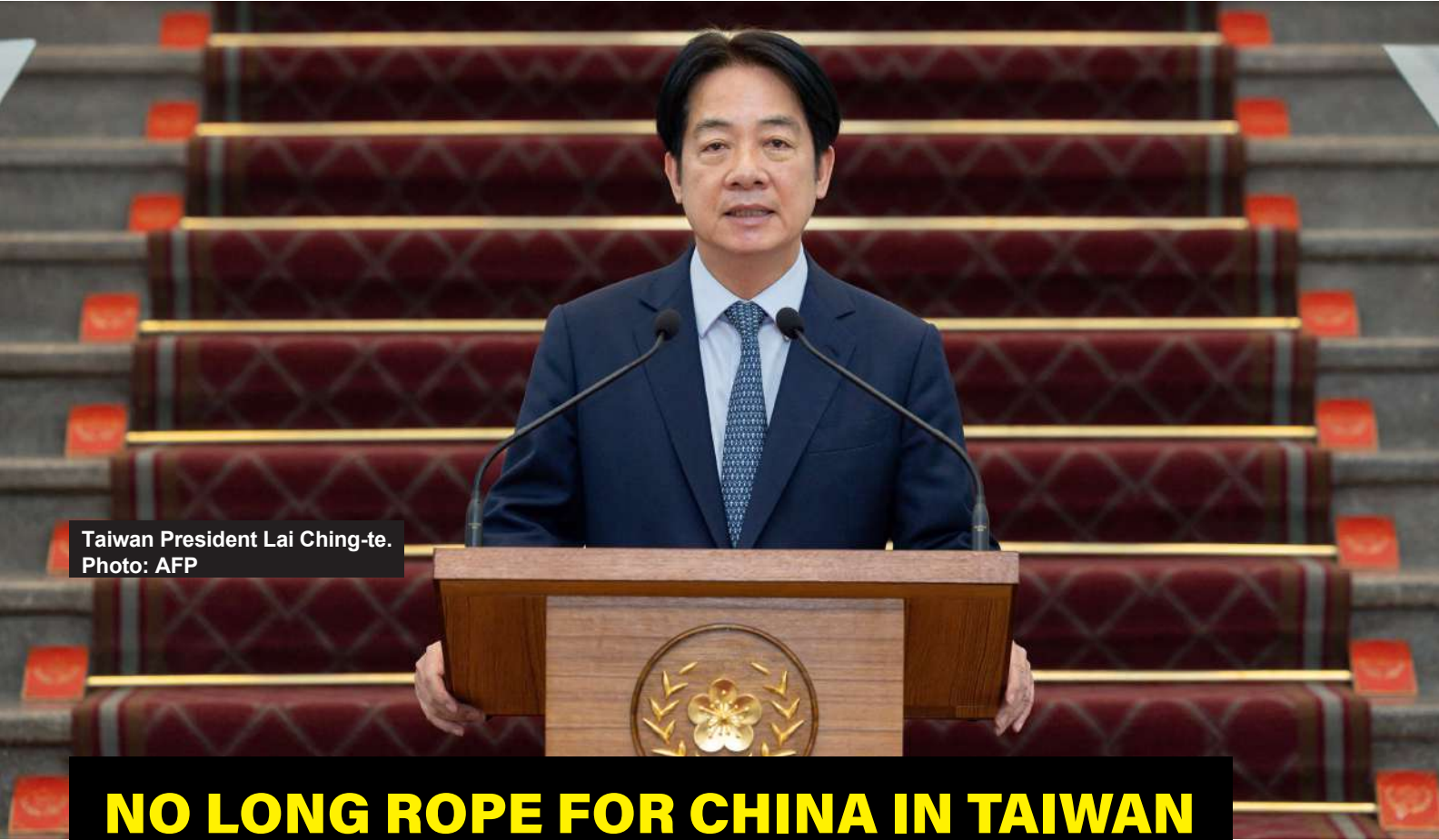
Regarding post-coup Myanmar, Mitchell observes that the country has entered an era of profound instability and resistance, far different from the reform era he worked within. He notes how the military takeover has galvanized an unprecedented level of public defiance, with a broad coalition of actors—including young activists, ethnic armed groups, and members of the ousted government—unified against military rule. Unlike past uprisings, the current resistance is more decentralized, grassroots and determined, leveraging new tactics and technology. At the same time, he warns that without a coherent leadership and strategy, the opposition risks fragmentation, which could prolong the crisis. He believes that the military's actions have fundamentally changed Myanmar's political landscape, making a return to the previous balance of power unlikely.

"External action is never going to make the determining difference inside a country, certainly in a situation like this," he says, reflecting on how the international community can play a supporting role in the country's continuing democratic aspirations. "But I very much believe that much more pressure from the outside is necessary and has been necessary, and there has not been enough! I mean, from day one, we needed to shut down their weapons; their now it's their fuel, their money, their families, access to international society, all of that. There should be absolute, airtight pressure, not just from the United States, but from the frontline states to this regime, to say, 'this is unacceptable.'"

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Taiwan President Lai Ching-te.  
Photo: AFP

## NO LONG ROPE FOR CHINA IN TAIWAN

**SUN LEE**

**B**eijing has no reason to feel overjoyed that the United States is going to offer to China a long rope in Taiwan, now that with Donald Trump as President the policies of Washington towards Ukraine have undergone a dramatic change. If anything, the U.S. policies towards China in the opening weeks of the Donald Trump administration have been more aggressive than what they were in the days of Joe Biden in the White House.

The imposition of 10 percent tariff on all Chinese imports and the promise to enhance this tariff soon is the most talked-about instance of this tougher stance.

Since the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan during the tenure of Joe Biden as President, a cornerstone of the policies of Washington has been to scale down the involvement of the American military in other corners of the globe to meet the threat from China squarely. Analysts believe that now Donald Trump wants the European nations to bear a greater share of the burden of defending Ukraine against Russian aggression so that the resources of the United States can be deployed fully to prevent a Chinese takeover of Taiwan.

Executive Director of the Global Taiwan Institute in Washington Russell Hsiao does not think that Beijing will act in haste just because of the shift in policy of the Trump administration on the Ukraine conflict. "I don't think (President of China) Xi Jinping will be so brash as to roll the iron die on the conclusion that just because Trump acted in a certain way concerning Ukraine he would do the same over Taiwan," he said in an Associated Press report.

China wants to occupy the self-governing island of Taiwan by force and has been carrying out in the recent period brazen military exercises close to the shores of the island in an attempt to threaten Taipei into submission. Under an American agreement, the U.S. has an obligation to supply Taiwan with sufficient hardware and technology to fend off invasion from the mainland.

After a meeting with NATO allies in Brussels in February, U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth emphasized that if the U.S. indeed pulled back support from Ukraine it would be a planned move to concentrate its efforts in the Asia-Pacific region and leave European defence primarily to Europeans. "The deterrent effect

in the Pacific is one that really can only be led by the United States," Hegseth pointed out.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio too has stressed in a joint statement with Japan and South Korea after a meeting in Munich that the "importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is an indispensable element of security and prosperity for the international community."

Both Pete Hegseth and Marco Rubio, key policy makers in the U.S. administration, are China hawks. Rubio had twice been sanctioned by China earlier for his anti-Chinese Communist Party views.

Soon after his swearing in, Rubio had met the Foreign Ministers of Australia, Japan and India; the three other members of the Quadrilateral Alliance, the fourth being the U.S. It was a signal to Beijing that he would continue to work with the same alliance that Biden had formed to blunt the expanding influence and aggression of China in the Indo-Pacific.

To the chagrin of Beijing, in a revised fact sheet on Taiwan – United States relations published by the U.S. State Department in February, under the Donald Trump administration the earlier opposition of the U.S. to the independence of Taiwan has been withdrawn. The earlier version of the fact sheet stated that the U.S. opposed "any unilateral changes in the status quo from either side." It also said: "We do not support Taiwan independence, and we expect cross-Strait differences to be revised by peaceful means." The updated version of the fact sheet published on February 13 said: "We oppose any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side. We expect cross-Strait differences to be resolved by peaceful means, free from coercion, in a manner acceptable to people on both sides of the Strait." The reference to the U.S. not supporting the independence of Taiwan has been removed from the updated fact sheet.

Further, on the stand of the U.S. on the role of Taiwan in the international community, the previous fact sheet said Washington "will continue to support Taiwan's membership in international organizations where statehood is not a requirement," while the latest version of the fact sheet says that the U.S. "will continue to support Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations, including membership where applicable." The exception made in cases where

statehood is a precondition has been omitted from the latest fact sheet. "Consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act, the United States makes available defence articles and services as necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defence capability," the fact sheet also says.

Speaking at her Senate confirmation hearing, nominee of Trump as Ambassador to the United Nations Elise Stefanik has pledged the maximum meaningful participation of Taiwan in international organizations and within the U.N. system. Stefanik, a Republican Representative since 2015, is very critical of China.

Senior defence analyst with Australian Strategic Policy Institute Euan Graham has noted that it would be simplistic to assume that Trump would abandon Taiwan to shore up relations with China. "It is more likely that the U.S. administration is attempting to get Ukraine out of the way by making it a European problem, in order to face China from a relatively stronger position," he has said.

The way Trump is facing the flak for suspending military assistance to Ukraine, his predecessor Joe Biden too had been roundly criticized for having withdrawn U.S. troops from Afghanistan. But the Biden administration had listed refocusing the national security priorities of the United States to shore up the core strengths of America to meet the strategic competition with China as one of the reasons for the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

According to analysts, the American preoccupation of two decades in Afghanistan and the Iraq war had helped China to expand its geopolitical influence in different corners of the world through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and to set up unchallenged military bases in the South China Sea. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has brought to an end the good times for Beijing which is now facing the military challenge in the South China Sea and the BRI too is running into difficulties. With the U.S. scaling down its involvement in Ukraine, China may find it all the more difficult in Taiwan.

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



Women protesters in Dhaka. Photo: AFP

## BANGLADESHI WOMEN ALARMED BY EMBOLDENED ISLAMISTS

**A**rrested for sexually harassing a Bangladeshi university student, Asif Sardar Arnab was soon released -- greeted by a cheering crowd who presented him with flower garlands and a Koran.

His alleged victim was a student who enthusiastically supported the youth-led uprising that overthrew the Muslim-majority nation's autocratic government last year.

That young woman, after receiving a torrent of violent threats from religious hardliners emboldened by the political upheaval, now wonders whether she made the right choice.

"A perpetrator was freed because of a mob," she said in a social media post.

"You can't imagine the number of rape and death threats I've received," added the woman, who cannot be identified due to Bangladeshi laws designed to protect sexual harassment complainants from retribution.

"We made a mistake by joining the movement. So many people sacrificed their lives in vain."

Ex-premier Sheikh Hasina, ousted in last August's revolution, took a tough stance against Islamist movements during her 15-year tenure.

Her government was blamed for gruesome human rights abuses and for many, her departure heralded change.

Since her exit, the hardline religiously fuelled activism that Hasina's government had driven underground has resurfaced.

Much of it is directed at Bangladeshi women, accused of failing to act with sufficient modesty.

Arnab, who works at the library of the prestigious Dhaka University, was accused of accosting a student on campus, saying that her choice of attire did not sufficiently cover her breasts.

The student complained, and Arnab was arrested.

Supporters of Arnab who believed he had acted in appropriate deference to his religious convictions surrounded the police station and demanded his release.

They yielded when a court quickly bailed Arnab -- something the female student attributed to mob pressure.

A spokesman for Dhaka's police force, Md Talebur Rahman, told AFP that Arnab was still under investigation, and also acknowledged the menacing behaviour his victim had faced.

"She can lodge a complaint against those who have been threatening her," Rahman added.

### 'A crisis'

It is far from an isolated incident.

Several women's football matches were cancelled this year after pitch invasions by Islamists angry at women's participation in sport.

Two women were briefly taken into protective custody by police this month, after an altercation that began when they were harassed for publicly smoking cigarettes by a crowd of men on their way to pray at a mosque.

Islamist groups have also demanded organisers of religious commemorations and other public events remove women from the line-up.

Dhaka University student Jannatul Promi, 23, said that the rising incidences of harassment had left young women feeling unsafe.

"We are going through a crisis," she said. "The other day, I was waiting for the metro when a man approached me and asked if I should be outside without a veil. As soon as I responded, more people joined him against me."

Fellow student Nishat Tanjim Nera, 24, said the authorities had failed in their duty.

"Harassment incidents are happening repeatedly, but there is no redress from the government," she said.

### 'Complete denial'

Several recent cases of sexual violence have captured public attention.

An eight-year-old girl died Thursday from wounds she sustained during a rape days earlier -- a case that prompted days of protests and vigils by women in Dhaka and elsewhere.

Such is the level of public anger that police have begun transporting rape suspects to court in the middle of the night, fearful of attacks.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, who leads the interim government which replaced Hasina, condemned the "horrific acts of violence" against women.

"This is deeply concerning and completely at odds with our dream of building a new Bangladesh," he said.

Yunus's administration has struggled to restore law and order, with many police officers refusing to return to work and the army brought in to help.

It has since last month also directed scant police resources to a sweeping crackdown, dubbed Operation Devil Hunt, against gangs allegedly connected to Hasina and working to foment unrest.

Maleka Banu, of the feminist campaign group Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, said those resources would have been better spent on trying to curb sexual violence.

"What good is it for the government to simply express concern? We expected action," she said.

"After Sheikh Hasina's fall, a series of violent incidents followed. The government was in complete denial... Now, they claim the fallen dictator is behind every crime."

AFP



US President Donald Trump.  
Photo: AFP

# TRUMP FREEZES US-FUNDED MEDIA OUTLETS INCLUDING VOICE OF AMERICA

President Donald Trump's administration on 15 March put journalists at Voice of America and other US-funded broadcasters on leave, abruptly freezing decades-old outlets long seen as critical to countering Russian and Chinese information offensives.

Hundreds of staffers at VOA, Radio Free Asia, Radio Free Europe and other outlets received a weekend email saying they will be barred from their offices and should surrender press passes and office-issued equipment.

Trump, who has already eviscerated the US global aid agency and the Education Department, on Friday issued an executive order listing the US Agency for Global Media as among "elements of the federal bureaucracy that the president has determined are unnecessary."

Kari Lake, a firebrand Trump supporter put in charge of the media agency after she lost a US Senate bid, said in an email to the outlets that federal grant money "no longer effectuates agency priorities."

The White House said the cuts would ensure "taxpayers are no longer on the hook for radical propaganda," marking a dramatic tone shift towards the networks established to extend US influence overseas.

White House press official Harrison Fields wrote "goodbye" on X in 20 languages, a jab at the outlets' multilingual coverage.

VOA director Michael Abramowitz said he was among 1,300 staffers placed on leave Saturday.

"VOA needs thoughtful reform, and we have made progress in that regard. But today's action will leave Voice of America unable to carry out its vital mission," he said on Facebook, noting that its coverage -- in 48 languages -- reaches 360 million people each week.

The head of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which started broadcasting into the Soviet bloc during the Cold War, called the cancellation of funding "a massive gift to America's enemies."

"The Iranian ayatollahs, Chinese communist leaders, and autocrats in Moscow and Minsk would celebrate the demise of RFE/RL after 75 years," its president, Stephen Capus, said in a statement.

### Uncensored reporting

US-funded media have reoriented themselves since the end of the Cold War, dropping much of the programming geared toward newly democratic Central and Eastern European countries and focusing on Russia and China.

Chinese state-funded media have expanded their reach sharply over the past decade, including by offering free services to outlets in the developing world that would otherwise pay for Western news agencies.

Radio Free Asia, established in 1996, sees its mission as providing uncensored reporting into countries without free media including China, Myanmar, North Korea and Vietnam.

The outlets have an editorial firewall, with a stated guarantee of independence despite government funding.

The policy has angered some around Trump, who has long railed against media and suggested that government-funded outlets should promote his policies.

The move to end US-funded media is likely to meet challenges, much like Trump's other sweeping cuts. Congress, not the president, has the constitutional power of the purse and Radio Free Asia in particular has enjoyed bipartisan support in the past.

### 'Chaos'

Advocacy group Reporters Without Borders condemned the decision, saying it "threatens press freedom worldwide and negates 80 years of American history in supporting the free flow of information."

Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and senior Democratic congresswoman Lois Frankel said in a joint statement that Trump's move would "cause lasting damage to US efforts to counter propaganda around the world."

One VOA employee, who requested anonymity, described Saturday's message as another "perfect example of the chaos and unprepared nature of the process," with VOA staffers presuming that scheduled programming is off but not told so directly.

A Radio Free Asia employee said: "It's not just about losing your income. We have staff and contractors who fear for their safety. We have reporters who work under the radar in authoritarian countries in Asia. We have staff in the US who fear deportation if their work visa is no longer valid."

"Wiping us out with the strike of a pen is just terrible."

AFP





## NAVIGATING THE INNER JOURNEY

“I suppose it just felt like, ‘This is what I’ve been looking for!’” exclaimed Lynne Bousfield, reflecting on her first meditation retreat in Bodhgaya many decades ago, during a discussion on the Insight Myanmar Podcast. “It just made sense to me, that this was something authentic, and something I needed to do.”

Growing up in Australia, Lynne came to the practice of vipassana via a long, winding road of travel adventures across Asia. In 1975, when she was 18 years old and a student at the University of Western Australia, she received a postcard from her brother depicting a golden stupa somewhere in Asia. She did a deep dive at the university library to try and unravel the mystery of where the card had been sent from and what it represented. “I don’t remember the book I landed on, but I read something, and I remember having the thought that if you learn to meditate, everything will be okay.” So she quit university, much to her father’s dismay, and worked a temporary job to save some money, then set off for Jakarta, and from there to Bali, Java, Thailand, and Laos, before eventually landing in Burma with an Australian woman friend.

Her visit to the Golden Land only lasted 10 days, but it strongly impacted her, mainly due to the hospitality and extraordinary generosity that she and her friend experienced. “A Burmese man came up to us, and he said, ‘Please come stay at my house,’” she recalls, in a story that is very reminiscent of something that would happen to Claire Thorp, a past podcast guest, several

decades later. “We had a few experiences already in Southeast Asia, and you would normally shy away from something like that. But there were no hotels, and I found out later, the Burmese didn’t stay in hotels! So we said, ‘Well, let’s do it,’ and he took us over the next three days to what he thought were all the important things to see in Mandalay. It was a very generous and gracious thing for him to do.”

After Burma, she traveled to India, but while visiting Dharamsala, she got sick and ran out of money. And to her dismay, although she had now been traveling for some time, and dabbling in various practices along the way, nothing had yet stirred her like what she felt on seeing her brother’s postcard. “I really didn’t know what meditation was!” she admits. “But each thing I tried, I realized, well, this isn’t it.”

She was running low on money, and thought of going to Japan to teach English ...but she couldn’t afford the ticket. So she ended up traveling overland to another country that had teaching opportunities for foreigners in those days, Iran. Unfortunately, no one believed that she had the credentials because she was so young, but eventually she secured a job as a typist. While in Teheran, staying in a shared apartment, she met a British friend of her housemate who had just come from India, and spoke about a meditation retreat in Bodhgaya led by a teacher named Munindra. That somehow resonated deeply with her, and she headed back to India.

Lynne takes a moment to reflect on her time traveling around Asia in those days, that while it was fun and exhilarating, it also could be dangerous, especially for a young, naive, single, white women, even if they dressed modestly like she did. She recounts several times that she and her friend nearly died; once was due to severe dysentery, likely from a dip in a contaminated pool, being “hunted” in Laos, and a couple of fearful encounters in Iran.

### CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/3/1/episode-318-a-journey-of-inner-navigation>



Photo: AFP

# JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS 27 IN VILLAGE MARKET IN MYANMAR'S MANDALAY REGION

**A**t least 27 people, including six children, were killed when Myanmar's military junta launched an airstrike on a bustling market in Letpanhla Village, Singu Township, Mandalay Region on March 14, according to the Mandalay Region People's Defense Force (MDY-PDF).

"Based on the latest information, 27 people have died, including six children. There are also many severely injured," MDY-PDF spokesperson Osmond said on March 15.

The junta's airstrike occurred around 3 pm when fighter jets dropped two bombs directly on the crowded market stalls along the Mogok-Mandalay road. All casualties were civilians, with more than 30 people wounded, many seriously.

Since the 2021 coup, Myanmar's military junta has relied heavily on airstrikes in areas controlled by resistance forces. Aerial bombardment remains the

regime's most potent weapon against resistance-held territories. Resistance forces and ethnic armed organizations lack anti-aircraft weapons, allowing junta aircraft to operate with impunity.

This marks the second attack on Letpanhla in two weeks. On March 4, another airstrike killed six civilians and wounded several others, according to MDY-PDF statements.

Dr. Soe Thura Zaw, the leader of MDY-PDF, warned on social media that those still supporting the junta are indirectly facilitating war crimes.

Letpanhla was a thriving village even before the coup. The junta has increasingly targeted civilian areas with airstrikes since losing control of Singu Township. Resistance forces completely captured all junta army bases in the township on July 17, 2024.



Super Yay Chan

## MYANMAR KICKBOXER SUPER YAY CHAN'S LOSS SPARKS HEATED DEBATE AMONG FANS

**S**ocial media erupted with passionate reactions following Myanmar's Super Yay Chan's unanimous decision loss to Thailand's Sangarhit at ONE Friday Fights 100. The 140-pound kickboxing battle left many Myanmar fans questioning the judges' verdict despite Super Yay Chan's impressive performance.

"The third round clearly belonged to Super Yay Chan. The Thai fighter was visibly rocked by high kicks and was staggering, though he didn't fall. The referee not counting the knockdown when the opponent (Thai Kickboxer) went down to his knees is questionable," wrote one disappointed Myanmar Facebook user, adding that "Super Yay Chan has nothing to be ashamed of. The margin between victory and defeat was extremely thin."

Another Facebook user praised the Myanmar fighter, "Super Yay Chan deserves tremendous respect. He consistently landed powerful high kicks against a

taller opponent, and that big punch was devastating. The Thai fighter was knocked down twice, and the judges should have scored at least one of those. A unanimous decision seems unfair - it should have been a split decision at most."

However, another Burmese fan defended the result, "I want to ask those who are saying the Thai fighter should have received a count - why should he get counted when he simply slipped? Super Yay Chan's strikes weren't even landing properly, while the Thai fighter's shots connected and knocked Super Yay Chan down. The judges scored it correctly. He (Super Yay Chan) lost, and that's that - what are people still hoping for?"

# 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.