

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

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Analysis & Insight



FAILING

The junta destroys the Myanmar economy

EARTHQUAKE UPDATE

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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

QUAKE TOLL IN MYANMAR MAY HIT 10,000

The scale of the earthquake that struck Myanmar on March 28 is finally sinking in. The official death toll provided by the Myanmar military junta keeps creeping up, with a good chance the total death toll – once fully tallied – could reach 10,000 or more.

The quake left a trail of destruction, with search and rescue efforts progressing slowly. Although the full extent of the damage is still being assessed, early estimates suggest that the earthquake has caused significant loss of life, injuries, and displacement. The situation remains dire, and the “official” death toll has increased as more people are discovered under rubble, especially in more remote and less accessible regions.

The earthquake, with a magnitude of 7.2, hit at a time when Myanmar was already grappling with political instability and challenges to its governance following the 2021 military coup, placing the spotlight squarely on the illegal junta, and specifically on junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

These ongoing political struggles, combined with a fragile infrastructure, have compounded the challenges of responding effectively to the crisis. The worst-case scenario for the death toll could be in the thousands, particularly if major urban centres, such as Yangon or Mandalay, were impacted. The scale of destruction in rural and hard-to-reach areas is difficult to gauge, but it is likely that the numbers will continue to climb.

One of the primary challenges in assessing the full impact of the earthquake is Myanmar’s geographical terrain, which is mountainous and densely forested. These areas often have limited access due to poor road infrastructure, which hampers rescue and recovery efforts. Areas affected by landslides or damaged roads will be particularly hard to reach, preventing relief teams from quickly

providing essential supplies such as food, water, medicine and shelter.

Another significant issue is the already strained healthcare system in Myanmar. The healthcare infrastructure has been weakened due to years of underinvestment, political conflict, and sanctions – including the flight of doctors and nurses in the immediate wake of the 2021 coup. Hospitals, especially in rural areas, may have been damaged or are ill-equipped to deal with the influx of casualties. With healthcare workers already stretched thin due to the ongoing political crisis, providing adequate care for the injured, particularly those with life-threatening injuries, presents a major challenge.

The political climate in Myanmar further complicates the distribution of humanitarian aid. Since the military coup in 2021, aid delivery has been hampered by restrictions and interference from the ruling military junta, as well as insecurity caused by armed resistance groups. International organizations may face bureaucratic obstacles, and in some regions, aid workers could be at risk of violence. Additionally, the military government may prioritize its control over areas hit by the earthquake, potentially restricting aid to certain populations or diverting resources for political gain.

In summary, the death toll from the March 2025 earthquake in Myanmar could be significantly higher as more bodies are uncovered in the rubble and remote areas. The challenges in providing humanitarian aid are numerous, from damaged infrastructure and inadequate healthcare resources to the political instability that impedes effective relief efforts. International organizations and local authorities must navigate these challenges carefully to ensure that aid reaches those who need it most in a timely and efficient manner.

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Cover photo of a worker at Yangon port by AFP





FAILING

THE JUNTA DESTROYS THE MYANMAR ECONOMY

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

The recent dramatic earthquake has put a nail in the coffin that is Myanmar. Just prior to this disaster, our special correspondent and economist took to the road to delve into the country's crumbling economy and its dire prospects.

"We didn't want to leave our homeland, but we had no choice," said Sai Oo, who recently arrived in Thailand from Shan State with his wife and four children. "If we had stayed, my family would have starved. The situation is getting worse and worse."

Since 2021, the State Administration Council (SAC) has been determined to crush the resistance that threatens its hold on power. Beyond the toll measured in lives lost and people wounded, the war has also

devastated the economy of Burma or Myanmar. This is especially ironic, given that most resistance fighters and civilians opposed to the SAC believe the generals are primarily driven by a desire to preserve their power and enrich themselves. Yet their actions have plunged the nation into even deeper poverty. With a GDP per capita of around \$1,200 per year—or roughly \$100 per month—Burma now ranks among the world's poorest countries, with an average income nearly 50% lower than that of Haiti.

STARK FIGURES

According to a recent UNDP report, Myanmar's GDP shrank by 9% between 2020 and 2024, erasing a decade of economic progress. Inflation soared to 25.4%



A worker operating in the Yangon port.
Photo: AFP

in 2024, while the trade deficit widened to 2.2% of GDP. Although trade briefly rebounded in 2022, it declined sharply in 2023 and continued to weaken in 2024. In the second half of FY2023/24 alone, border exports fell by 27% and imports by 50%. At the same time, the currency (The kyat) collapsed from 1,330 per U.S. dollar in 2021 to 4,520 in 2025, making imports unaffordable and driving shortages of basic goods. Poverty has surged, with 77% of households now classified as poor or near-poor—up from 58% in 2017.

In Mawchi, a mining town in Karenni State, entire families work under punishing conditions to extract tin and tungsten—much of it still done by hand. In the dim, dust-filled interior of the mine, shirtless young men push heavy carts deep into the earth along narrow rails. Armed with little more than headlamps and shovels, they navigate tunnels where the heat and humidity intensify the deeper they go. On the way out,

the carts—now loaded with hundreds of kilograms of stone—must be pushed uphill, a task that leaves the boys visibly straining under the weight.

At the surface, women crouch on the ground, smashing rocks with hammers to separate valuable ore from waste. With no childcare available, many bring their babies and toddlers, who play barefoot among the stone piles as their mothers work.

'FORTUNATE' WITH POOR PAY

The pay is as harsh as the labor itself—many work from dawn to dusk for as little as \$6 a day. Yet they consider themselves fortunate; with formal employment all but vanished, even this grueling job is one of the few sources of employment.



There is a crisis of employment in Myanmar, with some young people out of work, and businesses also having problems finding the right staff. Photo: AFP

While jobs are increasingly scarce across Myanmar, a surprising trend has emerged in urban centers like Yangon, where some companies report labor shortages. By April 2024, 28% of businesses said they had lost workers to migration—a reflection of a growing trend among Myanmar citizens fleeing not just economic collapse, but also spiraling inflation, hunger, war, and the threat of military conscription.

FLEEING FOR WORK

Migration has become a key survival strategy. According to a joint World Bank-ILO survey, migrant workers earn two to three times more in Thailand and Malaysia, and over ten times more in Japan and South Korea. Remittances now serve as the primary income source for 7.5% of households. However, much of this migration occurs through informal and dangerous routes due to conflict and recruitment pressures. Even

once abroad, families remain vulnerable. The SAC and armed groups have begun taxing remittances, further squeezing the earnings of migrant workers.

Sai Nyunt, a 35-year-old Shan man from Senwi in northern Shan State, has worked in Thailand's construction industry for seven years. "I lived in Chiang Mai for a year, then moved to Bangkok, where I now earn 30,000 baht a month," he said. While he used to send half his salary home each month, that's no longer possible. In August 2024, he sent 15,000 baht to his family—only to have 7,000 baht seized by an armed group. "It's just not fair," he said. "If a family refuses to comply, they aren't allowed to stay in the group's-controlled area."

As Myanmar's formal economy collapses, its illicit economy has rapidly expanded. The country is now the world's largest producer of opium and heroin, a



major methamphetamine manufacturer, and a hub for unregulated jade mining, illegal gambling, trafficking, and scam operations. Scam centers alone have fueled a regional crime wave, contributing to an estimated \$39 billion in stolen funds. In response to its failure to address money laundering and terrorist financing, Myanmar was blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force, further deepening its economic isolation.

CRIME RISES

Sai Seng Khur, a 35-year-old Shan man from Laikha Township, described how these dynamics are playing out in his hometown, where crime, drug production, and human trafficking have surged. He explained that the 758 Battalion of the Shan Border Guard Force (BGF) allowed a Chinese-run scam call center to set up operations in its territory—allegedly under the protection of both the BGF and the SAC. “Since the gang arrived, the price of goods has doubled,” he said. Many young people have abandoned farming jobs to work for the gang, drawn by the promise of high pay. The rest of the population suffer in fear. “People are afraid to travel even short distances now,” he said. “There are robberies and thefts everywhere—it’s just not safe anymore.”

Across Myanmar, more than 3.5 million people have been internally displaced, while the SAC continues to block international aid from reaching them. Hunger has reached catastrophic levels as agricultural output has dropped by 16% since 2021. This decline is driven by mass displacement, the loss of labor due to conscription or flight to countries like Thailand, and widespread fear of armed groups seizing crops, which discourages planting.

NEED FOR AID

The result: over one-third of the population now needs humanitarian assistance. In some formerly food-rich regions, output is projected to meet only 20% of local needs this year. At the same time, conflict has disrupted imports and caused food and transport prices to soar. Rice prices rose 220% between January 2021 and June 2024—including a 62% increase in the first half of 2024 alone—while the cost of a typical diet has nearly tripled since 2020.

Mass displacement has also led to overcrowding in previously sparsely populated areas, straining water supplies. With electricity in short supply, many rely on wood for cooking, fueling rapid deforestation. This has triggered environmental imbalances, including flooding in lowlands and drought in higher elevations. The crisis is so severe that 42% of farming families fear they won’t have enough to eat.

POOR INFRASTRUCTURE

Myanmar’s infrastructure has crumbled under the weight of war, economic collapse, and state mismanagement. Over half the population lacks access to electricity, with only 53% of households connected to the national power grid—and in rural areas, that figure drops to just 20%. Even where connections exist, power is frequently disrupted by fighting. The healthcare system has also collapsed, according to the UN’s 2025 humanitarian needs report. Hospitals and clinics struggle to operate amid bombings, a lack of paved roads, electricity, clean water, and soaring inflation. With no funds to buy medicines or equipment, it has become nearly impossible to provide even basic care.

Cuts to electricity are often accompanied by internet shutdowns, further impacting education. “Currently, many young people cannot go to school, and we don’t have internet,” said Seng Ja from Kachin State. “It’s been almost six months with no connection.” Nationwide, 45% of teenagers are out of school. Following the coup, Myanmar experienced 532 school closure days between February 2020 and February 2022—the highest in East Asia and the Pacific. The conflict has only worsened conditions: teachers dismissed, schools attacked, and trust in public institutions eroded. Violence and random airstrikes, often targeting civilian areas rather than enemy positions, have created an atmosphere of fear and instability.

INVESTORS FLEE

This collapse of essential services has driven away investment. Foreign direct investment (FDI) plunged from over \$5 billion in FY2019/20 to just \$662 million in FY2023/24. Most new capital comes from existing firms unable to withdraw, while many foreign companies

have exited due to sanctions, reputational risks, or deteriorating business conditions. The SAC has turned to allies like China and Russia, offering incentives to revive stalled infrastructure projects—but investor confidence remains low. Myanmar’s blacklisting by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has further restricted access to global financial systems.

In the end, the SAC has not only devastated the economy and driven civilians into poverty or exile—it has also left the country increasingly vulnerable to authoritarian influence from China and Russia, filling the vacuum left by the withdrawal of democratic powers and capital.

Note: This story was filed just days before the 28 March earthquake, which added further negative effects on the economy.

Antonio Graceffo is an economist and China expert who has reported extensively on Burma.

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Three killed in Indat Township in one of dozens of junta attacks since the quake. Photo: Supplied

KILLING THE MYANMAR PEOPLE WHILE SWEEPING UP AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

Despite multiple ceasefire declarations aimed at facilitating humanitarian efforts following a devastating earthquake, Myanmar's military junta has continued aerial and paramilitary attacks on civilian areas across the country, according to resistance groups and local reports.

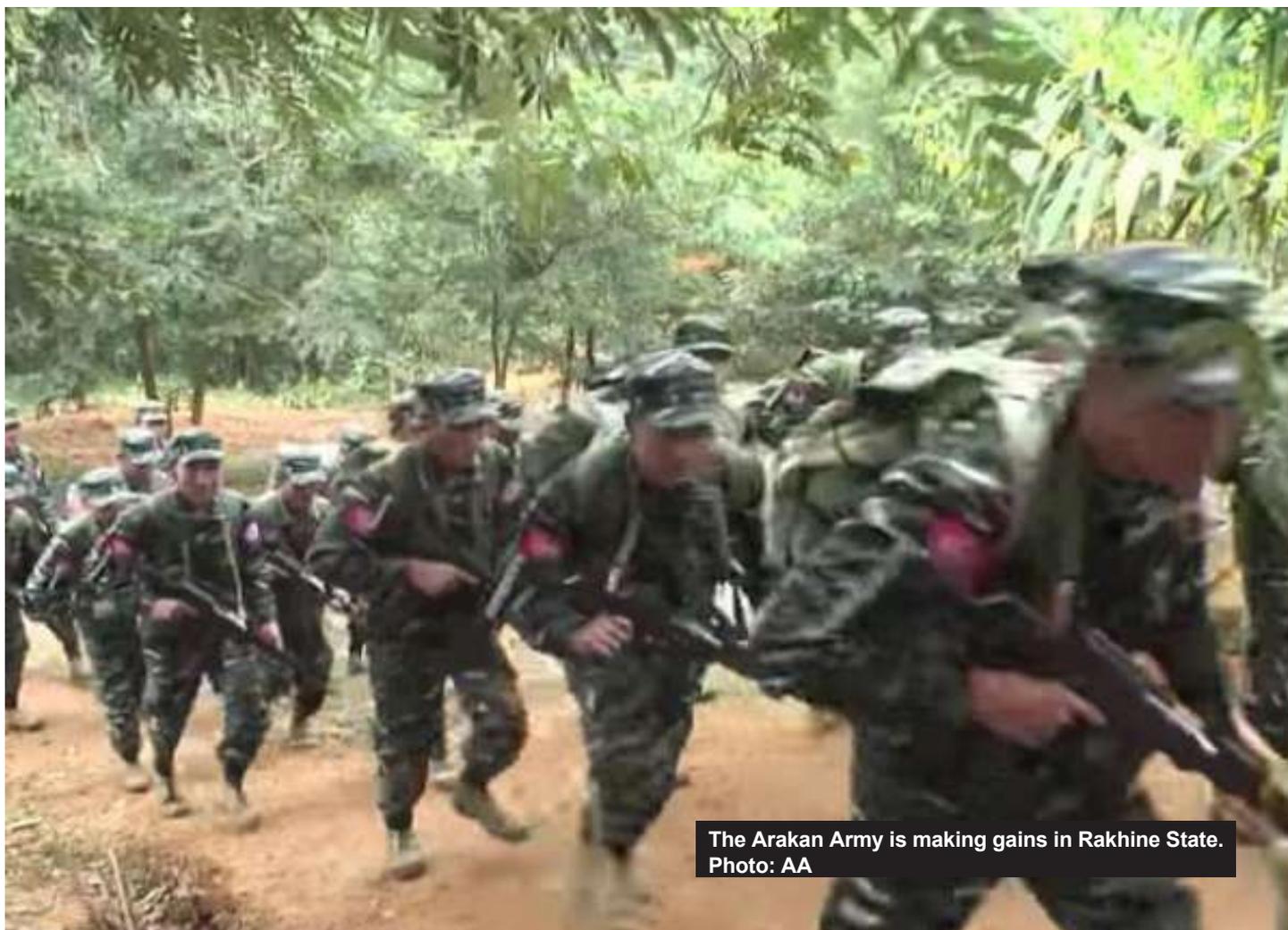
Shortly after the powerful earthquake struck Myanmar's Dry Zone on March 28, the junta launched an airstrike on Nawnghkio Township in northern Shan State, a territory under the control of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). The attack killed seven civilians, including six women, adding to the growing number of casualties in the quake's aftermath.

While the junta has yet to launch a full-scale ground offensive since the earthquake, aerial assaults have persisted nationwide. According to the National Unity Government (NUG), junta forces carried out at least 48

airstrikes in the days following the disaster, including several in Sagaing Region — one of the worst-hit areas by the quake.

In addition to airstrikes, junta troops have continued artillery shelling in multiple regions, including Rakhine, Kachin, Magway, Sagaing, and Mandalay, further endangering civilians already struggling with quake-related destruction. These bombardments reportedly caused at least seven more civilian deaths.

A disturbing new tactic emerged on April 6, when the junta used paramotors — small powered paragliders — to drop bombs on villages in Sagaing Region. In Butalin, Chyaung Oo, and Monywa townships, the strikes killed at least four civilians. In one incident, a midnight bombing on Thonepanhla village in Chyaung Oo claimed the lives of two women and one man, and left two others injured.



The Arakan Army is making gains in Rakhine State. Photo: AA

These attacks come in stark contrast to public commitments made by all sides to pause hostilities for humanitarian relief efforts. The NUG declared a two-week ceasefire on March 29 to allow for emergency response operations. Similarly, the Three Brotherhood Alliance — comprising the TNLA, MNDAA, and AA — announced a one-month ceasefire to ensure the safety of international and local volunteers.

The State Administration Council (SAC), also announced a temporary ceasefire from April 2 to 22. However, the continued military operations cast doubt on the sincerity of this declaration. In response, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) agreed to observe the ceasefire for the same period, while urging the junta to honour its own conditions — specifically the fourth clause of the SAC's announcement, which cautions against disrupting communication routes, attacking military bases, recruiting personnel, or

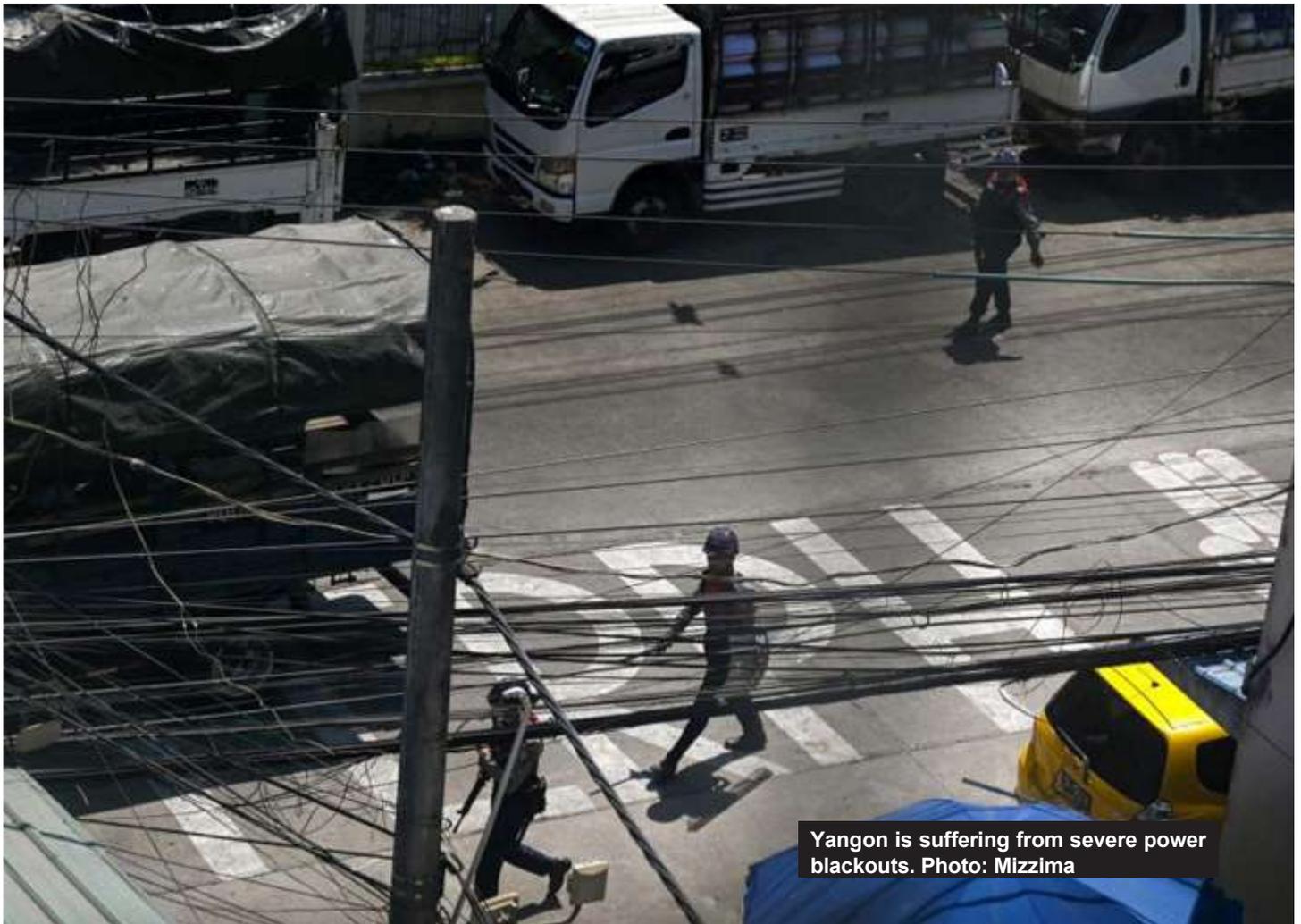
expanding territories under the guise of a ceasefire.

As the country reels from both natural and man-made crises, calls are growing louder for stronger international action to hold the junta accountable.

Arakan Army makes gains in Rakhine State

The Arakan Army (AA) is edging closer to full control of Rakhine State, with only three major cities remaining under junta control. While fighting in Sittwe has remained quiet since late March, intense clashes have erupted in Kyaukphyu, home to one of the junta's key naval command centres.

Fierce battles have been ongoing in Kyaukphyu Township since February 20, as AA forces challenge junta positions across an expanding frontline. The junta



is leveraging its naval firepower and aerial superiority to defend its stronghold, particularly the Danyawaddy Naval Base, a crucial military asset.

On April 7, junta troops based at Danyawaddy navy headquarters launched a counteroffensive, marching toward Kap Thabye village, sparking heavy fighting with AA troops that lasted until midnight. By the next day, the junta forces had retreated and repositioned in nearby villages.

In a statement issued on April 5, the AA accused junta forces of conducting drone attacks with over 90 bombs and 60 rounds of artillery shelling, launched from Danyawaddy Naval Base, Police Battalion No. (32), and other ground units. Despite heavy resistance, the junta has so far managed to hold the AA at bay from its core naval base in Kyaukphyu.

Outside the coastal townships, the AA continues to make strategic gains in the eastern part of the Rakhine mountain range, where it launched a separate offensive in January. Since then, the group has captured four key military outposts, significantly weakening the junta's military industries in the region.

On April 2, the Nyaunggyo military base fell to the AA, marking a major blow to the junta's control. The AA reportedly seized weapons and captured prisoners of war, while remaining junta troops fled in disarray. The fate of the strategic base commander remains unknown.

According to local sources quoted by Narinjara NewsAgency, three separate junta columns—reportedly from an arms factory and the Nyaungchyedauk post—have been dispatched to locate the missing commander and his forces. “The commander's status is still unclear. He might be dead, missing, or even deserted. That's why they are urgently searching,” a local source told the outlet.

Yangon suffers severe power outages

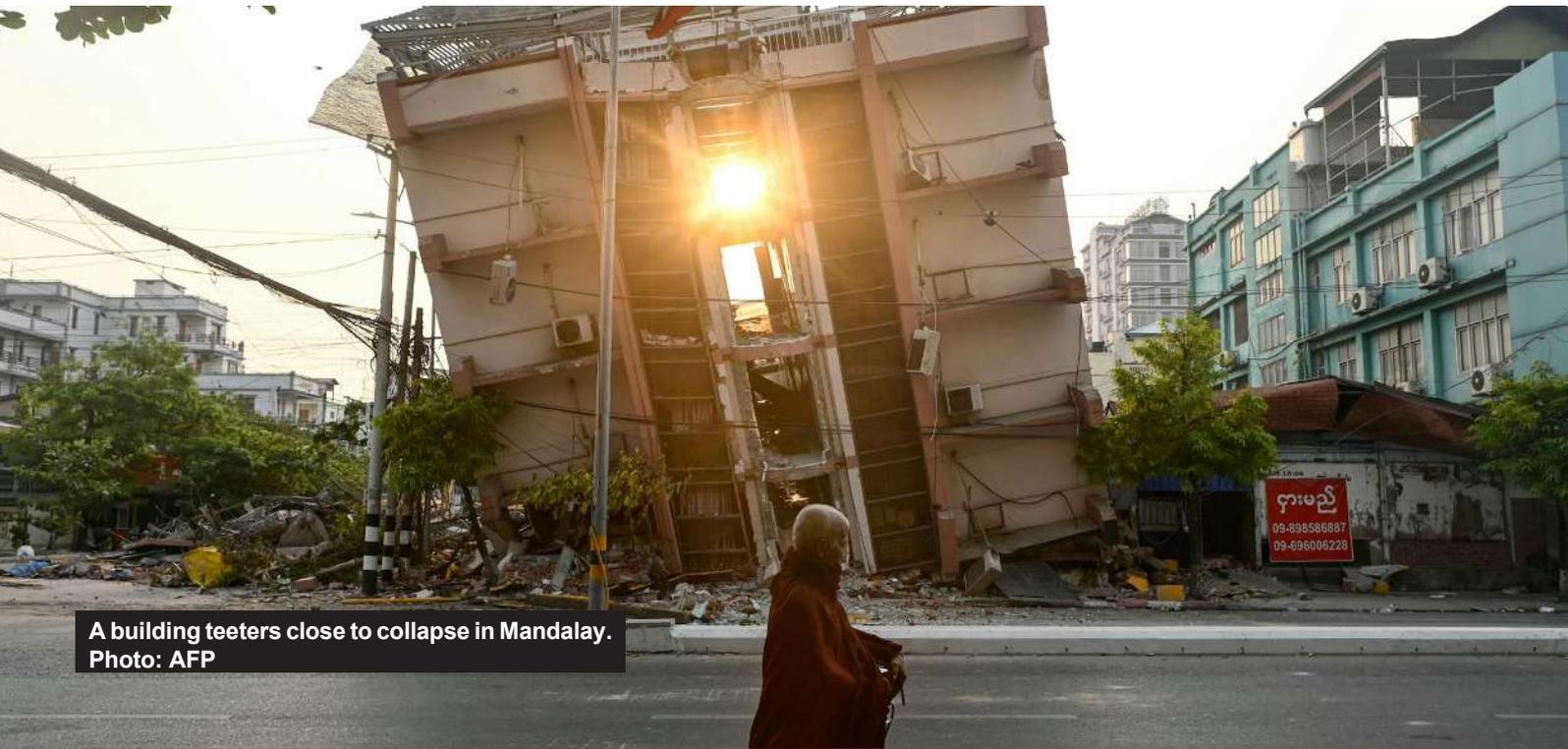
Yangon residents are facing a severe electricity shortage in the aftermath of the powerful earthquake that struck central Myanmar, with actual power supply falling far short of the government's already limited schedule.

Following the quake, the Yangon Electricity Supply Corporation (YESC) announced it would implement a rotating schedule, supplying electricity for four hours a day per group, dividing the city into six groups. However, many residents report that they are receiving only two hours of electricity—or even less.

A resident told Yangon Khit Thit Media, “The electricity is not available for the announced four-hour period—only about two hours. Some townships receive even less than that.”

The YESC blamed the widespread outages on damage caused by the earthquake to key infrastructure, including power stations, sub-stations, and transmission lines. In a public statement, YESC admitted that the main transmission line to Yangon is non-operational, severely limiting the city's access to the national grid. While the corporation is attempting to compensate by running natural gas-powered stations, the output remains insufficient.

As a result, only critical facilities such as hospitals and government buildings are receiving relatively stable electricity, while ordinary households face near-total blackouts. The electricity crisis has also led to a surge in candle prices and the emergence of phone charging services offered at high rates across Yangon, as residents scramble to meet basic needs.



A building teeters close to collapse in Mandalay.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR COMMUNICATION CUTS ADDING TO POST-QUAKE MISERY AND UNCERTAINTY

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Ek, a 25-year-old Burmese national currently living in Chiang Mai has been trying to reach friends in Mandalay through social media and by using DTAC's free international call service, but many remain unreachable. She also noted severe electricity issues in both Naypyidaw and Yangon. "Sometimes the power comes back at midnight, but because everyone uses it at the same time, the grid can't handle the load. Utility poles even catch fire," she said. Without electricity, accessing water or internet becomes nearly impossible. People now rely on houses with generators to charge power banks.

Across Myanmar, survivors are grappling not only with the devastation caused by the 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck near Mandalay on March 28, but also with the collapse of essential services—prolonged power outages, water shortages, and a near-total absence of aid. At the same time, ongoing government air and drone strikes have deepened an already dire humanitarian crisis.

In Meiktila, a small town not far from the epicenter, 22-year-old Matthew said his family survived, but many of his friends lost their homes. "We are a small town,

not like Mandalay. We just have to rebuild ourselves," he said. Electricity only returned several days later. "At that time, I felt so helpless and worried. I had no power... I could do nothing but be grateful they were alive." In North Phaung Daw Oo, Kyaw, 23, said the most urgent problem is access to clean water—a basic need now in short supply. In Yangon, the situation is no better. Su, 26, described her struggle to contact her father during citywide blackouts. "It's hard for me to reach... even my dad. There was an extremely long blackout in Yangon... his phone didn't have power."

These accounts point to a deeper crisis: the collapse of communication. With the State Administration Council (SAC) shutting down internet and mobile networks, families are left in the dark—unable to reach loved ones, request help, or stay informed about ongoing threats. The lack of connectivity is hindering rescue efforts, fueling panic, and obscuring the true scale of the disaster. In many places, the silence itself has become a source of suffering.

Ek described the emotional toll and practical chaos of trying to reach loved ones after the earthquake. "My sister lives in Naypyidaw and some of the people I used

to work with are in Mandalay. I was only able to contact my sister two days after the earthquake," she said. Her sister, a former government worker who left her post in 2021 as part of the civil disobedience movement, reported that her house was heavily damaged. The family had to move out of their government housing after she resigned, and now live without basic services. "They hardly get any internet connection. Sometimes the broadband WiFi works, but most of the time there's no connection at all."

The epicenter in Sagaing, already a war zone, remains under a strict digital blackout enforced by the military junta. According to Access Now, Myanmar recorded more internet shutdowns in 2024 than any other country—and the current blackout is proving fatal. Htaike Htaike Aung, executive director of the Myanmar Internet Project believes many deaths could have been prevented if people had access to timely information and communications infrastructure. Her group, along with over 120 local and international organizations, has called on the junta to restore internet access, including social media and independent news sites.

But the junta has ignored these demands. Instead, it continues to block media coverage in quake-hit zones. Even attempts to use alternative communication tools like Starlink have been suppressed, with soldiers reportedly confiscating satellite kits. Myanmar, a mobile-first country with limited landline infrastructure, has few alternatives when the networks go dark.

Across Thailand and around the world, Burmese diaspora communities are raising funds and trying to get aid into earthquake-affected areas. But sending money into Myanmar has become increasingly difficult, as the military government now uses biometric systems and electronic banking surveillance to monitor and punish those suspected of supporting the resistance. "They get information from account activity," explained one interviewee, a 22-year-old from Meiktila. "They send that data to KBZ Bank, and the bank confirms it. Then they arrest the people involved."

As a result, many donors have turned to digital currencies and informal channels to avoid scrutiny. Even those not directly tied to the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) risk detention or frozen bank accounts if their transactions are flagged. "They track both CDM and non-CDM people. Sometimes you're just sending money to a friend, and they freeze your account," the

interviewee added. With conventional banking no longer safe, the inability to send money reliably into the country has become yet another obstacle—further compounding the suffering and hampering recovery efforts in the wake of the earthquake.

While private and direct aid is being blocked, funds continue to flow to the SAC. Su reported, "The military government is asking for aid, and the aid is coming — but it's only going to areas that are important to them. Some aid has even been blocked." Ek confirmed the aid distribution has been highly selective. "There's emergency assistance in the government housing areas, but not everyone gets it. Only government offices get help," she said, explaining that families like her sister's have to rely entirely on themselves.

In Mandalay, Su noted, "It's just people rescuing people. There aren't any big rescue organizations." She fears the situation is even worse in the north, where intense fighting continues and communication remains limited. The junta is using the blackout to conceal its ongoing assaults on civilian populations—airstrikes and ground attacks that have continued unabated despite the disaster. Still, some reports are getting through. According to Free Burma Rangers, the Burma Army is carrying out sustained ground and air assaults across Karen, Karenni, and Sagaing. Villages have been bombed, civilians injured, and homes burned—part of a broader campaign the junta seems determined to pursue, even in the midst of a national catastrophe.

Su went on to say, "Now journalists and reporters are being blocked too, which limits the amount of news people can get. That is something I want the international community to know."

As George Orwell once warned, "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." In Myanmar today, the junta seeks to control the present—cutting communication networks, silencing journalists, and restricting the flow of information. By doing so, the military aims to suppress the scale of the suffering and rewrite the story of the earthquake—one in which its continued violence and neglect go unseen.

Antonio Graceffo is an economist and China specialist who has reported extensively on Burma.



APPROXIMATELY 180 BUILDINGS IN THABEIKKYIN TOWNSHIP DAMAGED BY THE MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE

A powerful earthquake, centred near Sagaing City, caused significant damage to approximately 180 religious buildings and homes across Thabeikkyin Township in Mandalay Region, as reported by the Thabeikkyin Township People's Defence Organisation (PDO or "Pa Ka Pha").

"Apart from minor damage to buildings and public houses, the pillars and compartments of religious structures collapsed, and several schools and classrooms were destroyed. Large buildings sustained significant damage," said a PDO official.

While no local residents were killed in the powerful earthquake that struck Thabeikkyin Township, two students from the National Unity Government Interim Education School were injured, according to the local PDO.

Similarly, in Madaya Township, the earthquake caused widespread damage and fatalities in both urban and rural areas, according to the Madaya Township PDO.

A total of eight people died, including three residents from Mwesa Lay village in the western part of Madaya Township. In the eastern part of Madaya Township, one person from Nat Gyi Sin village, one from Mwe Pon Thar, and three from Upper South

Village in the eastern part of Madaya died as a result of the earthquake, according to a Madaya PDO official.

"We are providing relief and assistance in the areas under our control, sending people to hospitals and clinics, and arranging burials for the deceased alongside their families," he said.

In Madaya Township, the downtown and surrounding areas are controlled by the junta, while the remaining areas are under the control of the revolutionary forces.

A Madaya PDO official stated that although large buildings collapsed and lives were lost in the downtown area of Madaya, the revolutionary forces were unable to provide relief and rescue services to that area. They are still in the process of compiling a list of the damage.

A powerful earthquake with a magnitude of 7.7 on the Richter scale struck near Sagaing at 12:50 pm on 28 March, causing widespread damage across Mandalay, Naypyidaw, Sagaing, Magway, Bago Regions, and Shan State.

As of 8 am on 3 April, the junta announced that the earthquake in Myanmar had resulted in 3,085 deaths, 4,715 injuries, and 341 people still missing.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE RELIEF EFFORTS OFFER PATH TO RECOVERY AND DEMOCRACY

As Myanmar reels from the catastrophic 7.7 magnitude earthquake that struck on March 28, claiming over 3,000 lives and displacing millions, humanitarian organizations are racing to provide aid. But in a country fractured by conflict and military rule, disaster relief is proving inseparable from the broader struggle for democracy.

A new report from the nonprofit Funds for Future urges donors to support not only immediate humanitarian needs, but also the grassroots democratic movement. Key to this effort is the National Unity Government (NUG) which has a critical role in both the coordination of earthquake relief while also moving forward the country's democratic aspirations. Through its Spring Revolution Support Fund, the NUG is mobilizing emergency relief while promoting long-term, people-centred recovery.

The fund is channelling resources into food distribution, mobile medical clinics, and the construction of earthquake-resistant infrastructure—often in areas neglected by junta-controlled aid. Donations to the NUG can be made securely via Funds for Future, a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit that provides tax-deductible receipts and transparent financial tracking.

Beyond the NUG, other trusted organizations are stepping up. UNICEF has delivered over 80 metric tons of emergency supplies but faces a \$200 million funding shortfall. Doctors Without Borders continues

to provide trauma care, while groups like Direct Relief and Partners In Health are airlifting essential medical kits.

For donors, the report provides a checklist for responsible giving: prioritize organizations with transparent finances, established local partnerships, and a track record of effective aid. Platforms such as GlobalGiving, Give2Asia, and Charity Navigator can help verify legitimacy.

Community-led and diaspora initiatives also play a crucial role, often bypassing logistical hurdles international NGOs face. Groups like Helping the Burmese Delta are leveraging local networks for faster, more culturally sensitive responses.

As Myanmar faces the twin challenges of natural disaster and political repression, this moment offers an opportunity to rebuild not just homes, but hope. "Supporting earthquake relief is more than charity—it's an investment in a democratic future," the report concludes.

Donors can learn more or contribute through trusted channels listed at www.fundsforfuture.org and vetted platforms like GlobalGiving and Give2Asia. In the face of tragedy, coordinated giving can help Myanmar rise stronger than before—resilient, self-governed, and free.



Aid delivery in Mandalay.
Photo: AFP

WFP DELIVERS AID TO DEVASTATED MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE ZONES

The World Food Programme (WFP) issued a press release on 3 April regarding their delivery of emergency food aid to earthquake-affected communities in Myanmar.

The press release is as follows.

Within 48 hours of the powerful earthquake that struck central Myanmar on 28 March, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) began emergency food distributions to affected communities.

WFP has reached over 24,000 earthquake survivors in four areas, Mandalay, Naypyitaw, Sagaing, and Shan, and is scaling up efforts to assist 850,000 affected people.

It has ongoing food assistance operations in the hardest-hit areas of Mandalay, Naypyitaw, Sagaing and Shan. In Sagaing, it has reached nearly 4,000 people with food rations in conflict-hit Sagaing, already home to a third of Myanmar's internally displaced population before the earthquake.

At the epicentre in Mandalay, WFP has distributed fortified biscuits to more than 15,000 people since 1 April. WFP also reached 480 households - about 2,400 people - in Sein Pan, one of the poorest and worst-impacted ward in Mandalay, where almost every resident lost their home due to the earthquake and a subsequent fire.

Meanwhile, WFP and its partners have so far reached 4,000 people with assistance in Southern Shan. In Nay Pyi Taw, a total of 1,000 people have received fortified biscuits since food distributions started on 30 March.

WFP has dispatched more than 100 metric tons of food from Yangon to Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw, and

Sagaing. WFP has over 200 metric tons of fortified biscuits available for immediate distribution, with an additional 7,000 metric tons of food stocks in country to assist those hardest hit.

It aims to reach 100,000 people with ready-to-eat food in the first phase of response, followed by food assistance for 850,000 people for one month.

WFP has established a central response hub in Nay Pyi Taw to coordinate the earthquake response and has rapidly deployed teams to Mandalay. It is collaborating with partners on rapid needs assessments in Mandalay, Sagaing, Shan and Nay Pyi Taw, while also evaluating market access and functionality. An interagency Rapid Needs Assessment is ongoing, with results expected soon.

Access to earthquake hit areas and unreliable telecommunications continue to pose challenges for WFP and partners to mount a full-scale response to the massive needs. WFP urgently needs US\$ 40 million to support 850,000 people affected by the earthquake.

Myanmar is already facing severe food insecurity, with 15.2 million people - one in four - food insecure. Despite escalating humanitarian needs, WFP's funding shortfalls recently forced the suspension of assistance to over one million people, leaving only 35,000 of the most vulnerable currently receiving monthly support from WFP.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is the world's largest humanitarian organization saving lives in emergencies and using food assistance to build a pathway to peace, stability and prosperity for people recovering from conflict, disasters and the impact of climate change.



Families camp out in quake-hit Mandalay.
Photo: AFP

PUBLIC TOILETS AND BATHING FACILITIES URGENTLY NEEDED IN EARTHQUAKE-HIT REGIONS OF MYANMAR

The "2025 Myanmar Earthquake Emergency Response Coordination Unit" has announced that public toilets and bathing facilities are urgently needed for people in areas devastated by the recent earthquake, particularly in Mandalay, where many of them remain displaced and are living on the streets.

A report released on 4 April highlights growing sanitation concerns in temporary encampments, where the absence of adequate hygiene infrastructure has heightened the risk of infectious disease outbreaks.

Many residents are avoiding their homes due to fears of aftershocks and further structural collapses. As a result, large numbers of people are temporarily sheltering in open areas, including roadside spaces, in an effort to stay safe.

Humanitarian organizations report similar conditions in Naypyidaw and Pyinmana, where homes have also been destroyed. Basic needs such as clean water, food, and secure shelter remain pressing issues across all affected regions.

In Sagaing, located near the earthquake's epicentre, electricity and internet services remain disrupted in both urban and surrounding rural areas. While some

aid has reached the city, many remote villages remain cut off, significantly escalating the humanitarian crisis.

Residents in Sagaing have also reported that ground fractures caused by the quake have altered underground water sources, resulting in dried-up wells and an urgent need to drill new ones as part of ongoing recovery efforts.

In Mandalay, critical needs include dry food rations, water purification supplies, medical kits, mosquito repellent, temporary shelters, and equipment for locating deceased individuals.

In other severely affected areas, such as Sagaing, Pyawbwe, Yamethin, and Pyinmana, locals have also called for blankets, mosquito nets, sleeping mats, and solar-powered lighting.

According to a statement released by the Myanmar military junta, the powerful earthquake that struck on 28 March has claimed at least 3,145 lives and injured more than 4,500 people across Naypyidaw, Sagaing, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, and Shan State as of 3 April.



Damaged housing. Photo: AFP

STAFF HOUSING IN MYANMAR'S CAPITAL ABANDONED AS FOUL ODORS EMERGE AFTER QUAKE

Staff housing in Naypyidaw's Zabuthiri Township lies abandoned, with foul odors emanating from the severely damaged buildings on 3 April, one week after a powerful earthquake struck Myanmar.

Due to the extremely powerful earthquake, many staff housing buildings were destroyed in Zabuthiri Township, resulting in fatalities.

Rescue teams continue searching for dead bodies in front of some housing complexes, while in some areas, people are seen retrieving belongings from the rubble.

Among the worst hit were railway staff apartments in Residence Blocks No. 2000 and above, as well as Blocks No. 3000, 4000, and higher. Structures that once stood four stories tall have been reduced to three, or in some cases, a single story.

Many former residents have either returned to their hometowns or rented temporary housing in nearby neighbourhoods. Some government departments are reportedly arranging accommodation for affected staff. A few staff members remain near buildings that were not completely destroyed.

Temporary shelters have been set up in open areas such as football fields and school grounds. Families have already begun moving into makeshift homes near the Gantgaw Housing area.

A resident living near the Padauk Housing complex said the affected staff families are managing food and water supplies independently, but noted a shortage of solar-powered lights due to the ongoing electricity outage.

The earthquake, which struck on 28 March with a magnitude of 7.7, caused widespread destruction in the administrative capital and other regions, including Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, northern Shan, and Bago.

The earthquake also damaged several ministerial offices in Naypyidaw, disrupting the operations of the military-led government. While many offices remain non-operational, staff have been instructed to return to work.

Reports indicate that some departments are taking disciplinary action, adding absent employees to no-show lists.



A gate into Lashio. Photo: Supplied

MNDAA TO HAND OVER ADMINISTRATION OF LASHIO TOWN TO MYANMAR JUNTA IN APRIL

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) will hand over the control of Lashio township, which they had captured, to the military junta before 21 April, according to two MNDAA sources who confirmed this to Mizzima on 4 April.

"The handover will involve 12 wards within Lashio city. The surrounding villages are not included, and troops will remain in those areas," one MNDAA source said.

"The handover is in progress. We will complete the withdrawal before 21 April," said an MNDAA source in Lashio.

Initially, some junta administrative departments will re-establish their presence in the city before the end of April, followed by military units, confirmed another MNDAA source involved in Lashio's reconstruction.

"The MNDAA will maintain their military headquarters, troops, police department, and liaison office in Lashio. They will operate jointly," the source said. However, the specific governing structure after the junta's return remains unknown.

The security of political prisoners released from Lashio prison during the city's capture, as well as local residents assisting in Lashio's reconstruction, will be a

significant concern following the junta's return.

The MNDAA sources also indicated that the junta is expected to conduct military recruitment drives, requiring local residents to prepare accordingly.

Lashio was captured during phase two of Operation 1027, in July 2024, by MNDAA-led resistance forces, which included People's Defense Forces.

The MNDAA then took over administrative control. The fighting resulted in extensive damage to civilian homes and property, and subsequent junta airstrikes caused numerous casualties among the local population.

"The junta threatened airstrikes if the MNDAA did not withdraw. China pressured them to halt economic and trade activities. There was significant pressure from various sources," said an MNDAA source in Lashio.

Chinese government pressure is reported to be one of the key factors in the planned handover.

MNDAA leader Peng Daxun, who was reportedly detained by China, made a public appearance on 2 April at a donation event for earthquake relief funds.



Photo: Jacob Diehl

UK ASSISTANCE REACHES 15,000 PEOPLE AFTER MYANMAR EARTHQUAKE, WITH FURTHER £10M PLEDGED

The UK has bolstered its support to Myanmar earthquake, allocating a further £10 million to the ongoing humanitarian response. This brings the UK total to up to £25 million of support, including up to £5 million to match donations to the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal and £10 million announced on 29 March. UK-funded supplies are already reaching areas devastated by the quake, helping over 15,000 people so far.

Lifesaving support for those directly affected by the severe earthquake in Myanmar will now go even further, with the UK now providing up to £25 million for vital humanitarian assistance.

The increase is the result of an additional £10 million of UK funding directed towards the humanitarian response.

It comes as UK Minister for the Indo-Pacific, Catherine West, on 4 April visited the offices of the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) in London, to hear about the realities of delivering aid to the most vulnerable across Myanmar.

The UK has already pledged to aid match every pound donated by the British public to the DEC appeal, up to £5 million.

UK funds, delivered through partners on the ground, are already helping to provide immediate support to the most vulnerable areas and people, including first aid, emergency and trauma care and primary healthcare, food, water, shelter and hygiene kits. The additional £10 million directed to the response will provide a further boost to these efforts, saving lives and supporting livelihoods across Myanmar. No UK

support goes to the Myanmar regime.

Catherine West, Minister for the Indo-Pacific, said:

“Even before this earthquake struck, Myanmar was already facing one of the world’s biggest humanitarian crises after four years of conflict.

“It is right that we step up to help. The rapid UK response means lifesaving supplies are already reaching those worst-affected by the quake – and new funding will enable partners on the ground to reach even more people in need.

“We thank the British public who continue to generously support the Myanmar people through the DEC appeal.”

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) works with a network of specialist partner organisations to deliver targeted support on the ground. This means UK support is able to reach those most in need, despite the challenges of operating in Myanmar.

The UK government has a strong track record of providing humanitarian assistance in Myanmar, with total UK support since the 2021 military coup standing at over £170 million. Our modern approach to aid not only supports some of the world’s most vulnerable people but also helps address global challenges from health to migration, ultimately contributing to the UK’s security and prosperity.

In addition to humanitarian assistance, the FCDO continues to provide consular assistance to British nationals in both Myanmar and Thailand, which was also affected by last week’s earthquake.



Photo: AFP

INDIA NAVY DELIVERS AID TO QUAKE-HIT MYANMAR

India's navy last Saturday delivered hundreds of tonnes of food aid to earthquake-hit Myanmar, a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi met reclusive junta chief Min Aung Hlaing.

India was among the first countries to rush aid and rescue teams to its war-torn neighbour after a devastating 7.7-magnitude quake on March 28.

The death toll from the earthquake has risen to more than 3,300, Myanmar state media said Saturday.

More than one week after the disaster, desperate survivors remain without enough food and shelter.

The latest aid from India comprised 442 tonnes of food including rice, cooking oil, noodles and biscuits, the Indian embassy in Yangon said.

The consignment arrived via an Indian navy ship, INS Gharial, at Thilawa port.

Modi held a rare face-to-face meeting on Friday with Min Aung Hlaing on the sidelines of the Bangkok BIMSTEC meeting -- the grouping of the seven nations on the Bay of Bengal.

"India is doing whatever is possible to assist our sisters and brothers of Myanmar in this critical time," Modi was quoted as saying in a government statement on Friday.

India's foreign ministry said that Modi told the junta chief that there was "no military solution to the conflict", and stressed the "importance of early restoration of a democratic process through inclusive and credible elections".

Min Aung Hlaing's armed forces have ruled Myanmar since a 2021 coup, when they wrested power from the civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi, sparking a multi-sided conflict.

The junta leader had issued a rare appeal for international aid following the earthquake, indicating the severity of the crisis.

Previous military regimes in the country have shunned foreign assistance even after major natural disasters.

Sri Lanka also sent a medical team and a plane loaded with supplies, many funded by donations from Buddhist temples, to Myanmar, a defence official said.

Colombo has pledged more than \$1 million to help quake victims in the fellow Buddhist nation.

AFP

UN CHIEF SAYS EARTHQUAKE HAS COMPOUNDED THE PROBLEMS FACING MYANMAR

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres issued a statement on 3 April on the crisis facing Myanmar in the wake of the 28 March earthquake.

The following is the statement:

Last week's earthquake in Southeast Asia hit the region hard – in places like Thailand and elsewhere. But especially in the epicentre of Myanmar. Myanmar today is the scene of utter devastation and desperation.

The death toll is now 3,000 and climbing – with thousands injured, and many trapped under the rubble. This disaster has laid bare the deeper vulnerabilities facing people throughout the country. Even before the earthquake, Myanmar was beset by political, human rights and humanitarian crises – hurting people, spilling over to neighbouring countries and the wider region, and opening the door to transnational crime.

Nearly 20 million people – or one in every three in Myanmar – required already humanitarian aid. Millions had already fled their homes from conflict and violence. The earthquake has supercharged the suffering – with the monsoon season just around the corner.

We need rapid action on several fronts. I am announcing today that I am sending our Emergency Relief Coordinator, Tom Fletcher, to Myanmar. He will be on the ground tomorrow. I am also sending my Special Envoy, Julie Bishop, to visit the country in the coming days to reinforce our commitment to peace and dialogue.

I appeal, in particular, to the international community to immediately step up vitally needed funding to match the scale of this crisis. I appeal for rapid, safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to reach those most in need across the country. And I appeal for every effort to transform this tragic moment into an opportunity for the people of Myanmar.

I welcome the announcements of temporary ceasefires. This is essential to help aid flow and let rescuers do their jobs. But an end of fighting must quickly lead to a beginning of a serious political dialogue and the release of political prisoners. Specifically, an inclusive political process where all the people of Myanmar feel represented.

As communities across Myanmar unite in grief, it's also time to unite behind a political solution to end the brutal conflict. This solution must include a pathway for the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingya from Bangladesh, whom I had the honour of visiting last month in Cox's Bazar.

It must include an end to the violence and human rights violations across the country and a pathway for democracy to take root.

Now is the time to stand in solidarity with the long-suffering people of Myanmar. The United Nations will keep pushing for peace and lifesaving support for the people of Myanmar in their hour of need.

Thank you



Photo: Mathias Reding

UN SECURITY COUNCIL PRESS STATEMENT ON THE MYANMAR CRISIS

The following United Nations Security Council press statement was issued on 4 April by Council President Jérôme Bonafont (France):

The members of the Security Council expressed their deepest sympathy and condolences to those affected by the earthquake that struck central Myanmar on 28 March, and also impacted neighbouring countries especially Thailand, resulting in significant loss of life, injuries and widespread destruction. They stressed their solidarity with the peoples of Myanmar, Thailand and other affected families and communities.

The members of the Security Council recognized the need to strengthen rescue, relief and recovery efforts and to scale up immediate and rapid humanitarian assistance in response to the requests to help the people of Myanmar, supported by the international community.

The members of the Security Council took note of the statements by ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] Foreign Ministers of 29 and 30 March. They reaffirmed the importance of a safe and conducive environment to ensure the timely and effective delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to all those in need, without disruption or discrimination. To that end, the members of the Security Council welcomed the ceasefire announcements to create a safe and conducive environment.

The members of the Security Council expressed their gratitude and support for the work of ASEAN, the region, the United Nations and the wider international community, including the swift provision of urgent life-saving assistance, rescue and disaster relief.



FLASHBACK - A US representative hands over aid to the Myanmar junta following the 2008 Cyclone Nargis. Photo: AFP

USAID IS MIA - INSIGHT MYANMAR

“How could this happen now?! I mean, are we part of the problem allowing Burma to slip to that ‘ninth layer of hell’?”

These anguished words from Chris Milligan, a longtime official of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), capture both his heartbreak and dismay over the current state of U.S. engagement with Myanmar—or rather, the lack thereof. His words – made in an Insight Myanmar Podcast – are especially poignant in the wake of the devastating 7.7 magnitude earthquake that struck amid the Trump Administration’s preceding dismantling of the very agency that would have led America’s humanitarian response. In this far-ranging episode, Milligan offers a sobering view of both the country’s potential and tragedy, as well as America’s missed opportunities in what may prove to be a historically consequential moment.

Milligan begins by describing his extensive experience of over 30 years with the Agency, highlighting his role in disaster response globally—from Haiti to Iraq—and particularly his involvement in Myanmar. He reflects on his tenure opening the USAID mission in Yangon in 2012 as one of the highlights of his career. At that time, the U.S. was following an “action-

for-action” policy that rewarded steps toward reform by the Myanmar military government with increased engagement and assistance. In other words, their mission was literally starting up from scratch. “There were no staff,” Milligan recalls of those early days. “I opened the door to our offices. It was an empty room!”

It did not take Milligan long to realize that Myanmar was unlike anywhere else he had worked. While he had experience in past conflict zones, Burma stood out: for its complexity, layered ethnic conflicts, and long history of authoritarian rule. He worked quickly to build a team and launch initiatives in a context where international development had been absent for decades. But the goal was not development for its own sake, or to help legitimize the military regime; rather, it was an important tool for leveraging democratic and economic reform in Myanmar.

He warned international donors that Burma was “a land of good intentions with unintended consequences.” As an example, Milligan gives the example of a well-meaning donor who held a civil society meeting at a luxury hotel unknowingly owned by military cronies, which instantly damaged trust with local grassroots organizations. He emphasizes that development itself is not inherently good or bad; rather, the important

thing is to understand where one is working, and the relationships and power dynamics there. Otherwise, one's efforts may well end up being counterproductive

Despite the challenges of his own four years in Myanmar, Milligan says they were some of the most fulfilling of his career. He witnessed rapid change: new roads, more phones, even the arrival of Uber. He proudly notes the success of a coffee initiative in Shan State where skeptical international buyers were amazed at how quickly local farmers met global standards.

But it wasn't all progress. His deepest regret remains the unresolved crisis in Rakhine State. From his very first days in the country, Milligan repeatedly visited the region, trying various humanitarian and community initiatives to ameliorate the growing inter-ethnic community strife, but not making any real progress. The suffering persisted, and the violence increased. He sadly admits that that this failure still stings.

Milligan turns his attention to USAID, itself. He is emphatic about its value to the United States because humanitarian aid is grounded in generosity and moral leadership; in this way, he explains, development assistance is very much in America's national interest, adding that it falls under the National Security Agency (NSA). Its work prevents the spread of pandemics, stabilizes conflict-prone regions, creates trade partners, and reduces migration pressures. In Myanmar, the agency fostered deep, people-to-people connections, linking universities, businesses, and civil society across borders. In this way, Milligan argues, the agency advanced not just humanitarian goals but also democratic values in competition with rising authoritarian models like China's.

He contrasts the American approach—rooted in individual rights, rule of law, and empowered private sectors—with China's model, which promotes state control and economic dependency. With China as the major trading partner for 120 countries and aggressively expanding its influence, Milligan sees USAID's role as vital to maintaining a balance of power and preserving democratic norms.

It is against this backdrop that the recent earthquake in Myanmar is especially tragic. Milligan describes how USAID has historically led major international disaster responses—deploying hundreds of personnel, search-and-rescue teams, and tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars in funding. He provides a number of examples, such as the terrible 2023 earthquake in Turkey, when USAID sent 200 responders and provided \$28 million in aid within two weeks, and when Hurricane Nargis devastated Myanmar in 2008, it deployed

hundreds of people and tens of millions of dollars. But the response to Myanmar's earthquake? "Just a three-person team, and \$2 million!" he says in a mixture of disbelief, sadness and deep frustration. "Today, we have urban search-and-rescue teams sitting in Virginia and California... They should be in Mandalay! They should be pulling people out of buildings. And that window is almost closed."

Milligan attributes the inadequate American response to the Trump administration's abrupt dismantling of the agency. Nearly 5,400 contracts and grants have been canceled, and more than 80% of USAID programs have been terminated, including four humanitarian initiatives active in Myanmar before the quake. Entire teams of experts have been fired. These programs are not easily restarted. "It would take years and years," Milligan laments. "USAID has lost the most technically competent people in the U.S. government."

Meanwhile, countries like Vietnam, China, India, and Russia have filled the vacuum, already deploying hundreds of personnel. While Milligan is careful to emphasize that any assistance saving lives is welcome and should transcend political calculation, nonetheless, he says, the contrast is painful when reflecting on what has been lost through the absence of American support. What is more, Milligan worries that the long-term consequences will be massive: global leadership will be ceded to China and others; local partnerships will evaporate; logistical networks will disappear; and the agency's unique ability to quickly pivot existing development programs to address emergencies will be lost. All this, in turn, will have chilling, long-term consequences: more pandemics, more conflict, fewer markets for U.S. exports, and a less free world. And at the heart of it all, a severed connection between the American people and the global communities they once supported.

For Milligan, Myanmar is not just another country. His voice softens as he recalls his four years there: biking across the countryside, eating Mohinga in morning tea shops, joining in local festivals. The warmth and generosity of the Burmese people inspired him deeply. "It was a magical four years," he says. "And that's why it was also inspiring. It made you want to work harder to support them ... because they saw a brighter future for themselves, and you wanted to help them get there."

LISTEN TO THE PODCAST

Listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://player.captivate.fm/episode/09f17000-c9cd-4771-a6bc-d75feb6078d4>

SPECIAL ADVISORY COUNCIL-MYANMAR CALLS FOR CEASEFIRE, HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The United Nations (UN) Security Council must urgently impose a compulsory humanitarian ceasefire on the Myanmar military junta and mandate an immediate, large-scale humanitarian response to the unfolding catastrophe in Myanmar following last week's earthquake, says the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) in a statement on 4 April.

The junta's continuing attacks in earthquake-affected areas and its obstruction of relief efforts are an immediate threat to communities already devastated by the most powerful earthquake to strike Myanmar in over a century. They also constitute an immediate threat to international peace and security, SAC-M says.

The full extent of the devastation is only just beginning to emerge. At least 3,145 people have died, with the toll expected to rise significantly as the rubble is cleared. Hospitals are overwhelmed and shortages of medical supplies, fuel, clean water and shelter continue to hamper relief operations. Thousands are homeless, with aid organisations fearing outbreaks of disease.

Rather than deploying its considerable military resources to assist the disaster response, the junta has obstructed relief and rescue efforts and continued its offensive military operations. Reports indicate that the junta has used roadblocks and onerous registration requirements to obstruct the flow of urgently needed aid and block access to earthquake-hit areas, including Sagaing, a region largely under resistance control. Aid workers have accused junta troops of seizing supplies and funds intended for the relief effort.

Meanwhile, dozens of junta air and artillery attacks have been reported in earthquake-affected areas, including Magway, Bago and Sagaing Regions and Kachin, Karen, Karenni and Shan States, since the earthquake. The National Unity Government (NUG) and its People's Defence Forces and ethnic armies, including the Three Brotherhood Alliance, declared a unilateral ceasefire almost immediately after the earthquake to facilitate an emergency response. However, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing declared that junta military operations would continue and intensified the bombing and shelling. Four days later the junta announced its own 20-day ceasefire, starting on 2 April, but it violated the ceasefire just hours later by carrying out airstrikes in Sagaing and Kachin.

Min Aung Hlaing has since left Myanmar to attend the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical

and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Summit in Bangkok on 4-5 April. No sane, responsible leader would abandon a country during a catastrophe of this magnitude. Leaders of BIMSTEC member states who meet with the junta leader are effectively enabling his criminal behaviour and the suffering it has caused.

The junta's attempts to exploit the earthquake disaster to recover lost territory have already cost lives. Urgent international action is needed to ensure that aid is delivered directly to those most in need and to undermine the junta's ability to use violence to inflict further suffering on the people of Myanmar.

The UN Human Rights Council's adoption of a new consensus resolution on Myanmar yesterday provides a strong basis for immediate UN Security Council action. The resolution "calls upon the Myanmar military and other parties to cease all hostilities and facilitate full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all victims and survivors in all affected regions." The resolution also "calls upon States to...cease the illicit transfer and diversion of arms, munitions and other military equipment to Myanmar."

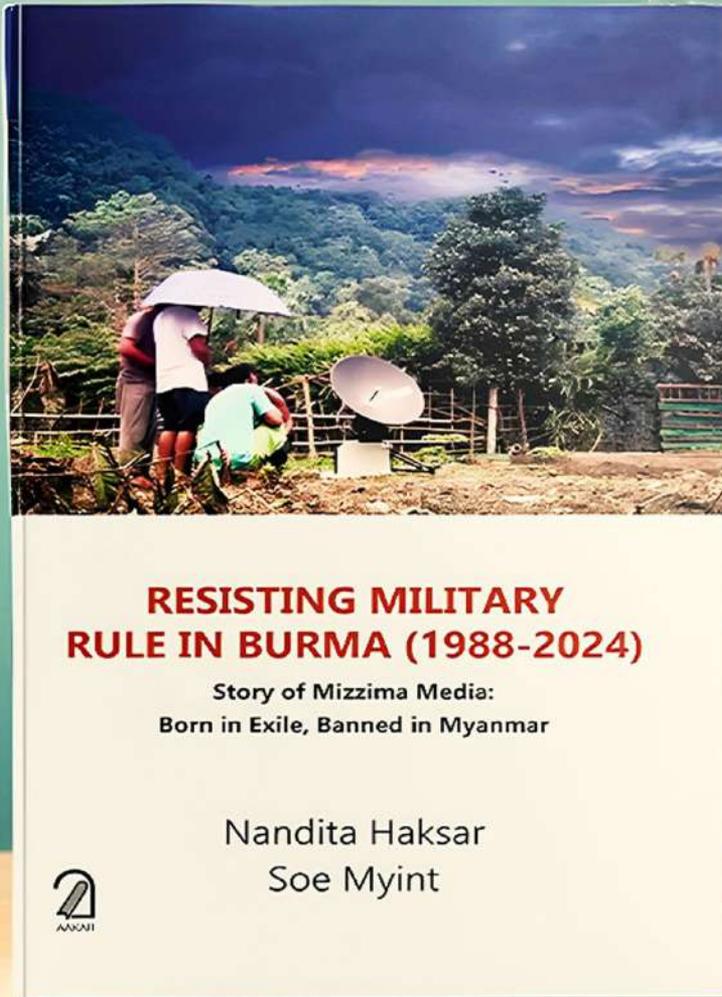
SAC-M calls on the UN Security Council to convene an urgent meeting to adopt a new resolution on the situation in Myanmar in follow-up to UNSCR2669, adopted in 2022. The new text should expand on the language in the Human Rights Council resolution to:

- Call for an immediate compulsory humanitarian ceasefire in Myanmar and include provisions to enforce the junta's compliance with the ceasefire
- Ban the sale, transfer and diversion of arms, munitions and other military equipment to the junta
- Demand that local and international rescue teams be given full and immediate access to all earthquake-affected areas
- Urge ASEAN, UN entities and the international community to urgently deploy humanitarian aid, medical assistance, heavy equipment and relief and rescue teams by land, air and sea, including through cross-border channels, in conjunction with the NUG, ethnic and civil society organisations capable of reaching communities most in need
- Call for scaled-up financial support to Myanmar to bolster rescue, recovery and reconstruction efforts, support newly displaced communities, and to address the broader humanitarian crisis.

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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PROTEST IN BANGKOK WITH 'WE DO NOT WELCOME MURDERER MIN AUNG HLAING' BANNER DISPLAY

During the visit of Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing to Bangkok to attend the BIMSTEC meeting, a protest occurred.

A banner writing "We do not welcome Murderer Min Aung Hlaing" was displayed on the King Taksin Bridge at approximately 8:00 am on 4 April.

Thai news outlets reported that the bridge, where the banner was displayed, is located near the Bangkok Shangri-La Hotel, the venue for the BIMSTEC meeting.

The banner remained displayed for about an hour before Thai authorities removed it.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing arrived at Bangkok's Don Mueang Airport around 4:00 pm on 3 April, to attend the BIMSTEC meeting hosted by Thailand.

The BIMSTEC meeting was held on 4 April.

The leaders of the Bay of Bengal Multilateral Economic and Technological Cooperation (BIMSTEC)

member countries, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka, attended a supplementary meeting.

Dr. Dulyapek Precharesh, Associate Professor at Thammasat University and Chairman of the Regional Studies Group, stated on 2 April that the Myanmar junta leader should not be allowed to attend the BIMSTEC summit in person, but rather participate online.

He also advised Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra to maintain a diplomatic distance from the Myanmar junta leader at the BIMSTEC summit to avoid international criticism.

On 29 March, over 300 civil society organizations issued an open letter calling for action against the junta and their international crimes. They demanded the junta leader be banned from attending the summit and that all junta representatives and their appointees be removed from all BIMSTEC meetings and events.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA CARRIES OUT AERIAL BOMBINGS IN TATUNG TOWNSHIP, MANDALAY REGION, DESPITE CEASEFIRE ANNOUNCEMENT

The military junta's air force bombed Thaetaw village in Taungtha Township, Mandalay Region, despite no active fighting in the area and the declaration of a temporary ceasefire.

The junta declared a 20-day temporary ceasefire from 2 to 22 April, citing compassion for those affected by the earthquake. However, at 2:20 am on 3 April, sources said that fighter jets and paramotors were used to carry out airstrikes.

In the small hours, military paramotors dropped bombs from the air on a school, the Jade Pagoda, and a house. They also fired gunshots at the house, likely believing it housed People's Defence Force (PDF) members. However, there was no fighting, and no PDFs were present. The entire house was destroyed, but the owner, who had gone to his father's house to sleep, was unharmed, a local resident told Mizzima.

The bombs and gunfire caused the roofs of the school to be blown off, damaged the walls of the Jade Pagoda, and led to widespread destruction of the home.

Local residents reported that junta troops fired two heavy weapon rounds at around 9:00 to 10:00 am on 3 April in Sittwe and Kyaukphyu, Rakhine State.

Despite ethnic armed groups and various revolutionary forces declaring ceasefires to support relief and rehabilitation efforts after the earthquake, the junta continues to target civilians.

The junta stated that it will respond if ethnic armed groups and other resistance forces disrupt and cause damage to communication routes used by the public, gather forces, organize, or expand their territory during the ceasefire period.

Local residents claim that it is only the military junta that is currently carrying out one-sided attacks.

"We didn't hear any gunfire from the AA (Arakan Army) side. We heard gunfire yesterday (2 April), and this morning (3 April) we heard two shots. It was the junta army that fired," a military source told Mizzima said.

On 29 March, the day after the earthquake, the National Unity Government (NUG) announced a suspension of all offensive operations, allowing only defensive ones, from 30 March to 12 April.

Similarly, the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) also announced a ceasefire on 1 April, effective from 1 to 30 April, with no offensive operations, although allowing defensive actions in areas where fighting is ongoing with the military regime.

As the public struggled to recover from the 7.7-magnitude earthquake centred in Sagaing City, the junta carried out aerial bombardments on 11 locations, including Chaung-U Township in Sagaing Region and Singu Township in Mandalay Region.

The attacks killed at least 50 civilians and injured 49, according to the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) on 2 April. According to the statement, the figure covers the period from 28 March, the day of the earthquake to 1 April.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA CONDUCTS AIRSTRIKES AT TWO LOCATIONS IN KANI TOWNSHIP FOLLOWING ITS CEASEFIRE ANNOUNCEMENT

Although the junta has declared a temporary ceasefire, they subsequently conducted 11 airstrikes with paramotors on two locations in the southern part of Kani Township, Sagaing Region, at Muttaw village and Taung Pyauk village, according to local residents.

Despite the junta's declaration of a 20-day temporary ceasefire from 2 to 22 April out of claimed compassion for the earthquake-affected populace, the Northwestern Regional Military Command's two paramotors dropped the bombs at 1 pm on 3 April.

"They bombed us for no military reason whatsoever. This is the second time. People were inside bomb shelters, so there were no casualties," a resident of Muttaw village said.

During the incident, the junta forces carried out a total of 11 airstrikes, five times in Muttaw village and six times in Taung Pyauk village. While there were no casualties from exploding bombs, some houses were damaged.

Various ethnic armed organizations and revolutionary forces announced ceasefires to assist with rescue and rehabilitation efforts during the earthquake disaster. While these groups have observed the ceasefire, the junta continues to target civilian areas.

The junta stated that they will respond if ethnic armed groups and other armed groups destroy public communication routes, gather forces, reorganize, or expand territory during the ceasefire.

The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) released a statement on 2 April that following the 7.7 magnitude earthquake centred in Sagaing City, the junta carried out airstrikes on 11 locations, including Chaung-U Township in Sagaing Region and Singu Township in Mandalay Region, resulted in the deaths of at least 50 civilians and injuries to 49 others.

KACHIN INDEPENDENCE ORGANIZATION DECLARES 20-DAY CEASEFIRE



KIA fighters. Photo: AFP

On 2 April, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) announced a ceasefire from 2 to 22 April, following the military council's declaration of a temporary ceasefire.

The KIO said it will halt offensive operations, allowing only defensive actions, said the statement.

The KIO has warned that the junta must also adhere to paragraph 4 of its own statement, which specifies that no attacks shall be carried out during the temporary ceasefire.

The military junta announced on 2 April a 20-day temporary ceasefire, from 2 to 22 April, out of compassion for those affected by the earthquake and to accelerate relief and rehabilitation efforts.

The junta initially rejected ceasefire declarations from the ethnic resistance forces and the National

Unity Government (NUG), stating that attacks would continue.

However, observers believe the junta's subsequent ceasefire announcement was likely influenced by China's request for security guarantees following an incident in which the junta army opened fire on a Chinese Red Cross convoy.

Additionally, the Three Brotherhood Alliance issued a joint statement on 1 April, announcing that offensive operations in conflict zones would be suspended from 1 to 30 April to enable the swift and effective delivery of relief efforts in earthquake-affected areas.



Thai soldiers on patrol in Mae Sot.
Photo: AFP

ASSESSING BORDER SECURITY ON THE THAILAND-MYANMAR LINE

Mr. Rangsiman Rome is the deputy leader of the People's Party in Thailand and the chairperson of the House Committee on National Security, Border Affairs, National Strategy, and National Reform. Mizzima Managing Editor Sein Win recently sat down with him to discuss Thailand-Myanmar border issues.

Mizzima: Thailand has been facing border security challenges with Myanmar. What are the priorities to tackle these issues?

So, we know that the situation in Myanmar is complex. You have civil war for so long. A lot of people from Myanmar, they come to Thailand.

Now, people who live in Thailand from Myanmar could be seven million. Most of them live in Thailand illegally. Some of them live in Thailand legally and have a suffering life in Thailand.

So, we know that a lot of things happen in Myanmar. With this conflict, it creates some opportunity for the Chinese mafia that they can establish some kind of business-like online scams in the border. They want to make a kingdom of their online scam.

They use electricity from Thailand, internet from Thailand. Maybe now it's starting. In the same time, with this business, it creates human trafficking and also have drugs near the Thai-Myanmar border for many decades.

So, yes, we have a lot of problems. But I think what Thailand can do about this is that we need to support the people from Myanmar. We need a democratic way.

So, if Myanmar has stability, has democracy, many things we can solve. Because why does this situation happen? Why do they have a lot of illegal activities? Because no one can do anything about this. And because it's in the Myanmar territory, Thailand cannot solve this problem easily.

So, we need a good partner to work together. So, we have to see that if we want to solve this problem, for the short term, maybe we have to cooperate with the actors who can really have power in that area to solve the problem. But for the long term, we need Myanmar to be a democratic country.

Mizzima: But how to be a democratic country when you have many stakeholders?

So, Thailand can be the safe space to let everyone can talk in Thailand. I really believe that the future of Myanmar must be decided by the people in Myanmar. Because they have many kinds of democracy.

So, people have to decide. It can be a federal state. It can be a state like Thailand.

You can have many ways, but you need the safe space to talk, to share, to discuss, and to make a decision. And I think Thailand can be for that. Thailand can be a facilitator to support Myanmar to return to become a democratic country.

Mizzima: I think we all do agree that Myanmar needs to end the crisis. So, what are Thailand's priorities to help in ending the crisis in Myanmar?

So, Thailand can do many ways. First, we have many people from Myanmar in Thailand.

The first thing that I think Thailand can do is, you know, at least make everyone not live in the shadows. First, we can have a registration. At least people who live in Thailand, we must know who they are.

And then we can talk about the career in Thailand, how to live. And when we know that, we can manage about the healthcare, everything. This is the one thing that we can do.

The second thing that we can do is to support the humanitarian aid in Myanmar. We know that they have IDP camps inside of Myanmar. More than a million people have to live in the camps.

They have a very suffering life. I think Thailand can connect with many countries. Okay, now we know that the US has changed. The policy is not the same as before. But we don't have to rely on just only the US. You know, they still have many countries, many people in this world who care about human life, who care about how people, about the well-being of the people.

So, Thailand can be the connector. You know, we can connect to the international community to support the refugees in Myanmar. And this is one of the things that we can do.

Another thing is, I'm thinking about to have well-being, you just not only need food but also you need

some kind of communication, like the internet. Because now, you don't know when the war will end. But at least the kids, you know, they have to learn something.

They can get maybe education. It's not just like living in fear, but you can do something. So, the internet is important.

And scamming. I know that many NGOs, they use scamming in Myanmar. But the problem about this, the scam compound, they also use scamming to make a crime around the world.

So, I think we can find a solution that we know where is the latitude, longitude of the compound. So, we can stop it. But at the same time, if we have a good partner in Myanmar, who are they? It's like we know your customer, you know, KYC.

We know that if we send the styling to this person, this person, they're not going to use for the scam, but they're going to use for the humanitarian issue. That is fine. So, I think Thailand, you know, we can provide the solution and the mechanism for that.

And I think, I also think that we need the safe space. You have an IDP camp, this should be the safe space for the people. But at the same time, they still have airstrikes.

That is not okay. So, Thailand, we need to find a solution. Okay, maybe we have to talk with the junta in Myanmar.

But, you know, we need the safe space that everyone has to respect. So, I think Thailand can do that. And for long term, I think I know that they have many actors that are involved in this situation.

They have many countries. Some countries are pro the people in power. But everyone has to be at the same table to talk, what is shouldn't do, what is okay.

But one of the rules that I think everyone has to respect is the future of Myanmar. It belongs to their people. So that is how we can solve the problem in Myanmar.

And that is the role of Thailand. There are several million Burmese people living in Thailand, or taking shelter, or different types of... I noticed that there is heightened tension over the issues of Burmese migrants in Thailand.

Mizzima: How can the situation be improved?

So, we receive a lot of refugees from Myanmar, you know.

Some of them are Burmese, some of them are Karen, you know. It's from many groups. So, absolutely, you are talking about the country that maybe have a population of 70 million.

Then you see that your country has 10% of the population that live in Thailand. Absolutely, it's changed. And Thailand is not prepared for that.

We're not ready to receive the high number of migrants from Myanmar. But we know that many people who come from Myanmar, they cannot just back to their country. It's a war there.

You know, if the war happened in my country, maybe I will do the same. So, for me, we need to organise this. We cannot let just let it happen naturally.

We cannot just let it happen like in the shadows. So, if I go to the details, first we need to register all of them. If they are the kids, they must get education.

We have to see, because everyone needs a hospital. You know, somehow, even you have a strong body, doesn't mean that you will not go to a hospital. No.

We need to see that the hospital will be ready or not. And then, absolutely, work. You know, if they don't have work, it means like, how can they live? It can create some crime, you know.

So, work is very important. And I think many companies in Thailand, they are very welcome about that. But we need to manage this, like transparency.

It must be easy to access. And I think we can solve many problems that happen about this. And for the Thai people, they will feel it's better.

I know that by our law, some of like career, the foreign people, they cannot take the job, you know. For example, like haircut they cannot do that. But it's okay to not do.

But maybe you can do another job. We can provide another job that maybe the industrial companies, they need it. So, I think just with transparency, I think many problems we can solve.

And I think the Myanmar people who live in Thailand, they will have well-being.

Mizzima: You stress about the communications with the different stakeholders in Myanmar. And I noticed that in your speech yesterday, you mentioned about the progress in Thai-Myanmar affair over the last year. And now, where are the areas that have seen progress?

So, as you know that the military in Thailand and Myanmar, they are very close. And they are, I mean the government of Thailand, especially the previous government, they really support the SAC. So, they have many sectors that somehow the money from Thailand, it goes to the SAC.

So, after we have a debate in the parliament in the year before, now they create the mechanism like the working group to monitor about this. And the bank, they wake up to see this transaction. Because they are, they say to me clear that they not support any transaction that go to the military purpose, they do not support any transaction that finally the money go to the SAC and use it to buy the weapons and then kill people. They do not support it.

So, I think the transactions from Thailand to the SAC have decreased. So, I hope that the situation is better. But we still need to work harder because I still know that we cannot make it zero percent.

You know, we still have to monitor more. We have to try to find a mechanism more that maybe can develop the situation better. And from my standing point, I do not support any money going to the SAC.

Mizzima: Only this week, Thai authority intercepted the illegal drug trafficking in Mae Sai. How should the illegal drug trafficking be dealt with?

So, we know that this large drug production is on an industrial scale, we know it. And actually, we know what are the groups that are involved with this kind of business. So, we need to find a solution and we cannot just rely on the SAC.

But we need to talk to some countries who are maybe behind this group. You know, we need to talk to them because that country, they have a lot of benefits in Thailand. So, we can deal with it.

Absolutely, it's very hard that we can deal with that group directly, but we can deal with the country

who have influence on that group. And I think maybe the situation can improve. But however, the group that involved with the drug, for example, like the WA, they are, they have like a military base that is in our territory.

I think this is my job that I have to deal with my government to make sure that we are, we send the signal clear that to cross our border is something that unacceptable. And the Thai people, they will not accept something like this, some aggressive actions like this. So, I think we have to deal with them.

And for the long term, to stop the illicit drugs, we need many countries to work together. We need China, we need India, we need to control some chemicals that are used to produce the illicit drugs. But in the same time, we have to make sure that any country will support the Wa group too.

Mizzima: Is drug production in Myanmar increasing?

Yes, it is increasing. A lot. And compared to before the coup and after the coup? I think after the coup, maybe it's more, after the coup, it's more.

I think because maybe when it's more war they need more money and more money is more weapons. Right. So, but I understand that we have a lot of corruption in Thailand too.

So, when we want to solve the problem like illicit drugs, we have many factors that we have to take care of.

Mizzima: You have border issues when it comes to the online scams. How do you view the cracking down against the online scams in Myanmar?

I think from Thailand's perspective, it's a good step. This is the first step that we can, I can say that we achieved it. But it's not enough. Let's say that you have a headache, you take Paracetamol, you feel better, but you may have a headache again.

So, we don't really solve the root of the problem. They are organised crime. They have many people who are involved with that.

But what we can arrest is just the workers. What we can arrest is just the victims of the human trafficking. The organised crime, they still there somewhere.

So, if we want to solve this problem we have to do more. We have to work with many countries. You know,

China, they must know their people, right? And many people are from China.

They are the mafia. I believe that China must have the names, you know. What we have to do is we have to hunt them.

We have to find where they live, how many foreign nationals they have, how many nationalities that they have, how many passport that they have. We have to find them, and we need to arrest them. But in the same time, we have to look at our infrastructure.

Because in our system, we have a problem too. For example, our banking is really easy to register. So, somehow, maybe it creates opportunity for the scammer or even the SIM card.

I know that we have the protocol that every SIM card has to register. But sometimes, you know, they can pay money for the people to register SIM card and then they sell it for their illegal business. So, we have to look at our system, how to make sure that our system is good enough.

So, we have a lot of things to do. But I have to say that what, I mean, the crackdown that happened in Myawaddy is still not enough. I heard that now they are building the new compound, maybe deeper in Myanmar.

So, now it's just getting better, but it's not enough to say that the scam compounds have gone.

Mizzima: Military conscription in Myanmar is a hot topic, and many young people flee the country to avoid conscription. And Thailand is the top priority for their safety. But some of them, unfortunately, were arrested and being sent back to Myanmar into the hands of the SAC. And, you know, they are conscripted there and then sent to the front line. So, what can Thailand be able to do to help those Myanmar citizens who flee from conscription?

Absolutely, we cannot stop the conscription law. It's not in our power to do that. And we cannot help them to flee to Thailand. But at the same time, Thailand cannot support this matter.

We cannot support the conscription law, and we cannot support, to return the Myanmar people back to Myanmar. Because if they're sent back to Myanmar, it

means that they will be forced to join the military, and the war will never end.

So, I think what Thailand should do is, okay, we support democracy.

We support human rights. So, we hope that the war in Myanmar will end soon. So, when people flee from Myanmar to Thailand, whatever the reason, for me, I think if they're already in Thailand, what we have to do is manage this.

We need to register them. We shouldn't let them live in the shadows and work illegally, you know, because when they live in Thailand, they need money. They need to spend money, and how they can always have money.

Somehow, it can be some crime maybe happens. So, when they're already in Thailand, I think we need to manage how they live in Thailand. But my point is if we know that they live in Thailand, we cannot send them back.

You know, if we send them back, the war will not end, and I think that is my standpoint.

Mizzima: Let me shift to the ASEAN, and what should ASEAN do to help to end the crisis in Myanmar?

First, I think we still need to continue to fight to solve the crisis. Ceasefire is the priority.

It should be, I mean, to kill especially the innocent people must be stopped. Second thing, ASEAN can support Thailand because we know that the situation in Myanmar, they have many stakeholders, and they have some superpowers involved with this. So, I think if Thailand wants to be like a facilitator, I think we need strength, and ASEAN is really important to support this.

And I think ASEAN still needs to keep pressure on the Myanmar junta. They are in power because of the coup, and the coup is something that we cannot accept. Any country, we don't have to talk about the name of the country.

We just talk about, you know, the coup. Where, where, where in this world that the law says the coup is fine, right? No. So, the coup is something that is totally wrong, and we should support Myanmar to go back to the democratic way.

But to go back to the democratic way shouldn't be just like you can have the election in this time because there is not transparency. So, I think for ASEAN, ASEAN has to be clear about this, that the SAC will never be welcome. So, and then with Thailand, Thailand can use the connection that Thailand has to talk to everyone.

Okay, we cannot have the SAC sit at the same table. I don't think it's going to work, but at least Thailand can create some room that many groups can be here and talk about the future, and then Thailand can maybe pass the message, talk with the SAC. Sometimes the SAC, they must think that what is the best for the people, and they have to think really carefully about what they are doing now and whether it is really good for the people.

It really makes the country move forward. I think this Thailand can do.

Mizzima: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Well, I just hope that the situation in Myanmar will be improved soon.

I know it's really hard, but I hope that it's getting better. I feel sad every time when I heard that people getting to lose their home, get killed, or the kid, the kid is like they lost their education, they have to flee Thailand. You know, I have a kid, and I don't want to see my kid to be in a situation like that.

And I know that a lot of kids, they get a suffering life in Myanmar, and maybe if they live in Thailand, they get a suffering life. So, I hope that your country will have peace, and enough of war, and look forward to the future of Myanmar. And I really believe that if Myanmar does not have war with the resources that you have in your country, I believe people in Myanmar will have a bright future.

So, I just hope that everything will be fine.



FORMER THAI FOREIGN MINISTER DISCUSSES THAILAND-MYANMAR AFFAIRS IN WAKE OF THE COUP

Mr. Kaset Piromya is a former Foreign Minister of Thailand and a former ambassador. He worked as a Foreign Minister from 2008 to 2011. In this interview with Mizzima Managing Editor Sein Win, Kaset Piromya discusses Thailand-Myanmar affairs.

Mizzima: First of all, I want to start with the Thai-Burma relationship, particularly after the military coup. Now we are in the fifth year of the military coup in Naypyidaw. So how does the coup in Naypyidaw affect Thailand? What are the issues that are coming out as a consequence of the military coup in Naypyidaw to Thailand?

I think the first point is that it denies the relationship between two democratic countries with the coup d'etat.

So, it makes the bilateral relationship a bit difficult. One military regime, the other one democratic or a semi-democratic one. So, in that sense, it is difficult to perceive the meeting of the minds because of the different political regimes.

I think that's the first point. Second, I think in the ASEAN Charter, besides our respective commitments to the treaties, conventions, and the spirit and so on of the United Nations about political freedom, economic,

social freedom, and so on, as well as spirit and letters of the ASEAN Charter which mentions about the world human rights and democracy, but for Burma to turn from a democratic entity to a military one, that poses a lot of difficulty. And it's detrimental not only to the aspirations of the Myanmar citizens, the people, but also to the common endeavours of both Myanmar and Thailand as members of the ASEAN community and as members of the United Nations.

That's the first point. The second point, the coup d'etat once made, and since then four years, the process of the coup d'etat has not been completed, not finalised. Which means that the Tatmadaw or the military establishment of Myanmar has not been able to put its rule and control over the whole of Myanmar.

Because most of the citizens of Myanmar were against the coup d'etat, but not only against the coup d'etat in terms of rallies and protests, but they all have taken arms, and eventually the resistance has led Myanmar into a state of a civil war, a serious one, which led to the deprivation of the ordinary life of the people, to the internal displacement, and also to the outflow of refugees into neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, India, to China, and particularly to Thailand and to a lesser extent to Malaysia.

So, what did happen in Myanmar has a spillover effect on the neighbouring countries, especially in Thailand. In terms of, I think, cross-border disease, environmental effects, migration, illegal activities including arms smuggling, drug trade, and people smuggling, and so on.

Because inside Myanmar for the past four years, there has not been any viable authority to administer the country. The country has been boiled down in military fighting and all of that, and so on. And it makes the normal relationship, the betterment of the livelihood of the people on both sides of the two countries, become so negative indeed.

And instead of also working together, either on the Mekong Basin development or within the ASEAN context, the two countries could not pursue that, I think, expected cooperation, because both sides have to try to overcome the immediate negative effects of the good data. So, it has denied a lot of possibilities, and so on. And it has been costly to both countries, you know, that attention would have to go to the caring of the refugees, management of the workers, migrant workers, to the fight over various types of cross-border criminal activities, and so on.

And on the Myanmar side, it is not in the position to administer the country. And Thailand has to go out and do it alone, more or less, because there is no proper counterpart on the Myanmar side. Whatever happens, the major changes in the Myanmar side have an impact, and an impact with respect to issues in Thailand.

There are also consequences. And when it comes to the border security, I think that Thailand has a concern a lot on the border security and the border management.

Mizzima: So how should Thailand deal to tackle all these issues?

I think at this point in time, if I were to be in the government, I would do three things at the same time.

One is to speak directly to the military government, to the Tatmadaw, in which area along the Thai-Myanmar border that we can have cooperation. Maybe

in the southern part of the eastern side of Myanmar. You know, from the Thai side is Kanchanaburi province, where the Tatmadaw has a sort of control, and so on.

Then we work together to ensure, I think, harmony across the border. Then you move further up towards the Mon control area, then to the Karen, to the Karenni, to the Shan, and so on. Then in that sense, the Thai government would have to speak to the ethnic governments, and not to the Tatmadaw, because the Tatmadaw is not in control of all of these areas where the ethnic governments are in control.

So, second, I think, a set of negotiations between the Thai side and the various minority governments. And then the third group would be the NUG, the National Unity Government, to speak to them, and so on, to see what we can do together. So, in short, Thailand has to speak simultaneously with the Tatmadaw, with the ethnic governments, and with the NUG.

If I were to be in the government, I would do that in order to try to work together as much as possible to look after the refugees, to work together to overcome illegal activities, and so on, and to facilitate cross-border cooperation, such as trade, such as a proper system for migrant workers, and so on. I think normal trade, normal border trade between Thailand and Myanmar has disruptions. And a lot due to the war in the Myanmar side.

Mizzima: So, Thailand is trying to avoid land crossing and trade routes using maritime, which took longer for the business people, ending the border. Any solution would be, any other alternative solution?

I think the first one is to try to bring about a ceasefire and a peace negotiation. Okay, the bigger picture, maybe in the middle term and the long term.

For the immediate one, as I mentioned to you, if we can go down to the Kanchanaburi side, southern Thailand, then that's where the junta, the Thailand has the control. Then we could, I think, expand the proper border trade. So, trucks could move from Thailand to carry goods and vice versa, from Myanmar back to Thailand.

So, you have to find areas where a proper trade route transportation could be established. In certain areas being, I think, under the control of the Karens or the Karenni or the Shan, one could indicate and work together to facilitate cross-border trade. Okay, then the third point is to work together with the Mon government, with the Karenni, the Shan.

What type of, I think, sort of social activities that we could do together in terms of health services, electricity supply, water supply, and so on. So, one has to sit down and work together and try to find ways and means that we could work together. I think this is something that we need to do on both sides.

And whatever the Thai government were going to do with the Mon, the Karenni or the Shan, it has to keep both the Tatmadaw as well as the NUG informed in order to ensure transparency and confidence building measure. Nothing will be done under the table without the acknowledgement or the knowledge of the Tatmadaw as well as the NUG. And the whole purpose is about trying to make what you call the situation more stable, more peaceful, and so on.

Mizzima: There are millions of Burmese taking shelter or working in Thailand or living in Thailand. But the recent development that we Burmese are concerned about is deportation back to Myanmar. One Thai authority, they arrest undocumented or overstayed Burmese people, including migrant workers, and send them back to Myanmar, particularly in the hands of the SAC. What happened?

In the majority, they are the youth, the young people. Tatmadaw needs confessions. They are trapping them and sending the youth to the combat zone.

I think there are three groups of Myanmar people coming across to Thailand. One is about 90,000 that are put into the nine refugee camps. I think they have been here for three or four decades.

So that's one group of refugees, a permanent group of refugees. Second are the groups of refugees that go back and forth according to the fighting inside Myanmar. Then that has to be looked after.

Third are the migrant workers that need to have a system for them to come to Thailand and go and work in Thailand. Fourth group is the political asylum seekers, those who have to flee from the military government and all the fighting and so on. So there must be four.

Mizzima: Among these four groups, how should Thailand act?

Then it is incumbent upon the Thai government to act according to the international laws, norms, practises, to consider about human rights and so on. The Thai government has not only to shoulder everything by itself. It could work very closely with the various agencies of the United Nations.

At the same time, it could seek assistance and support from friendly countries such as China, Japan, Australia, members of the European Union, the United States, Canada, and so on. So, the Thai government needs to sit down and make plans and so on in a proper manner. Today, Thailand is a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council based in Geneva.

As a member of the Human Rights Council, Thailand must act according to the international law, norms, and practice. So, sending political asylum seekers back to Myanmar into the hands of the Tatmadaw is inhuman against humanitarian law, against international law. And I, as a Thai citizen, do condemn this practice of the Thai government.

I am against it, and I will keep on fighting for the Thai government not to carry out this inhuman act. And the international community must come in to pressure the Thai government to act accordingly.

Mizzima: I have a question with regards to the ASEAN. You are a board member of APHR. Some critics are saying that the ASEAN principle, which is based on non-interference policy, is the weakest way to tackle the issues with regards to Myanmar. Is that true?

I am against the principle of non-interference as far as the situation inside the ASEAN community is concerned. Because Myanmar and Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and so on, are members of the ASEAN

community. So, we are an ASEAN family. And if a member has a problem, in this case, Myanmar has a lot of problems.

So, the rest of the ASEAN family members must go and help Myanmar. That is not interference. That is family members helping one another, mutual assistance, because a member of Myanmar is in trouble.

And in reality, ASEAN has the five-point consensus. And the five-point consensus was being reached and agreed upon three years ago with the presence of the leaders from the Tatmadaw, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. So, the ten members of ASEAN came together and agreed on the five-point consensus of principle to bring back peace and democracy to Myanmar.

So, it was a collective undertaking, a collective decision-making, so that is not interference. So, we have to help each other because we are an ASEAN family as much as possible. But it's not only Thailand or Malaysia that should help Myanmar.

The military authority of Myanmar also has to help itself and try to reach out to the NUG, try to reach out to the various ethnic governments, whether the Chin, the Kachin, the Arakan, the Shan, the Karen, the Karenni, the Mons, and so on. It's about time now that the Myanmar military authority comes to the realisation that the coup d'état was a failure and they cannot use military means to suppress the rest. They are more on the losing side.

At the moment they only control about 40% of the land area. They have no control whatsoever on all the areas along the Myanmar borders with Bangladesh, with India, with China, with Laos, and Thailand. So, they are not in control.

They have to realise that they are more on the retreat. They have been defeated. So, it's about time they recognise this reality and come to the negotiating table.

ASEAN's five-point consensus doesn't work out. And I think ASEAN is lacking a comprehensive strategy when it comes to Myanmar. Because ASEAN chairmanship, year by year, working differently, is up

and down.

Mizzima: So what do you think?

It's normal for any organisation to have differences. There could be ups and downs. Every regional organisation, you look at the European Union and other regional organisations around the world, it has problems.

But problems are the reality in life. And the leaders have to try to work together to overcome the problem. Now the chair of ASEAN is the Malaysian Prime Minister, Mr. Anwar Ibrahim.

So, it is his duty to try to bring the various ASEAN members together and to review the situation and try to find a consensus. So, he has the ability, he has the political experience to do so. So, he has to keep on trying to overcome the differences and to find a common consensus among the ASEAN.

He keeps on trying it. But this is not a fait accompli. It's not already ended that everyone is going a different way.

No, there could still be the possibility of everyone coming together and work together for the common benefit of ASEAN as a whole.

Mizzima: You mean the Malaysian Prime Minister, Mr. Ibrahim, should himself talk to all stakeholders?

Of course, he is the chair. And we have a five-point consensus.

And then he has to accept the reality that there are three parties, major players in Myanmar, the Tatmadaw, the NUG, and all the ethnic minorities group put together as one. So, three parties. The three have to speak to one another.

Mr. Anwar Ibrahim has to speak to the three of them.

MALAYSIA AND ITS CONCERNS ABOUT THE MYANMAR CRISIS

Mr. Wong Chen is a member of a parliamentary committee on Malaysian foreign affairs. The following is a recent interview with him conducted by Mizzima Managing Editor Sein Win on Myanmar affairs.

Mizzima: I want to start with the ASEAN's five-point consensus. Critics say it doesn't work out at all, even though it has been laid down for more than three years already. What is the issue with the ASEAN, when it comes to dealing with the Myanmar political issues?

The primary issue is that in the ASEAN, we have a culture of non-interference. Some of the ASEAN country members, I don't want to name them, but you probably know who, are a bit sympathetic towards the junta.

Some are more vocal. When we don't have a united front on this issue, even though the five-point consensus was made by us, its implementation needs a lot of work. We're not sure exactly when the chair is in charge, were they really doing their job 100% or were they not doing their job.

All we know is that now it's under Malaysia's chairmanship. We will push this agenda, of course, and we'll try our best using our envoy. But I think we need to go beyond the five-point consensus.

We really need to start talking directly to the rebels, to NUG (National Unity Government), to all the factions, and then also at the same time to also approach the Tatmadaw for a dialogue, so that if we can bring everybody on board, they don't have to agree, but just getting them in the room together, I think it's going to override the five-point consensus quite easily.

Mizzima: The Myanmar junta is pushing for the elections, their own plan of elections. But ASEAN told them, I think, recently, that hold the election later, the first is the peace and not violence. But it doesn't, for the

Myanmar junta, they don't seem listening.

Well, it's quite simple. If you don't control a big portion of the country, how can you have an election? And if you have an election, will you allow the political parties that were overthrown, are they allowed to stand in the election? Because ultimately, it has to be a free and fair election, but even from the physical side, if you only control 30-40% of the land, how can you claim to have an election, unless you're talking about local government election, not the federal election, right? So, I think, realistically, if you want ASEAN countries to recognise this election result, I think it will be very, very, very difficult.

I mean, I don't speak for my government, but I think nobody would believe that this is an election that is free and fair, or also representative of a nation, because by virtue of it being in very small pockets of the area only. Myanmar is also the centre point for the geopolitical issues, when it comes to the power, major power players.

Mizzima: Now, the junta, they bring Russia, they have a plan to build a nuclear power plant.

What do you think?

Well, I think ASEAN, we have a nuclear-free zone for weapons. That one is ASEAN standard. We don't have one plan for nuclear-energy-free zone, but historically, none of us are pursuing that.

I mean, some countries have stated that they want to have nuclear power or energy power, but nobody has fully committed to the idea. Because in the West, to fight climate change, some countries have started propagating this idea that we need nuclear power. So, to me, this idea of Russia trying to assist the Myanmar junta to build a nuclear power plant cannot be a right solution, because, number one, Myanmar has oil and gas, right? So, why do you need nuclear power when you have that kind of energy available? Number two,

you cannot build a nuclear power in a conflict zone.

It's so dangerous. It's not dangerous to Myanmar alone, to all the neighbours, including Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, even China, and Thailand for sure. So, I don't think ASEAN wants to be put in that position.

So, we will need to sit down and think about this properly, and send a message to the Russians, and say that this is not a good idea.

Mizzima: Due to civil war in Myanmar, and the millions of people are displaced, and also many people migrated to the neighbouring country, especially to Thailand, and a lesser extent to Malaysia. But recent developments, which concerns the Burmese migrants in Malaysia, because undocumented or overstayed Burmese migrants are arrested and sent back into the hands of the SAC.

Mostly they are youths, and they are sent to the combat zone, and some of them are killed. Well, the unfortunate truth is that, like Thailand, when they overstay, they break the law, immigration law. So, the immediate reaction from government officials, civil services, is to catch them and send them back.

I think we need to be more cognisant to this idea that they are trying to evade war, and sending them back means that they get conscripted and fight, and possibly die or get injured in the war theatre. So, we need to be a bit more softer in our approach, and to talk about refugee rights. Even though Malaysia has not signed the Refugee Convention, I think we need to be better.

I can't commit anything, because these are powers of the government. We as lawmakers, as members of parliament, we can advise on policy, and we can try to pressure. In particular myself, because I'm human rights chairman for APHR Malaysia.

So, we make our point clear to the government. That's all we can do. But we definitely do not encourage young Myanmar people to overstay in Malaysia.

I think it's dangerous, it's not a good thing, because the current government policy is to, you know, you break immigration law, we send you back. The government does not take into consideration what happens to them, which is unfortunate. So, we're trying to also educate and explain to the authorities.

But at the moment, please, don't spend a lot of money, make an attempt to come to Malaysia. Then when your visa expires, they send you back. It seems to be a bit cruel to themselves physically and financially.

I think you have the same issues in Thailand, but they are probably a bit more considerate, after all, you are neighbours. In Malaysia, we have a lot of Myanmar people, including Rohingyas, working in the community. I think the population in Malaysia, they're a bit tired of the situation.

So, they're less caring, I would say. They're less sympathetic. In countries where there's not a lot, they still have that openness.

For instance, the Philippines have probably no Myanmar (migrants), so they can probably take some in. I would advise, if you are evading conscription, and you have every right to, look for other countries where refugee status is given to people avoiding this kind of thing.



US President Donald Trump.
Photo: AFP

TRUMP'S GLOBAL TARIFF TAKES EFFECT IN DRAMATIC US TRADE SHIFT

US President Donald Trump's widest-ranging tariffs to date took effect Saturday, in a move which could trigger retaliation and escalating trade tensions that could upset the global economy.

A 10 percent "baseline" tariff came into place past midnight, hitting most US imports except goods from Mexico and Canada as Trump invoked emergency economic powers to address perceived problems with the country's trade deficits.

The trade gaps, said the White House, were driven by an "absence of reciprocity" in relationships and other policies like "exorbitant value-added taxes."

Come April 9, around 60 trading partners -- including the European Union, Japan and China -- are set to face even higher rates tailored to each economy.

Already, Trump's sharp 34-percent tariff on Chinese goods, set to kick in next week, triggered Beijing's announcement of its own 34-percent tariff on US products from April 10.

Beijing also said it would sue the United States at the World Trade Organization and restrict export of rare earth elements used in high-end medical and electronics technology.

But other major trading partners held back as they digested the unfolding international standoff and fears of a recession.

Trump warned Friday on social media that "China played it wrong," saying this was something "they cannot afford to do."

Markets collapse

Wall Street went into freefall Friday, following similar collapses in Asia and Europe.

Economists have also warned that the tariffs could dampen growth and fuel inflation.

But Trump said on his Truth Social platform that his "policies will never change."

Trump's latest tariffs have notable exclusions, however.

They do not stack on recently-imposed 25-percent tariffs hitting imports of steel, aluminum and automobiles.

Also temporarily spared are copper, pharmaceuticals, semiconductors and lumber, alongside "certain critical minerals" and energy products, the White House said.

But Trump has ordered investigations into copper and lumber, which could lead to further duties soon.

He has threatened to hit other industries like pharmaceuticals and semiconductors as well, meaning any reprieve might be limited.

Canada and Mexico are unaffected as they face separate duties of up to 25 percent on goods entering the United States outside a North America trade agreement.

Retaliation risk

While Trump's staggered deadlines allow space for countries to negotiate, "if they can't get a reprieve, they are likely to retaliate, as China already has," Oxford Economics warned this week.

EU trade chief Maros Sefcovic said the bloc, which faces a 20-percent tariff, will act in "a calm, carefully phased, unified way" and allow time for talks.

But he said it "won't stand idly by."

France and Germany have said the EU could respond by imposing a tax on US tech companies.

Japan's prime minister called for a "calm-headed" approach after Trump unveiled 24-percent tariffs on Japanese-made goods.

Meanwhile, Trump said he held a "very productive" call with Vietnam's top leader, with imports from the Southeast Asian manufacturing hub facing extraordinary 46-percent US duties.

Since returning to the presidency, Trump has hit Canada and Mexico imports with tariffs over illegal immigration and fentanyl, and imposed an additional 20-percent rate on goods from China. Come April 9, the added levy on Chinese products this year reaches 54 percent.

Trump's 25-percent auto tariffs also took effect this week, and Jeep-owner Stellantis paused production at some Canadian and Mexican assembly plants.

Trump's new global levies mark "the most sweeping tariff hike since the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, the 1930 law best remembered for triggering a global trade war and deepening the Great Depression," said the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Oxford Economics estimates the action will push the average effective US tariff rate to 24 percent, "higher even than those seen in the 1930s."

AFP



CRACKS IN THE SYSTEM

"It's going to take days, if not weeks, to really get a full picture on how devastating this initial earthquake was, let alone these aftershocks that were expected," Michael Martin said, speaking to the Insight Myanmar Podcast.

In the wake of a devastating 7.7 magnitude earthquake that struck central Myanmar, followed by a significant aftershock of 5.5, the country now faces a humanitarian catastrophe of massive proportions. The earthquake's impact extended across borders, with tremors felt in Thailand and Vietnam, but Myanmar bore the brunt of the destruction, particularly along the central corridor from Yangon to Mandalay, including key areas such as Naypyidaw, Magway, and Bago. Michael Martin, a seasoned analyst and adjunct fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, joins the podcast to give a sobering assessment of the crisis and its far-reaching implications.

The disaster comes at a time when Myanmar is engulfed in conflict and political instability, which had already severely compromised the country's infrastructure. The earthquake has only exacerbated the situation, rendering major highways and bridges completely unusable. As a result, Martin says that accurate, comprehensive data about the scope of the catastrophe remains scarce, but as expected, preliminary reports indicate widespread devastation. In Sagaing and other areas, as many as 80% of structures have collapsed. Fortunately, it appears that some regions such as Chin State and the Rohingya camps in Bangladesh have been spared significant damage

due to their geographical insulation by surrounding mountains.

The conflict has also splintered the country into zones of control held by various groups: the military junta (SAC), ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), and allied People's Defense Forces (PDFs). This fragmentation makes coordinated disaster relief extremely difficult. Some areas are fully inaccessible to the regime, while others are under firm EAO control. In this environment, aid delivery becomes a logistical and political puzzle, with no single authority capable of orchestrating a national response.

Martin explains how aid delivery is further complicated by the fact that international humanitarian organizations—in particular, the International Red Cross—have traditionally insisted on engaging only with what they determine to be recognized governments. In Myanmar, they have defined this as working strictly with the SAC, which many Burmese rightly perceive as implicitly endorsing the junta. What is worse, the Myanmar Red Cross is known to be close to the SAC and senior military leaders. These political affiliations of so-called humanitarian organizations unfortunately undermine the sense of neutrality regarding any aid delivered through traditional channels.

And Martin emphasizes that there is good reason to view partnering with SAC as extremely problematic. Historically, the military has shown little interest or ability in functioning as a relief agency; instead, they focus on security and logistical control, which enables them to more easily either siphon off aid in blatant corruption, divert it to supply its troops, or withhold it from areas perceived as hostile, weaponizing it as a tool of control and punishment. In other words, Martin believes that the SAC views incoming aid not as humanitarian relief for the benefit of the citizenry (much of whom it has been attacking for the last four years), but rather as a way to benefit itself. Any aid that does not serve this purpose or that they cannot control may be blocked, delayed, or redirected, particularly if it's destined for regions under opposition control.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or catch the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/3/31/episode-235-cracks-in-the-system>



Photo: AFP

20 GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS DAMAGED IN NAYPYIDAW AS JUNTA PRIORITIZES ADMINISTRATION OVER EARTHQUAKE RELIEF

According to junta records, 20 government department buildings in Naypyidaw were damaged by the recent earthquake, while critics said the junta is more focused on restoring its administrative machinery than ensuring safety for victims, including its own staff.

Junta Naypyidaw Council member Colonel Ye Moe told a junta-affiliated Telegram channel that over 2,800 structures across Naypyidaw's eight townships were damaged, including these government facilities. However, he did not specify which ministries were affected.

The junta's official casualty count for Naypyidaw alone stands at 661 dead, 857 injured, and 9 missing. The damaged structures include approximately 1,000 homes, 150 monasteries, 39 schools, 1 bridge, 290 pagodas, and over 280 other buildings.

Rescue operations in Naypyidaw have been supported by teams from China, India, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Turkey, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, and UAE. These teams conducted searches at 145 locations, rescuing 149 survivors and recovering 198 bodies.

Some high-ranking officials suffered injuries during the earthquake. A photograph taken after a meeting between the junta's Foreign Affairs Minister and Tom Fletcher, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, revealed a senior official of the Myanmar Foreign Affairs Ministry with a leg injury. The Foreign Ministry building was also damaged, forcing meetings to be held outdoors.

Critics accuse the military junta of using the earthquake disaster to seek international legitimacy and acceptance since its 2021 coup.



Indaw Police Station.
Photo: Supplied

SOCIAL MEDIA USERS CELEBRATE RESISTANCE FORCES' CAPTURE OF JUNTA'S LAST STRONGHOLD IN SAGAING'S INDAW TOWN

Social media erupted with jubilant responses after allied resistance forces captured the Myanmar junta's final stronghold in Indaw Town, Sagaing Region.

According to a statement from the opposition National Unity Government's (NUG) Ministry of Defense, resistance forces successfully seized the junta's Japan Cave base on April 7, forcing the commander of the Light Infantry Division (LID) 77 and his troops to flee.

The NUG's Ministry of Defense reported that the battle for Indaw Town had been ongoing for eight months, beginning in August last year, making it one of the longest sustained military operations in the Spring Revolution.

During the offensive, resistance forces captured significant weaponry including two howitzers, two 120mm mortars, and large quantities of small arms and ammunition from the junta's base.

The coordinated attack involved multiple resistance forces including NUG troops, the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), a special column of the

Kachin Independence Army's (KIA) Brigade 9, and other allied resistance groups.

Facebook users responded enthusiastically to the news, though some expressed confusion about previous reports. One user questioned: "I thought there was a temporary ceasefire due to the earthquake. What happened?"

Many comments expressed support for the resistance forces, with one user writing: "May the resistance forces be safe. May they defeat the brutal military council (junta)."

Another user criticized the junta's continued airstrikes during the recent earthquake disaster, "Even during the earthquake disaster, the military council conducted airstrikes against civilians across the country. May they be defeated."

Some comments took a more sarcastic tone, with one user remarking: "Min Aung Hlaing [junta chief] is just donating territory as a gift for the Myanmar New Year."

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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.