

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

A photograph of Min Aung Hlaing, the leader of the Myanmar military junta, in a green military uniform with numerous medals and insignia. He is standing in a hospital setting, with other people and medical equipment visible in the background. The background is slightly out of focus, showing people in various attire, some in military uniforms, and medical supplies like a cart with a pink bag labeled 'Medicine for'.

OUT OF HIS DEPTH
Junta leader calls for help
in wake of disaster but
bombs his people

SPECIAL EARTHQUAKE REPORT

● Min Aung Hlaing visits hospital in Naypyidaw

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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.

DÉJÀ VU IN MYANMAR

As Myanmar struggles to tackle the outcome of the 28 March 7.7 magnitude earthquake that has caused widespread devastation, resulting in significant loss of life and infrastructure damage, how will the military regime handle the crisis?

Have we been here before? What happened in the wake of the 2008 Cyclone Nargis or the 2023 Cyclone Mocha? The reigning military junta got in the way.

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has publicly called for international help. But it is unclear whether the junta will allow the free flow of aid to those in need – both in junta-held and non-junta-held regions.

The disaster has further worsened the country's existing humanitarian crisis, presenting several key challenges for aid delivery.

Myanmar's military junta maintains stringent control over aid distribution, often limiting access to regions outside their authority. This centralization can lead to aid being withheld from opposition-held areas, hindering impartial relief efforts. The junta's reluctance to allow foreign assistance further complicates the situation.

The country's division among various resistance forces and ethnic militias creates a fragmented control environment. This fragmentation makes coordination among aid organizations challenging and can lead to delays in reaching affected populations. Additionally, the military's interference with communication channels, including money transfer systems, hampers the flow of information and resources.

The earthquake caused extensive damage to critical infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and hospitals, particularly in Mandalay and Naypyidaw. Collapsed structures and disrupted transportation

networks impede the delivery of aid and the ability of rescue teams to access affected areas.

Hospitals in affected regions are overwhelmed with casualties, operating beyond capacity, and struggling to provide adequate care. The destruction of medical facilities further exacerbates the healthcare crisis, leaving many without essential medical services, some patients being cared for on the street.

The ongoing civil conflict poses significant risks to aid workers, who may face safety threats from various armed groups. These risks deter international organizations from deploying personnel, relying instead on local organizations that may lack the necessary resources and capacity.

The presence of multiple aid organizations, each with its own objectives and operating procedures, can lead to coordination challenges. Ensuring that aid reaches those most in need requires effective collaboration among international agencies, local organizations, and community leaders.

Addressing these challenges necessitates a multifaceted approach that includes negotiating access with various stakeholders, leveraging local networks to navigate political and logistical barriers, and ensuring that aid distribution is equitable and reaches all affected populations.

The UN and international donors should be allowed to work with the local administrations to deliver aid to those in need. The Myanmar junta should not be allowed to control the flow of aid. By doing so, it could use this serious disaster to tighten its hold on power and the suffering of its opponents among the people of Myanmar.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of Myanmar junta leader at a hospital in Naypyidaw in the wake of the quake by AFP





Many religious buildings have been destroyed but it is the loss of houses and schools and the death toll that really matter. Photo: AFP

OUT OF HIS DEPTH JUNTA CHIEF CALLS FOR HELP IN WAKE OF DISASTER BUT BOMBS HIS PEOPLE

Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing appears out of his depth as he calls for international aid following the devastating 7.7 magnitude earthquake on 28 March and at the same time continues to allow his armed forces to launch airstrikes against the people of Myanmar.

As he wandered on the weekend through the courtyard of a hospital in the Myanmar capital Naypyidaw, crowded with patients and medical staff after they fled the building, he looked at a loss as to what to do. It didn't help that his own house in Naypyidaw was also reportedly damaged in the quake – not a good omen.

Min Aung Hlaing is at war with his people but he is trying to put on a responsible face by calling for aid as the gravity of this natural disaster sinks in.

As of going to press, six days after the quake, over 3,085 are reported killed and 4,715 injured in the worst earthquake in the modern history of Myanmar.

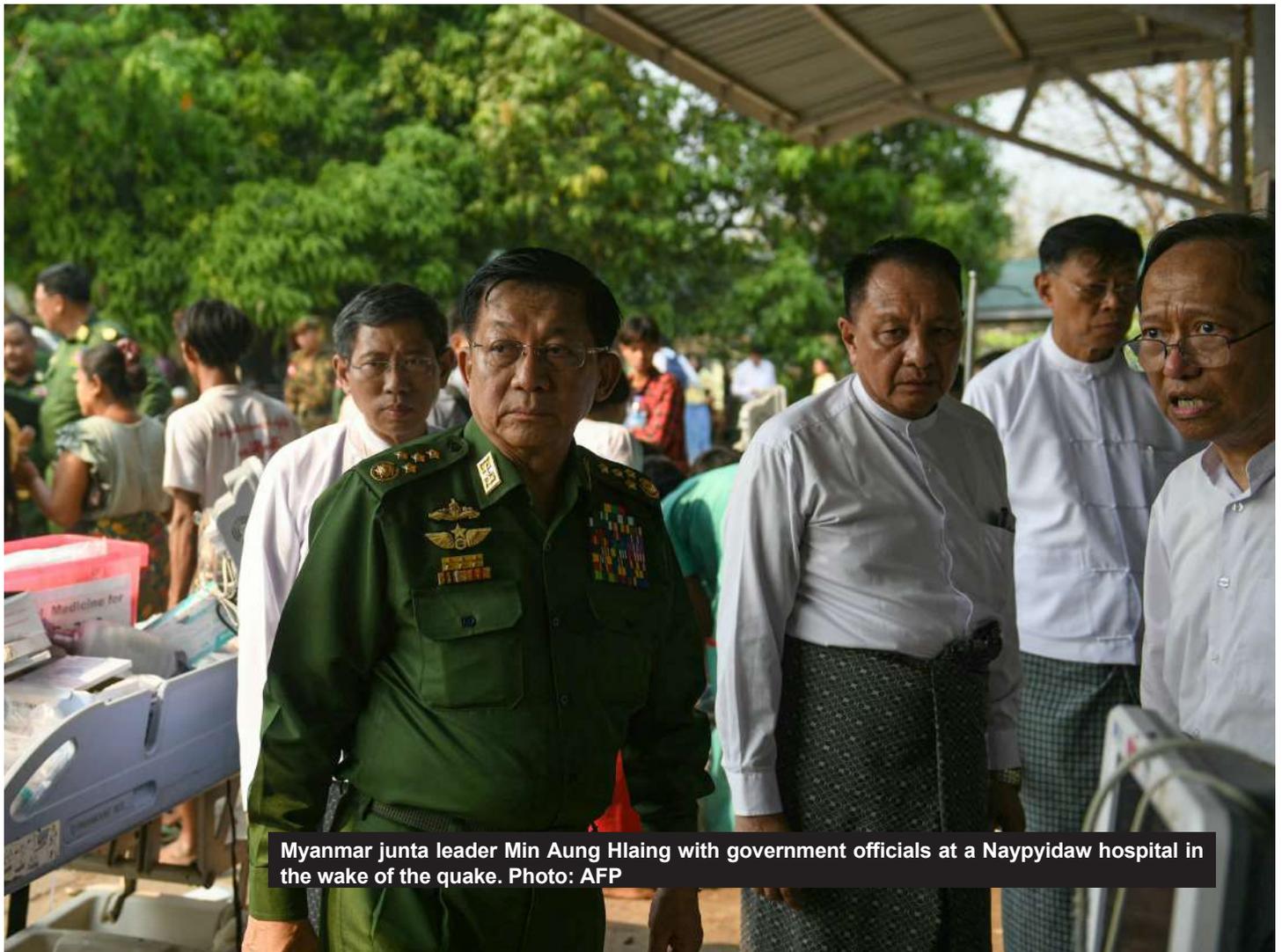
The quake – a 7.7 magnitude shudder and a 6.4 magnitude aftershock – was centred on the Sagaing Fault with both Sagaing and Mandalay most directly affected. The quake was so bad that it caused serious damage and deaths in Thailand, and was felt as far away as China and India.

SHOCK RESPONSE

Critics express shock that within hours of the quake, the Myanmar air force was bombing several areas of the country – rather than the junta having the decency to at least put offensives on hold.

UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews told media that the military attacks were "completely outrageous and unacceptable" and that it was "nothing short of incredible" that the military was continuing to "drop bombs when you are trying to rescue people" after the quake.

Andrews called on the junta to stop all military operations. "Anyone who has influence on the military



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing with government officials at a Naypyidaw hospital in the wake of the quake. Photo: AFP

needs to step up the pressure and make it very clear that this is not acceptable," he told the BBC.

Democracy activist Igor Blazevic echoed Andrews' sentiments. "The world must see this for what it is - ruthless, bloody murderers—criminals in uniform—remain just that, ruthless, bloody murderers, no matter what is happening in the country.

"In the midst of a catastrophic earthquake, in a nation where nothing functions because they have plundered and destroyed everything, the Myanmar military is still carrying out airstrikes against the population.

"Since the 2021 attempted coup, 4,631 airstrikes have rained down on our towns and villages. And now, even in the face of a natural catastrophe, the junta chooses violence," he wrote.

Media reported that seven people were killed in an air strike in Naungcho in northern Shan State. This strike took place around 15:30 local time, less than three hours after the quake struck.

People's Defence Forces that are fighting to remove the military from power have reported aerial bombings in Chang-U township in the north-western Sagaing region, the epicentre of the quake. There were also reports of airstrikes in regions near the Thai border.

The National Unity Government (NUG) said in a statement that its armed forces would begin a two-week pause in "offensive military operations, except for defensive actions" in areas affected by the earthquake, starting from Sunday.

The NUG said the focus should be on helping the quake victims.

CALL FOR AID

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing made the rare call for international aid in the immediate wake of the quake and declared a state of emergency across six regions of the country.

He addressed the country in a televised address, offering initial numbers of the dead and injured.



Min Aung Hlaing looks at the damage done to his house and those of other senior generals. Photo: Supplied

"In some places, some buildings collapsed," he said in the speech, after visiting a hospital in the capital Naypyidaw where patients were being cared for in the courtyard as the building was damaged. "I would like to invite any country, any organisation, or anyone in Myanmar to come and help. Thank you."

He urged massive relief efforts in the wake of the disaster and said he had "opened all ways for foreign aid".

"We want the international community to give humanitarian aid as soon as possible," junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun told AFP at the hospital.

The fact that the isolated military government is appealing for help - which it rarely does after natural disasters - suggests the damage is on a large scale.

The junta said in a statement that a state of emergency was in effect in six of the worst-affected areas: Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, northeastern Shan State, Naypyidaw, and Bago.

Zaw Min Tun said blood donations were needed for patients in Mandalay, Naypyidaw and Sagaing.

A number of countries reacted quickly to send initial aid - including China, India, Russia and Malaysia. A rescue crew from Taiwan was prevented from entry.

But many people are questioning whether the Myanmar junta will directly help people in the worst-hit parts of the country.

"I am 100% sure the military won't deliver aid to resistance areas," former UN envoy and SAC-M delegate Yanghee Lee told CNN. "Why hasn't Min Aung Hlaing sent his military assets in for rescue and relief? We don't see any helicopters with rescue and relief teams. We only see civilians digging through the rubble."

She called on the international community, ASEAN, Myanmar's neighbours, the United Nations Country Team, to ensure that aid, assistance and equipment is directed to the National Unity Government (NUG), ethnic organisations, civil society and implementing



partners to ensure that it reaches all earthquake-affected communities.

Myanmar CSOs echo her plea, with a group of 265 issuing a statement on the weekend calling for the free distribution of aid and for the junta to enable it.

ILL PREPARED

Ravaged by four years of civil war, Myanmar is ill-prepared to cope with the destruction brought by Friday's massive earthquake. The bloody conflict sparked by the 2021 military coup has brought the country's infrastructure, healthcare system and power network to their knees.

The United Nations and aid agencies have warned that millions were already facing a dire humanitarian crisis before the quake, and are now in urgent need of yet more aid.

Much of the country was already plagued by a punishing mix of conflict, poverty and instability after the civil war that left 3.5 million people displaced and smashed the economy.

"We have estimated that 19.9 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, and this is just before the earthquake," said UN humanitarian coordinator in Myanmar Marcoluigi Corsi. "The situation will be further aggravated."

Before the quake, the World Food Programme (WFP) said more than 15 million out of a population of 51 million were unable to meet their daily food needs.

Just two days after the quake, the UN said the aid effort was being hampered by a severe lack of medical supplies, while rescuers on the ground have pleaded for more equipment to comb ruined buildings for survivors.

The quake also struck Myanmar at a time when US President Donald Trump has slashed jobs and funding to Washington's foreign aid agency. Trump has promised US help for Myanmar but one million civilians in Myanmar face WFP aid cuts after he halted the work and funding of the US Agency for International Development or USAID.

LOSING CONTROL

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has lost control of large parts of Myanmar throughout the post-coup conflict, though it remains in charge of major cities including Mandalay - the closest to the quake epicentre and worst hit.

Many civil servants chose to switch sides following the military coup and join resistance to the junta. This loss of personnel has further weakened an already antiquated civil administration, making the management and distribution of relief efforts harder.

In a sign of the enormity of the disaster - and perhaps in a tacit admission of the state's inability to respond - Min Aung Hlaing issued the rare appeal for foreign aid on Friday. This marked a major shift from previous military rulers who shunned all international assistance - most notably in the wake of Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and more recently in the wake of Cyclone Mocha in 2023.

Poverty is rampant, the economy shattered, and international sanctions combined with the expense of fighting the civil war have drained the junta's coffers.

DIVIDED COUNTRY

Much of Myanmar is controlled by a shifting patchwork of junta forces, ethnic armed groups and pro-democracy partisans.

The complex mosaic of control on the ground, often involving competing groups with different agendas, may further frustrate efforts to move relief resources to where they are needed around the country.

Sagaing city - near the quake's epicentre - has seen some of the heaviest fighting between junta forces and armed resistance groups. Sagaing has been subject to some of the most brutal junta attacks during this war - pursuing heavy bombing and a scorched earth policy.

Ethnic armed groups, border militias and the military have all been vying for control of local resources, spurring fears there will be a similar tussle for aid.

POOR INFRASTRUCTURE

Myanmar's infrastructure and medical system have been ravaged by the civil war. The junta has bombed hospitals in rebel-held areas and many doctors have abandoned government medical facilities to join the rebellion.

The UN has said hospitals in Mandalay, Magway and the capital Naypyidaw "are struggling to cope with the influx of people injured".

The country was already beset by phone and internet blackouts but the quake has further hurt communications and the ability to direct aid to the most in need. Internet communications in Mandalay were patchy and land and air routes severely disrupted after the quake buckled roads and took down bridges.

With many houses collapsed, the UN and other NGOs say solutions are needed for the many left homeless, as the country enters the hot season with temperatures in the 40s. Destruction of homes and other buildings appears widespread across a swathe of the country.

Meanwhile, the Myanmar junta issued a statement banning foreign journalists from visiting the country to report on the disaster.

END OF JUNTA RULE?

Even Min Aung Hlaing, personally, was not spared from the destruction. What is known as the "six row house" occupied by the top military class, such as Min Aung Hlaing, and former presidents Than Shwe and Thein Sein, including Presidential House and Military Central Command, suffered severe damage as a result of the earthquake. Min Aung Hlaing has instructed the military engineering department to repair them, according to media.

As images of the damage circulated on social media, a number of Myanmar people said the damage to the senior generals' houses was a sign of the end of the junta's rule.

"When someone's cruelty exceeds what a human should be capable of, and no justice can reach them, nature takes over," Sein Lwin, a retired immigration officer told The Telegraph newspaper. "This earthquake is a sign that [military leader] Min Aung Hlaing's punishment is coming soon."

While such speculation may be premature, the superstitious junta chief will be doubling down on his Buddhist merit making.

Reporting: Mizzima, AFP, BBC, The Telegraph

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A family camps out on the road following the collapse of their home in Mandalay. Photo: AFP

BURMA: THE EARTHQUAKE AND THE REVOLUTION

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Nana, a 32-year-old principal of a nursing school in Karenni State, remarked that the recent 7.7 magnitude earthquake in Myanmar, which killed over 2,000 people and injured more than 3,000 at last count, barely affected people in ethnic areas like hers. “Because most of the houses are already gone,” she explained, highlighting a grim reality for Burma’s civilian population. Displaced by war and now living as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in ethnic states, they have endured so much devastation that the quake went almost unnoticed.

Similarly, David Eubank, head of the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) faith-based aid organization, reported that while Southern Shan State and Karenni felt the tremor, no one in the jungle—where most IDPs are hiding—was harmed. He noted that “the ground shook and the trees swayed,” but with homes already destroyed or abandoned due to military attacks, there was nothing left to collapse. The nearby town, reduced to rubble by the Burma military, had no structures standing to be further damaged.

This underscores a tragic testament: war has left these communities so broken that even a catastrophic natural disaster struggles to worsen their plight.

The earthquake struck central Myanmar on March 28, 2025, with its epicenter located approximately 17.2 kilometers from Mandalay, the country’s second-largest city, and about 16 kilometers northwest of Sagaing. The quake caused widespread destruction across multiple regions, demolishing homes, schools, churches, and other religious sites, as well as health

clinics, while leaving over thousands dead and injured. Its impact reached over 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) to Bangkok, Thailand, where an unfinished high-rise building collapsed, killing at least eight people - including Burmese construction workers - and leaving over 50 missing. This tragedy underscores a sad irony: Burmese fleeing the war in Myanmar, forced into difficult and often unsafe labor in Thailand, still lost their lives, offering yet another lesson from the ongoing conflict.

The Three Brotherhood Alliance issued a joint statement addressing the recent earthquake in Myanmar, expressing solidarity with those affected and pledging to provide aid to the best of their ability. Reports also indicate that the Ta’ang, Wa, and Kokang groups are conducting relief operations in Mandalay and Sagaing. These efforts highlight how Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) are stepping into a governmental role, issuing public service announcements and tackling public safety concerns. In a nation where the SAC junta has failed to adequately protect or support its civilian population, the EAOs’ actions demonstrate their commitment to filling this void and serving their communities.

In central Myanmar’s cities, rescue efforts are severely hampered by widespread electricity and internet outages, leaving many areas isolated and slowing both information and aid delivery. This crisis compounds pre-existing challenges in Myanmar, where much of the population already endured limited or no

access to electricity, internet, or phone services before the disaster struck—a stark reflection of their ongoing suffering amid a decades-long war. International aid has begun arriving—India, for instance, dispatched 15 tons of relief materials—but logistical hurdles, including bombed-out roads and routes cut off by fighting, are delaying broader efforts. The European Union swiftly pledged €2.5 million in emergency aid following the earthquake, but many Burmese fear the SAC might divert these relief funds for its own purposes. Meanwhile, China and Russia have seized the opportunity to bolster their presence on the ground, with China deploying 37 rescue workers and Russia sending 120.

Political obstacles further complicate the response. David Eubank reported that the SAC junta is blocking aid and information from reaching resistance-controlled areas. He stated, “The earthquake also is a problem for the people that it affected and we’re trying to get help to them any way we can. Not easy because Burma Army is blocking that as well.”

Eubank noted the difficulty in obtaining accurate casualty figures from junta-controlled Mandalay, saying, “Since the hardest-hit areas are under the control of the dictatorship, we do not have direct access. However, we are praying for ways to send help or to assist other organizations in reaching those in need.” The junta’s history of obstructing aid is well-documented, particularly in ethnic and resistance-held regions, where even before the quake, government-to-government aid rarely reached displaced populations, and smaller private organizations faced relentless interference.

A severe “youth deficit” exacerbates these challenges, as outlined in a LinkedIn report by Nyi Nyi Kyaw. The war has drained cities and towns of young men through forced conscription, leaving rescue and relief efforts underfunded and critically understaffed. Residents in junta-controlled areas like Yangon note a haunting void, with one observer remarking, “On the streets of Myanmar, I no longer see youth—only the elderly and young children.”

Similarly, Burmese students at Chiang Mai University confirmed that central Myanmar’s cities have been purged of youth, driven primarily by conscription rather than economic factors. Su, a 25-year-old student, explained, “Following the conscription law, most of the young people have already fled—some to the revolution areas, others abroad.” Nineteen-year-old Beracha added, “It’s mostly due to conscription, not

economics, because if it were economic, people would still be in the city.”

This loss of civic energy, combined with distrust in the junta’s unreliable forces—such as the military, police, and Myanmar Red Cross—threatens to cripple recovery in the quake-hit regions, where the scattered youth likely feel heartbroken and powerless amid the devastation.

Despite the devastating earthquake and ongoing relief efforts in Myanmar, the civil war rages on, with the natural disaster failing to halt hostilities. David Eubank reported that the Burma Army launched multiple airstrikes during and after the quake, noting, “We had three air strikes after the earthquake in our area alone and in other places as well.” Ground reports confirm this, detailing junta airstrikes and drone attacks in the hours following the quake, including strikes around 4 p.m. on March 28, 2025, near Ley Wah by the Karen National Union (KNU) headquarters and at Pyu in Bago Region’s 3rd Brigade area. The junta also bombed targets with jets and drones across Kawthoolei, Sagaing, northern Shan, and Bago Regions, with people on the ground reporting additional jets flying overhead during the night, signaling the military’s intent to continue its offensive unabated.

Eubank emphasized the unrelenting conflict, saying, “The fighting goes on. And the biggest problem in Burma is the dictators and their army attacking people. The earthquake also is a problem for the people that it affected and we’re trying to get help to them any way we can.” In war-torn areas, the quake’s impact blends into the existing destruction, as Eubank noted that blown-up cities and ongoing fighting made it feel like “no change to us.” He recounted that on the same day as the earthquake, the Free Burma Rangers (FBR) somberly held a funeral for a young man killed by the Burma Army, who had been about to join their group. He emphasized, “People are still getting shot and killed in the blown-up towns, but that’s the war.”

Now, with the earthquake intensifying the crisis, the population faces the compounded devastation of ongoing conflict and natural disaster.

As always, please pray for the people of Burma, and send donations or aid directly through local and ethnic organizations to avoid having money fall into the hands of the generals.

Antonio Graceffo is an economist and China expert who is covering Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

MANDALAY QUAKE VICTIMS FEAR BUILDING COLLAPSE

After a night sprawled out on cardboard panels under hastily erected plastic tarps, hundreds of Mandalay residents awoke Tuesday to more earthquake recovery work, wondering when they can return safely to permanent shelter.

The violent 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck Friday near the city in central Myanmar, killing more than 2,000 people, with fears the toll could rise significantly.

Initial tremors destroyed many homes across the city, and persistent aftershocks have left the residents of those spared wary of spending time indoors.

"We don't dare to go back home because we are worried our neighbouring building will collapse on us," said 57-year-old grandmother Hlaing Hlaing Hmwe.

"Children want to go back because the weather is hot here," she said.

Temperatures early week in the city of more than 1.7 million people again approached 40 degrees Celsius.

Hlaing Hlaing Hmwe said they won't be able to endure it much longer, so she is considering going to a monastery in search of shelter.

"We heard monasteries collapsed too but there is another one we can go to."

Though sleeping in the open relieves one of the risk of falling buildings, Soe Tint said that basic amenities such as water, electricity and access to toilets are difficult to come by.

Still, it is preferable to the potential danger of being inside.

"We don't feel safe to sleep at our home," said the 71-year-old Mandalay resident. "So we moved to this field".

The buildings next to his home are as high as six or seven storeys, and he said they are now leaning due to the tremors.

"I even think my own heartbeat is an earthquake."

Uncollected belongings

At the U Hla Thein Buddhist examination hall, where part of the building collapsed as hundreds of monks took an exam, at least 60 uncollected book bags were piled on a table outside.

Textbooks, notebooks and passports were among the contents.

"These are the belongings of the monks who sat the exam," said one attendant, adding there was a

second pile elsewhere.

Fire engines and heavy lifting vehicles were parked outside and an Indian rescue team worked on the pancaked remains of the building.

One Indian officer said there was a terrible smell coming from the building.

"We don't know how many people are under the structure," he said.

A Myanmar fire official confirmed: "Many dead bodies are coming out. There can be no survivors."

In a compound on Tuesday next to Mandalay University, a Myanmar flag flew at half-mast, its yellow, green and red stripes stirred by a desultory breeze.

Traffic has picked up in the city since the quake, but one driver said it was still less than usual.

Little hope

At the collapsed Sky Villa Condominium apartment block in the city, rescuers thought they had saved the life of a pregnant woman, Mathu Thu Lwin, trapped under rubble for more than 55 hours. They even amputated her leg to free her, but after pulling her out they were unable to resuscitate her and she was pronounced dead.

Forty-three people were rescued alive from the building and nine were reported dead as of Tuesday.

Dozens may lie dead under the 12-storey building, including possibly three or more expat Filipino teachers who were living there. Their relatives sent missing person requests to Mizzima after they lost touch with them on 28 March.

Elsewhere in Mandalay, parents of schoolchildren at a collapsed school in the city appeared to have lost hope as rescuers continued to look for bodies in the rubble of the building.

Hospital patients in the heat

Mandalay General Hospital, the city's main medical facility, has around 1,000 beds but despite high heat

and humidity, most patients were being treated outside in the wake of the massive earthquake.

"This is a very, very imperfect condition for everyone," one medic, who asked to remain anonymous, told AFP.

"We're trying to do what we can here," he added. "We are trying our best."

As temperatures soared to 39 degrees Celsius (102 degrees Fahrenheit), patients sheltered under a thin tarpaulin rigged up to protect them from the fierce tropical sun.

Relatives took the hands of their loved ones, trying to comfort them, or wafted them with bamboo fans.

Small children with scrapes cried amid the miserable conditions, while an injured monk lay on a gurney, hooked up to a drip.

It is not only the patients that are suffering. Medics sat cross-legged on the ground, trying to recuperate during breaks in their exhausting shifts.

Although the hospital building itself has not been visibly affected, only a handful of patients who need intensive care, and the doctors who look after them, remain inside.

The rest crammed themselves under the tarpaulin, or a shelter close by with a corrugated iron roof surrounded by motorbikes.

The tempo and urgency of rescue efforts wound down by Wednesday in Mandalay, one of the cities worst hit by the quake, as hopes faded of finding more survivors in the rubble of ruined buildings.

Soe Tint, who relocated to the field with his family, is eager to return to the comforts of home.

"No one knows how long it will take," he said.

AFP



A Russian rescue team visiting Myanmar sets up tents. Photo: Mizzima

COUNTRIES OFFER AID TO QUAKE-HIT MYANMAR

Many countries have been quick to begin sending aid, pledging aid, or sending rescue teams to Myanmar in the wake of the powerful earthquake that has killed more than 3,000 people in war-torn Myanmar and neighbouring Thailand and caused widespread damage.

Here is what we know about relief efforts:

China

China sent an 82-person team of rescuers to Myanmar on Saturday, Beijing said. On Sunday, state-run Xinhua news agency said a 118-member search and rescue team had also arrived.

A separate rescue team arrived in Myanmar's commercial hub Yangon on Saturday, state media said.

The Chinese government will also provide Myanmar with 100 million yuan (\$13.8 million) in emergency humanitarian assistance, with shipments to begin Monday, its international aid agency said Saturday.

Hong Kong

A 51-person team from Hong Kong has arrived in Myanmar, the financial hub's government said Sunday. The city also sent two search and rescue dogs and

equipment, including life detectors.

The city has earmarked HK\$30 million (\$3.8 million) for emergency relief support to Myanmar, it said in a statement.

India

An Indian aid flight landed in Myanmar on Saturday, with more on the way.

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said a military transport plane had been dispatched carrying hygiene kits, blankets and food parcels.

"A search and rescue team and medical team is also accompanying this flight," he added.

Four more aircraft were being sent with personnel and equipment, as well as two navy ships, officials said.

WHO

The World Health Organization has mobilised its logistics hub in Dubai to prepare trauma injury supplies and triggered its emergency management response.

On Sunday it said the quake was a top-level crisis and announced it was urgently seeking \$8 million to save lives and prevent disease outbreaks over the next 30 days.

Red Cross

The local Myanmar Red Cross Society has mobilised trained volunteers to provide help, launching search and rescue efforts, administering first aid, distributing emergency relief items and deploying mobile health teams.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies launched an emergency appeal Sunday for more than \$100 million to help 100,000 people with life-saving relief.

United Nations

The UN humanitarian agency OCHA is mobilising emergency response efforts, alongside its partner organisations.

"A severe shortage of medical supplies is hampering response efforts, including trauma kits, blood bags, anaesthetics, assistive devices, essential medicines, and tents for health workers," OCHA said in a statement Saturday.

United States

US President Donald Trump on Friday vowed Washington would assist Myanmar, describing the quake as "terrible".

"It's a real bad one, and we will be helping. We've already spoken with the country," Trump told reporters.

EU

The European Union said it was providing 2.5 million euros (\$2.7 million) in initial emergency aid and assessing the needs on the ground in order to mobilise further assistance.

Britain

Britain pledged £10 million (\$12.9 million) in humanitarian aid, with development minister Jennifer Chapman saying UK-funded local partners were already mobilising on the ground.

Ireland

Ireland announced it would contribute an initial six million euros in aid, with half going to Red Cross

organisations and the other half to UN agencies.

Malaysia

Malaysia's foreign ministry said it had sent a team to Myanmar consisting of one commander and 49 rescue personnel "to support ongoing humanitarian and disaster relief operations".

Indonesia

Indonesia said Sunday it will send a search and rescue team, medical team and logistical aid to Myanmar starting Monday.

The Indonesian military will send a hospital ship, three Hercules aircraft and four helicopters to assist emergency response, local media reported military spokesman Kristomei Sianturi as saying.

Philippines

The Philippines said Saturday it is sending a team of 114 people, including medics, firefighters and members of the armed forces. The team's tentative deployment date is Tuesday.

Vietnam

Vietnam said Sunday it would send 80 rescuers to help search and recovery efforts.

The Public Security Ministry said it will send a team of police officers and medics, a ministry-run newspaper reported. All were to be deployed on Sunday.

South Korea

South Korea said it would send \$2 million in humanitarian assistance "to support urgent rescue and relief efforts" after the earthquake.

New Zealand

New Zealand said it would give NZ\$2.0 million (\$1.1 million) to the International Red Cross for the emergency response.

Reporting: AFP, Mizzima



India flies in relief supplies.
Photo: Indian government

AID AGENCIES MUST ENSURE RELIEF IS NOT EXPLOITED BY THE MYANMAR MILITARY JUNTA: CSOS

Progressive Voice issued a statement on the weekend on behalf of 265 CSOs on the humanitarian aid effort in Myanmar, calling for relief supplies to go to those in need.

The following is the statement:

We—the undersigned 265 Myanmar, regional, and international civil society organizations—express our deepest sorrow for communities across Myanmar and Thailand devastated by the earthquake on 28 March 2025. As Myanmar faces yet another humanitarian crisis amidst the military junta’s intensifying campaign of terror against the Myanmar people, it is imperative that the international community immediately mobilize resources and direct disaster emergency relief to survivors and affected communities of the earthquake. This must be channeled through local community groups and frontline responders in collaboration with the National Unity Government (NUG), Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs), and civil society. We emphasize that these disaster relief efforts, through any implementing partners, must not be exploited, manipulated, or weaponized by the military junta for its political and military gain.

The earthquake on Friday—a severe 7.7 magnitude and the region’s most devastating in nearly seven decades—has caused over 2,500 confirmed deaths and

left communities across Myanmar shattered, homes and religious infrastructure destroyed, and tens of thousands of lives in peril. With hospitals overwhelmed, roads and bridges collapsed, and aftershocks threatening further destruction, immediate and unimpeded humanitarian assistance is crucial. Areas hit by the earthquake include Sagaing, Mandalay, Magwe, and Bago Regions, eastern and southern Shan State, and Naypyidaw. Most of these areas are under the effective control and administration of the NUG, EROs, and People’s Defense Forces. In affected areas under its control as well as under the resistance’s control, the junta will attempt to weaponize aid to attack and leverage gains over the resistance movement. Myanmar’s history provides stark warnings about the dangers of channeling aid through the military junta.

During Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the then military regime cynically weaponized disaster relief efforts to manipulate results of its sham referendum. International aid was obstructed from entering the country and withheld from desperate survivors to coerce their favorable vote for the military-drafted constitution in exchange for aid—all measures employed to secure its control and meddling in politics. Many local volunteers from the democratic movement were arrested and imprisoned by the regime for attempting to deliver assistance. This heavily delayed critical assistance and caused masses of civilian casualties. Once aid was finally allowed into Myanmar, the military regime

and their officials diverted and misused it for personal and political gain, including benefiting constituencies with ties to the regime. This is but one example of the Myanmar military's grotesque manipulation of human suffering for consolidation of political power and personal profit.

The military's pattern of aid exploitation persists today, as evidenced by the junta's obstruction and manipulation of relief efforts in response to recent natural disasters, namely Cyclone Mocha in 2023 and Typhoon Yagi in 2024, and its relentless commission of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity against civilians across the country. Even after the earthquake on Friday, the military junta repeatedly bombed civilian areas in Chaung U Township in Sagaing Region, Phyu Township in Bago Region, and Naung Cho Township in northern Shan State—areas under its illegitimate declaration of state of emergency for natural disaster management. Earlier this month, the junta had already shut down seven private hospitals in Mandalay following an accusation of their employment of healthcare professionals from the Civil Disobedience Movement, severely limiting healthcare capacity in Mandalay, now torn by the earthquake. Against this backdrop, the junta has systematically imposed years-long internet and phone line shutdowns, coupled with an aggressive crackdown on VPN usage, significantly restricting the flow of information about the devastation inside Myanmar and hindering emergency response efforts. The junta's callous contempt for human life, even in the face of widespread earthquake devastation, underscores its unsuitability to oversee aid—and more importantly, its willingness to manipulate any humanitarian response.

At this critical time, we welcome the NUG's announcement of a two-week pause in its offensive military operations in earthquake-affected areas, effective today. However, the military junta has continued dropping bombs in earthquake-affected Pauk Township, Magwe Region, as recently as this morning. We look to the United Nations' and ASEAN's facilitation to ensure the junta ceases all military offensives, especially the immediate halt of ongoing airstrikes.

As communities across Myanmar mobilize to support one another amidst the devastation, we call on UN agencies, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management

(AHA Centre), neighboring countries, international organizations, and the wider international community to collaborate directly with Myanmar's legitimate stakeholders—namely the NUG and EROs—and civil society to ensure aid is not obstructed, manipulated, or weaponized by the junta. Aid can and must reach earthquake survivors and affected communities without delay through border-based channels which have proven the most effective. The NUG's swift activation of the Emergency Operation Coordination Committees following the earthquake exemplifies its readiness and capacity to lead relief efforts in collaboration with ethnic and community partners. We commend the prompt and impactful responses to this disaster, particularly through crowd-funding efforts, including by the NUG and Myanmar Earthquake Response Coordination Unit comprised of Myanmar civil society organizations, which have already provided essential support to affected communities.

We once again remind the international community, particularly aid agencies, that humanitarian assistance must be guided by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, do no harm, and operational independence. The UN Country Team must fully embody these principles in their action, remembering the hard lessons learned from past engagements on aid with the military junta and past military regimes. Disaster response to this latest catastrophe must prioritize collaboration with stakeholders who demonstrably value the lives, safety and well-being of the Myanmar people—the NUG, EROs, and civil society—while actively preventing the junta from obstructing or exploiting aid delivery. Failure to do so will deepen the already dire humanitarian crisis and guarantee further abuses by an illegal body notorious for its active destruction of human lives.

We urge the UN, neighboring countries, and the wider international community to remember Myanmar's painful history of the military's manipulation of aid in times of natural disasters, and act resolutely to protect affected and vulnerable communities from exploitation and further suffering. The people of Myanmar deserve aid that alleviates suffering—not aid weaponized against them.



Rescue workers outside the building site in Bangkok where a high-storey building collapsed. Photo: AFP

HOPES FADE OF RESCUING MORE WORKERS FROM BANGKOK BUILDING COLLAPSE

Close to a week after the earthquake that brought down a multi-story building under construction in Bangkok, a total of eight people are reported dead and about 50-70 missing. Many of the victims are said to be Myanmar migrant workers.

A Chinese construction company is facing questions over the deadly collapse of the skyscraper -- the only major building in the capital to fall in a catastrophic earthquake that has killed more than 2,000 people in Thailand and neighbouring Myanmar in total, according to latest figures

The 30-storey tower, still under construction, was to house government offices, but the shaking reduced the structure to a pile of rubble in seconds, killing at least 13 people and injuring nine.

It was the deadliest single incident in Thailand after Friday's 7.7-magnitude quake, with the majority of the kingdom's 20 fatalities thought to be workers on the building site and hopes fading for around 70 still trapped.

Sprawling Bangkok bristles with countless high-rise blocks, but none have reported major damage, prompting many to ask why the block under construction gave way.

"We have to investigate where the mistake happened," said Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, who has ordered a probe into the materials and safety standards at the construction site.

"What happened from the beginning since it was designed? How was this design approved? This was not the first building in the country," she told reporters on Saturday.

The development near Bangkok's popular Chatuchak market was a joint project involving China Railway No. 10 Engineering Group (Thailand) - an offshoot of China Railway Group (CREC), one of the world's largest construction and engineering contractors.

Questions raised

Testing of steel rebars - struts used to reinforce concrete - from the site has found that some of the metal used was substandard, Thai safety officials said on Monday.

Industry Minister Akanat Promphan announced that a committee would be set up to investigate, saying one supplier of the steel had failed safety tests in December and may have its licence withdrawn. He did not name the supplier.

Professor of Civil Engineering at King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang Suchatwee Sunaswat said there were questions to be answered.

"We have to look at the design. At the beginning, how they calculate, how they design. And in the rescue mission, how they collect evidence at the same time," he told reporters on Saturday.

Safety complaints

The local partner in the project, Italian-Thai Development (ITD) offered condolences on Monday to quake victims but said it was "confident" the incident would not impact its other projects.

Beijing-owned building conglomerate CREC is one of the world's largest construction and engineering contractors, with projects in more than 90 countries and regions, according to its website.

The Bangkok construction collapse is not the first time CREC and its subsidiaries have come under fire after deadly incidents.

A tide of anger was unleashed at authorities in Serbia following the deaths of 14 people when a roof collapsed in November last year at a train station built by CREC subsidiaries - largely focused on reports of alleged shortcuts made with building projects.

Roisai Wongsuban of the Migrant Working Group advocacy organisation said there have been a large number of complaints from migrant workers employed by Chinese companies in Thailand about lax safety standards and poor labour rights.

"For Chinese companies we can't see the human rights due diligence, to see if labour standards are being met," she told AFP.

"There is always a power imbalance between employer and employee."

Bangkok's construction boom is powered by an army of labourers, a large proportion of them migrant workers from Myanmar, toiling on hot building sites for low pay.

The Migrant Working Group has called on Thailand's labour ministry to hold the employers involved in the construction project criminally liable if they have failed to meet health and safety laws.

China sensitivities

AFP has asked China Rail No. 10 Engineering Thailand and CREC for comment but has not had a response.

An announcement celebrating the completion of the main structure at the Chatuchak construction site posed on China Rail No. 10's official WeChat channel was deleted soon after Friday's quake.

AFP archived the post shortly after the tremors hit but before the page was removed.

Local media said that four Chinese nationals were apprehended on Saturday for attempting to retrieve documents from the collapse site.

But China is the largest source of foreign direct investment in Thailand, injecting \$2 billion into the kingdom in 2024, according to Open Development Thailand, and the government typically handles anything linked to Beijing with kid gloves.

Paetongtarn said an investigation into the collapse launched on Monday would not be "specific to one country".

"We do not want one particular country to think we are only keeping eyes on (it)," she said on Tuesday.

At a small shelter near the site on Monday, 45-year-old Naruemol Thonglek waited for news of her boyfriend, electrician Kyi Than, who was missing under the enormous mound of concrete and twisted metal being lifted by mechanical diggers.

"I'm devastated," she told AFP. "I've never seen anything like this in my entire life."

AFP



Thai soldiers on the Thai-Myanmar border at Mae Sot. Photo: AFP

THAILAND FACES MOUNTING BORDER SECURITY CHALLENGES

Thailand is grappling with mounting security concerns, humanitarian burdens, and economic fallout as Myanmar's ongoing crisis continues to spill over its borders, aside from the difficulties of cleaning up after the 28 March earthquake.

Intensified fighting between the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)-led resistance forces and Myanmar's junta troops has led to border security issues, while refugee influxes and online scam operations originating from Myanmar are straining Thai resources.

On March 14, KNLA resistance fighters seized the junta's Puluu outpost after more than two weeks of attacks that began on February 27. Unable to withstand the assault, junta soldiers fled across the border into Thailand. According to Thai media reports, the Thai military provided shelter and medical aid to 11 fleeing junta troops, one of whom suffered severe injuries and was transferred to a Thai hospital. In response to the border intrusion, the Thai Army heightened security

measures along the frontier to prevent further incidents.

Tensions escalated again on March 23, when KNLA-led forces launched an offensive on the junta's Khalede post. In retaliation, Myanmar's military carried out airstrikes the following day using MiG-29 and Yak-130 fighter jets. Given that the attack site was only two miles from the Thai border, the Royal Thai Air Force deployed two F-16 fighter jets for reconnaissance, underscoring Thailand's growing security concerns over Myanmar's internal conflict.

Beyond border security, Thailand is struggling with increasing pressure on its healthcare and social services due to the influx of Myanmar refugees. Following the suspension of U.S. humanitarian aid, Thai hospitals have faced severe strain, with growing numbers of displaced individuals seeking medical care. Thai district authorities have admitted that the local healthcare system is overwhelmed, with hospitals reaching capacity limits. While Thai government



Young women are growing fearful of being conscripted into the military. Photo: AFP

officials have pledged continued support for refugees, medical personnel are reportedly struggling with excessive workloads and insufficient resources.

Adding to Thailand's challenges, Myanmar-based online scam operations have caused significant financial losses and social problems for Thai citizens. Criminal networks operating from areas under the control of armed groups and pro-junta militias have lured Thai nationals into scam centres, where many are forced to engage in fraudulent activities under threat of violence. Thai law enforcement agencies have been working to rescue victims trafficked into these scam syndicates, but cross-border crime remains difficult to control.

With Myanmar's conflict showing no signs of resolution, Thailand faces an increasingly complex challenge. The combination of border security risks, overwhelmed public services, and cross-border cybercrime has placed the Thai government under significant strain. As regional instability persists, Thailand is left balancing heightened security measures with the economic and humanitarian consequences of Myanmar's ongoing crisis.

Update on humanitarian aid

The World Food Programme (WFP) announced that it will cease providing food assistance to one million people in Myanmar starting in April due to financial constraints. WFP Myanmar Resident Representative Michael Dunford warned that the suspension of aid will have devastating consequences for vulnerable communities that rely solely on WFP support for survival.

"The coming halt in providing aid will severely harm sensitive communities that depend entirely on

WFP assistance," Dunford stated, speaking before the 28 March earthquake.

One of the most affected groups is internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kachin State. On March 15, WFP carried out its final aid distribution at the Inpawng IDP camp in Waingmaw Township. With limited job opportunities in the camp and security risks preventing residents from seeking work elsewhere, IDPs now face severe hardships.

WFP provided financial aid as part of its final distribution, allocating 84,000 MMK per person for individuals over three years old and 90,000 MMK for children under two. However, this temporary assistance is unlikely to bridge the gap left by the programme's suspension.

The halt in WFP aid underscores the growing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, where ongoing political instability and economic turmoil have exacerbated food insecurity. The international community's response remains uncertain, raising concerns about how displaced and impoverished communities will cope in the coming months. This situation will be compounded by the fallout of the 28 March earthquake.

Conscription begins to affect women

The Myanmar military junta's controversial conscription law has begun affecting women since January 2025, with authorities actively compiling lists of eligible females aged 18 to 27. Previously focused on male recruits, the junta's effort to expand its military ranks now includes checking household registrations in regions such as Yangon to identify women for conscription.

Local sources report that junta authorities are not only registering men but also scrutinizing women's eligibility. Families of selected women have found it difficult to negotiate their way out of conscription, a practice that has often worked with bribes in other military enforcement actions. Even those residing abroad have been pressured to return to Myanmar to fulfill military service requirements.

While the conscription law formally exempts married women, local administrators have nonetheless included their names in recruitment lists. A woman listed for conscription told BBC Burmese, "My name is on the list. The ward authorities asked me about my plans regarding military service. My parents disapprove, and I am trying to avoid being drafted."

Despite these reports, a member of the junta's central recruitment committee claimed there is no concrete plan yet to forcibly enlist women, suggesting that authorities are currently only gathering demographic data. However, growing concerns persist that listing women is a precursor to broader enforcement of female conscription.

This development has intensified fears among Myanmar's population, as the military struggles to sustain its forces amid ongoing resistance from ethnic armed groups and pro-democracy fighters. With limited transparency about the next steps, uncertainty looms over the fate of women now caught in the junta's widening military draft.

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Internally displaced people hiding in a forest in Myanmar. Photo: AFP

WHAT'S BEEN LOST IN BURMA

ASHLEY SOUTH

The Spring Revolution in Burma is Resilient – which is just as well.

In 2025 anti-junta forces control about half the country, and have the political and military momentum. Or at least they had, until the United States pulled its support.

In February the US government axed \$160-million of funding from Burma, almost overnight. Compounded by aid cuts from the UK and other countries, the collapse in support to civilian communities is devastating – especially for those who have already suffered so much.

Among the activities defunded overnight: humanitarian aid to some four million displaced people – and support to schooling in the war-zones, where ethnic minority teachers provide basic education to some of the most marginalized children in Southeast Asia, under constant risk of air-strikes from Myanmar Army. The US and other western countries also provided hundreds of scholarships for young people who have fled the violence, but were able to continue their education abroad.

One of the organizations I work with is a college in the jungle of southeast Myanmar. Eleven of our graduates, who come from hard-scrabble backgrounds in conflict-affected areas, received scholarships to study at university in Chiang Mai. Meeting with these idealistic, committed and joyful young people was one of my happiest memories from late last year. Now their grants have been cancelled, and their futures whisked away. They cannot go back to Myanmar, fearing forced conscription into the military. Some will become migrant workers in Thailand, eeking out a living on the edges of the grey economy.

Another project I worked on provided emergency bomb-shelters for civilians under attack by the Myanmar Army, and helped brave local groups evacuate civilians under attack from the Myanmar Army. Now also scrapped. A further project worked with anti-junta political forces to deliver basic services and democratic governance arrangements in the liberated zones. All gone.

I personally have seen no corruption in US or other aid programs in Myanmar – although like others, I have often wondered at the fancy houses and

relatively lavish lifestyles enjoyed by aid bureaucrats (not just Americans). I should declare an interest: with the destruction of USAID, I lost three-quarters of my precarious income as a consultant. But this is hardly the greatest tragedy facing the country.

The seeming end of US political support for democracy promotion and human rights globally is devastating. Although 'experts' like me often criticized the international aid industry, at the end of the day we always knew – or hoped – that America had our back. There was a basic assumption that western democracies stood in solidarity with the movement for freedom in Myanmar. While assistance might be limited and slow in coming, at the end of the day the United States and other western powers provided a backstop to struggles for democracy and human rights.

With the destruction of USAID, and the rapid decline of UK and other countries' aid funding, that assumption no longer holds. The sense of abandonment across the Spring Revolution is widespread – with a fear that worse is yet to come. The destruction of USAID may not have been about Myanmar – but abrupt end of support creates a security and political vacuum, with China and Russia keen to step in.

For decades, China has provided cover to successive military regimes in Myanmar, in the UN and other forums, and provided a deadly arsenal of weapons to the military. Meanwhile, since the end of the Vietnam War, Russia has lacked a foothold in Southeast Asia – until now. The Putin regime's support for the Myanmar junta has so far consisted mostly of bombs and bullets – including the jet bombers and attack helicopters which regularly massacre civilians across the country. One fear is that – especially should the war in Ukraine die down – Russia will re-direct assets to Myanmar. Already the Russian state and businesses are making plans with the junta to renew development of a deep-sea port at Dawei in southeast Myanmar. Meanwhile in the north, China is expanding its influence with ethnic armed organizations which control some of the most important rare earth and other natural resources in the region.

With political and humanitarian assistance to Myanmar massively reduced, what does the future hold?

If we are living through 'the end of aid', then oft-repeated calls for greater localization of humanitarian and development support must be taken seriously. The challenge is to help build the resilience and the capacities of local actors, while there is time.

The future of aid and resistance in Myanmar will be local, led by armed and political resistance groups, and civil society organizations. Among the few international actors still on the ground are the Free Burma Rangers – a unique and Christian-inspired group, which provides impartial aid and care to civilians across the country. While many aid operations have had to cease operations when the money runs out, the FBR mission of love and hope continues, backed by voluntary donations – which are needed now more than ever. A range of other local organizations also need urgent support to address huge and growing needs for assistance and protection across the country.

Before the withdrawal of material and moral support from the US government, there was a real prospect for further victories against the junta this year. Although the Spring Revolution was not dependent on foreign aid, the future is now far more uncertain.

Local communities and anti-junta forces are resilient, and the revolution will continue. There is some hope that American aid may be resumed at some point, perhaps through the State Department. Much damage is already done – but the struggle for freedom in Myanmar will never be defeated.

Dr Ashley South is a Senior Research Fellow at Chiang Mai University.



Myanmar junta leader, centre, on a visit to the Yangon port. Photo: Supplied

JUNTA LEADER PROMOTES DOMESTIC EMPLOYMENT AMID SURGE IN MIGRATION FROM MYANMAR

In a meeting held in Naypyidaw on 25 March, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the leader of the military junta, emphasized the possibility of achieving economic growth within Myanmar, despite the ongoing crises following the military coup.

He acknowledged the emergence of labour shortages due to an increasing number of citizens seeking jobs abroad and urged them to focus on domestic employment instead.

Min Aung Hlaing suggested that rather than leaving the country, individuals could find opportunities for economic advancement in a more secure local environment. He stressed the need for developing technical skills, creating job opportunities, and advancing industrial technology to support domestic labour.

Since the military takeover, Myanmar has experienced significant economic decline, widespread armed conflict, and forced conscription, leading many to flee the country, both legally and illegally.

While the junta promotes domestic work, it has simultaneously tightened restrictions on those wishing to leave, prohibiting men of military conscription age from working abroad and imposing new limitations on overseas employment agencies, including caps on the number of workers they can send overseas.



KAREN NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY CAPTURES LONG-OCCUPIED KHALELDAY JUNTA BASE

A representative from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) confirmed to Mizzima that they have successfully taken control of the Khalelday junta base in Hlaingbwe Township, Hpa-an District, the operating area of the Brigade 7 of the KNLA.

The official stated on 26 March that the operation was executed to fulfil military objectives. The Khalelday camp, located near the Thai-Myanmar border, had been occupied by junta forces since 22 September, 1989.

“Yes, the camp was captured. This aligns with the military objectives of our Brigade 7, and we carried out the operation because we deemed it necessary,” an official from the KNLA said.

The KNLA commenced their attack using drones on 22 March and seized the camp after four days of fighting, culminating on the evening of 25 March, according to a Karen National Union (KNU) statement.

During the intense battle, the junta forces conducted airstrikes on 24 March, dropping 36 bombs,

including 500-pound munitions, from fighter jets. Despite the heavy bombardment, the junta troops could not withstand the KNLA's assault and eventually abandoned the camp, destroying their ammunition before fleeing.

The KNLA reported the discovery of two junta soldiers' bodies and the seizure of various military equipment, including a 0.5 caliber machine gun and ammunition. There were no reported casualties among the KNLA forces.

The KNU states that the operation involved coordination between the Brigade 7 Security Column and Battalions 19, 21, 22, and 24.

During the course of the fighting, over 100 villagers, including children, women, and the elderly, reportedly fled to the Thai side of the border due to the clashes and the junta's aerial bombardments.



Ko Ko Gyi, chairman of the People's Party. Photo: AFP

PEOPLE'S PARTY CHAIRMAN EMPHASIZES COOPERATION WITH THE MYANMAR JUNTA AHEAD OF CONTROVERSIAL ELECTIONS

In an interview with Myanmar Hard Talk, a media outlet supportive of the junta, U Ko Ko Gyi, chairman of the People's Party, discussed the junta's planned elections set for the third and fourth weeks of December 2025 or in the first and second weeks of January 2026.

He asserted that the election outcome should not challenge the current junta and must be approached through collaboration with the military. While expressing hope that the elections could lead to improved conditions, U Ko Ko Gyi acknowledged concerns that they might heighten internal conflicts.

He also criticized the National League for Democracy (NLD) for its decision to boycott the elections, recalling that in 2010, the military government aimed to prevent the NLD from participating, which could have resulted in significant tensions. He questioned whether the NLD's abstention was a genuine stand against the military or a tacit agreement to align with the junta's objectives.

Despite the military's promises to hold elections since their takeover in 2021, over four years have passed without any elections.

Junta leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, announced during his recent visit to Belarus, that the expected dates for the elections in December this year or January next year.

He emphasized the importance of ensuring these elections are conducted successfully. Meanwhile, the junta has allowed over 50 political parties to register, while the NLD was dissolved due to missed registration deadlines, attracting widespread criticism from the NLD, the National Unity Government (NUG), revolutionary forces, international election experts, and various organizations opposing the junta's electoral plans.



Junta troops guarding Myingyan town shortly after the military coup. Photo: CJ

SEVERE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED ON FOOD AND GOODS PURCHASES IN MYANMAR'S MYINGYAN TOWNSHIP

Junta authorities in Myingyan Township, Mandalay Region, have implemented stringent restrictions on the purchase of dry goods, groceries, and vegetables. Junta soldiers and members of the pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee militia at security checkpoints are reportedly threatening to kill anyone attempting to buy more than three bags of rice.

Previously, residents were permitted to transport up to five 48-kilogram bags of rice per truck, but local vendors have indicated that these restrictions have recently intensified.

"We now have to register the number of rice bags we buy and provide our identification details. When I attempted to purchase rice, I had to show a receipt for the purchase and pay 5,000 kyats per bag of rice and another 5,000 kyats per bag of salt. They now only allow a total of three bags," one vendor described.

A more alarming instance involved a person transporting four bags who was threatened by Pyu Saw Htee members with the warning, "We will shoot and kill you."

Additional fees are imposed at return checkpoints, raising the total cost to 15,000 kyats for three bags of rice and salt. Restrictions also extend to cooking oil, which is limited to small bottles, and purchasers face a charge of 5,000 kyats per 5-viss bottle.

In addition to food items, the junta has completely

banned the purchase of electronic goods, electrical equipment, solar panels, and diesel fuel, according to local shoppers.

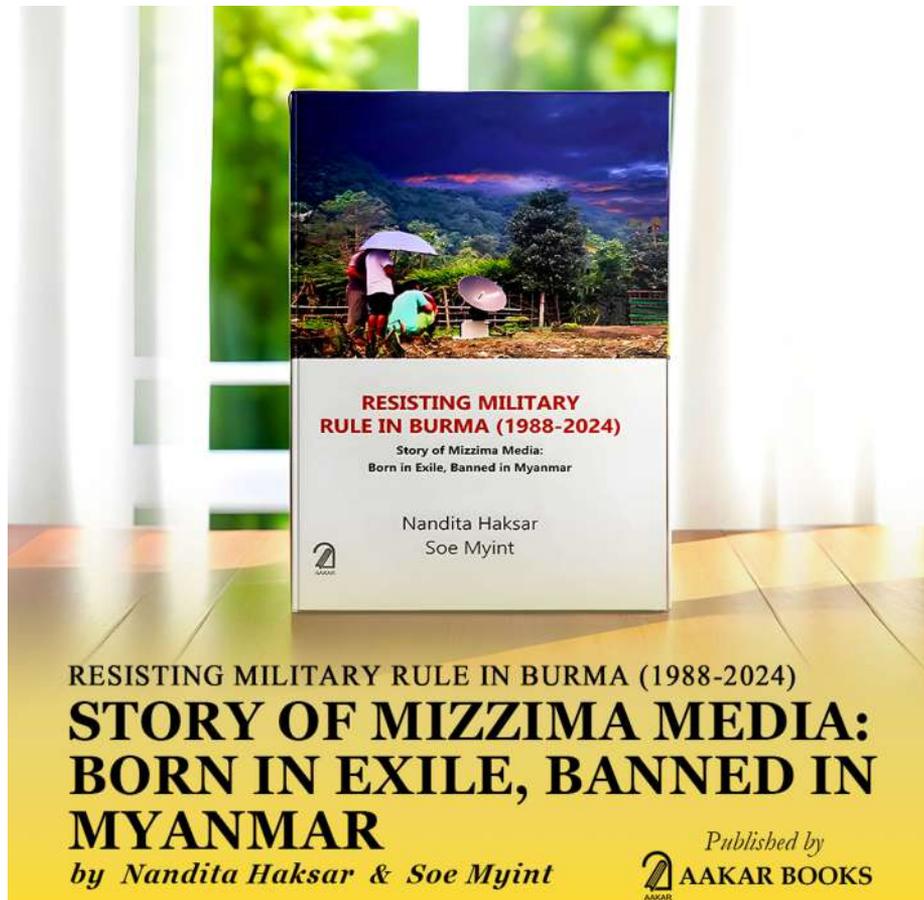
A hardware store owner said, "They won't let us buy phone chargers, and since electricity has been cut off for a long time, people rely on solar panels for charging. Now, those are banned too."

These restrictions began in February and have become increasingly stringent by March.

Local defence forces report that eight security checkpoints surround Myingyan town. Typically, 20 to 30 trucks and tractors use alternative routes to avoid the heavily policed Myingyan-Meiktila and Myingyan-Natogyi roads.

The checkpoints are staffed by the Pyu Saw Htee militia, led by notorious leader Thidar Yu Mon, and soldiers from Light Infantry Regiment 15. They are enforcing the new regulations and conducting inspections.

Individuals attempting to purchase goods in larger quantities face the risk of detention or going missing. Consequently, there has been a significant decline in the number of shoppers visiting the town recently. While Myingyan is controlled by junta forces and Pyu Saw Htee militias, surrounding villages remain under the authority of local defence forces.



THIRTY-SIX YEARS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR MYANMAR DEMOCRACY

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH BALL

It was September 1988. Myanmar, then known as Burma, found itself in the throes of a violent military suppression of a nationwide uprising calling for the restoration of democracy in the Southeast Asian country. As with many youth his age, especially those educated in Myanmar's major cities, Soe Myint made the fateful decision to join the armed resistance to military rule gathering momentum in the country's eastern jungles. Soe Myint did not tell his parents he was leaving Yangon, "but hid a note for them in my guitar telling them I was going to the border." The note would remain unknown for years.

Such were the beginnings to Soe Myint's journey to fight for the wishes of the Myanmar people as told in the recently released book *Resisting Military Rule in Burma (1988-2024), Story of Mizzima Media: Born in Exile, Banned in Myanmar* (henceforward referred to as *Resisting Military Rule*). Having left Yangon and his studies at the university for the border region with Thailand, Soe Myint thought that "after I got training in armed resistance, we would be able to liberate Burma in a few months, and we could return to our homes and

country in peace." Those few months eventually grew into 24 years in exile – someplace Soe Myint again finds himself following the 1 February 2021 coup in Myanmar.

Resisting Military Rule chronicles Soe Myint's journey from the jungles of Myanmar to his time in India and in exile, his return to Myanmar following the country's brief dalliance with democratic reforms, and his ensuing return to exile. The story of how Soe Myint arrived in India could itself be the subject of an entire tome. On 10 November 1990 Soe Myint was part of a hijacking operation that diverted a Thai Airways plane bound for Yangon to Kolkata in India. The plan was designed to bring attention to the plight of those fighting against military rule in Myanmar. The passengers and flight crew were never at risk. As the *World/Nation* headline on 11 November read, "Burmese use soap bomb to hijack jet; no one hurt".

And it was this action that eventually brought Soe Myint to the attention of Nandita Haksar, human rights lawyer and co-author of *Resisting Military Rule*. Her

legal defense of Soe Myint was the start of a lifelong friendship as well as Haksar's growing involvement in the plight of Burmese both in Myanmar as well as in India. Resisting Military Rule goes on to document the parallel, and at times intersecting, trajectories of Soe Myint and Haksar in the Myanmar drama as well as the dynamics of Indian-Myanmar relations as they pertain to Burmese politics.

While residing in India in 1998, Soe Myint co-founded a small independent Burmese media group. Of its founding, Soe Myint writes, "We did not even own a mobile phone or a laptop. Despite all these obvious problems, we had a name for our dream internet news service: Mizzima, a word derived from the Pali word Majjima which means the middle path, or moderate." But Mizzima would not remain a small operation. Over time and through the hard work of Soe Myint and others, Mizzima grew into one of the most noted and trusted sources of news regarding Myanmar. In a type of backhanded acknowledgement of Mizzima's success, the front page of the state's English-language mouthpiece, New Light of Myanmar, would over the years single out Mizzima and other like-minded groups for their alleged spreading of lies.

Resisting Military Rule goes on to chronicle the challenges, successes, and failures of Mizzima over the ensuing years, while weaving together the personal Burmese sagas of both Soe Myint and Haksar. To this end, the wide-ranging text incorporates, among many others, vignettes of ethnic rebels wrongfully entrapped by Indian intelligence, the musings of a foreign journalist attached to Mizzima who for years operated inside Myanmar, the experiences of Mizzima journalists arrested and tortured by the Myanmar junta, the plight of Burmese refugees in India, and the reflections of Thaw Zin Tun, the younger brother of Soe Myint and Managing Editor of Mizzima. Through these stories and voices the reader is led along the heroic journey of Mizzima and Burmese resistance to military rule.

As the year 2021 dawned it seemed Mizzima – and Myanmar, at least to certain degree – might have a happy ending. Mizzima was firmly established in the domestic Myanmar media landscape, having officially returned to the country in early 2012, and Myanmar's tenuous democratic experiment was teetering along. But there turned out to be at least one more twist in the plot. And a significant one at that. The 2021 coup in Myanmar again forced Mizzima into exile, while maintaining clandestine operations inside the country.

But the situation today is not a repeat of Myanmar and Mizzima's experience under previous incarnations of military rule. The stakes have arguable never been higher. "There have been other military coups like 1962 or in 1988," contends Soe Myint, "but from the very first day we could see that this coup is like no other; the level of repression and brutalities has been

unprecedented even by Myanmar's standards." Soe Myint adds, "This time, both sides, the Generals and the people, know it is a fight to the finish, no matter what the cost...There will be no negotiations with the military."

Today's conflict is increasingly seen as one of life or death. Myanmar's political, social and economic landscapes are being redrawn. "Even for me," explains Soe Myint, "I feel the fight has become personal. It is not only the arrest of (Mizzima co-founder) Thin Thin Aung and Mizzima journalists, or the ban of Mizzima. They even attempted to confiscate my parents' small home where my mother is lying bedridden after a stroke. To punish a mother for the acts of her sons in this way is nothing short of inhuman."

And as Resisting Military Rule makes clear, it would be unwise to write off the prospects of Mizzima in playing a critical role in the dawning of a new era for Myanmar. The 28 March 7.7 magnitude earthquake in Myanmar is but the latest twist in the plot. A story that – like the Safron Revolution, Cyclone Nargis, 2013 SEA Games, 2015 and 2020 General Elections, and fallout from the 2021 coup – Mizzima stands ready to cover both from the perspective of hard news as well as its possible ramifications for the country's future.

Title: Resisting Military Rule in Burma (1988 – 2024), Story of Mizzima Media: Born in Exile, Banned in Myanmar

Authors: Nandita Haksar & Soe Myint

Publisher: AAKAR Books (2025)

To purchase a copy of the book, please contact marketing@mizzima.com. Resisting Military Rule is also available from Midland Books at <https://www.midlandbookshop.com>.

TO PURCHASE THE BOOK ON AMAZON, CLICK HERE: <https://amzn.in/d/5n9Lkhd>

What Thailand Needs to Do under ASEAN Mechanism and Beyond

M. W. Barends, Chairperson, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR)
 W. ... , Chairperson of Malaya ... Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs
 ... Yukate, Committee, ... Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs

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 ... ASEAN Parliame ... Rights (APHR)

APHR COMMENDS THAI PARLIAMENT INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS MYANMAR CRISIS

ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) issued a statement on 25 March welcoming an initiative by the Thai parliament in hosting a two-day seminar titled, 'Fostering Sustainable Peace and Security: Thailand and ASEAN's Path towards Border Stability and Democracy' on March 22-23, 2025, in Bangkok, Thailand.

The statement is as follows.

In a time where the crisis in Myanmar has escalated on multiple fronts, including mass displacement, destructive environmental impacts of militarization, human trafficking orchestrated through scam centers, the inhumane treatment of political prisoners including women and children and the deadly decline in humanitarian assistance—the seminar shed light on the devastating human cost of the crisis.

During the seminar, key stakeholders—including

representatives from the Thai Foreign Affairs Ministry, military, civil society organizations from Myanmar, ASEAN parliamentarians, academics and UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews—convened to forge a coordinated, rights-based response to the crisis. Central to the discussions was the urgent need to bridge fragmentation among revolutionary forces in Myanmar and ensure border security and regional stability. Speakers emphasized that uniting all elements of the resistance is crucial for a successful challenge to the junta's authority and for laying the groundwork for a federal democratic transition that truly reflects the will of the people.

In the seminar, Rangsiman Rome, APHR Board Member and Chairman of the Thai House Committee on National Security, Border Affairs and National Reform called for Thailand and ASEAN to lead efforts in fostering dialogue and reconciliation in Myanmar, "Thailand must take an active role in facilitating dialogue among various stakeholders in Myanmar while

coordinating with regional and international actors, including ASEAN, Malaysia and Japan. We must work together to end the violence and restore democracy to ensure peace and security in the region.”

A key concern raised was the junta’s plan to build a nuclear power plant with Russian support. Wong Chen, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Malaysian Parliament and APHR Board Member, opposed the project, saying, “ASEAN must take a decisive stance against nuclear ambitions in Myanmar, as it threatens both regional security and environmental sustainability. We urge all ASEAN members to reject this dangerous path and advocate for renewable and sustainable energy solutions instead.”

Recognizing the declining power and political reach of the Myanmar junta, APHR asserts that now is the moment for ASEAN and the international community to impose strong political isolation. By uniting in this effort, we can help end the crisis and restore hope to millions.

APHR also urges the Royal Thai Government to uphold international human rights standards in addressing the security and safety of Myanmar refugees. Ending the flow of arms and financial transactions that fuel the conflict is crucial, as is strengthening coordination among ASEAN states to develop a unified and rights-based approach to the Myanmar crisis.

The seminar also discussed Myanmar’s grassroots political transformation, where communities are uniting to build a federal democracy from the ground up. This transformation is characterized by collaborative leadership rather than adherence to a single figure, demonstrating the people’s resolve to achieve sustainable peace and coexistence.

“We commend Thailand for hosting this important dialogue and urge ASEAN to take the lead in fostering a peaceful, stable and democratic Myanmar,” said Raoul Manuel, APHR Member and a Member of the House of Representatives from the Philippines. “It is crucial that ASEAN countries demonstrate unity and commitment to human rights and democracy as fundamental values guiding regional peace and security.”

Building on the insights from the recent Roundtable Discussion on Women’s Role in the Peace Process in Myanmar and the Myanmar stakeholder consultation organized by APHR in Bangkok and Chiang Mai respectively, APHR remains steadfast in advocating for a gender-inclusive approach to security and peace-building. Mercy Christy Barends, APHR Chairperson from Indonesia, reinforced this intention, “women must lead the peace-building process in Myanmar, and their full inclusion in every stage of political transformation is not negotiable.”

She further emphasized APHR’s dedication regionally, “we are committed to advocating for greater inclusion of women in peace negotiations and decision-making processes in the region, and we call on ASEAN to take a more decisive stance on promoting gender equality in political transitions beyond tokenism and rhetorics.”

In support of sustained regional collaboration, APHR will collaborate with the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Malaysian Parliament in organizing a follow-up conference in July 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This event aims to reinforce regional dialogue and collective advocacy, demonstrating APHR’s commitment to human rights, peace and democracy across Southeast Asia.

Charles Santiago, APHR Co-Chair and former Member of Parliament from Malaysia said, “ASEAN has a critical opportunity to demonstrate leadership by addressing the worsening crisis in Myanmar. The ASEAN Charter mandates meaningful action to promote peace and stability, and the organization must step up to fulfil its responsibility. Bold, rights-based interventions are essential to foster a democratic transition and uphold human rights in Myanmar.”



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR COURT ORDERS AUCTION OF PROPERTY AT NO. 54 UNIVERSITY AVENUE AT REDUCED PRICE AMID INHERITANCE DISPUTE

The Kamayut District Court has ordered the auction of property No. 54 on University Avenue in Yangon at a reduced price of 270 billion kyats (US\$128 million), as proposed by Aung San Oo, according to sources close to the court. This fourth auction is scheduled for 29 April.

There have been three previous attempts to auction the property. Starting at a court-set floor price of 315 billion kyats (US\$149.9 million) for the first auction, then 300 billion kyats (US\$142.8 million) for the second, and 297 billion kyats (US\$141.4 million) for the third.

However, there were no bidders for any of those auctions. Consequently, Aung San Oo submitted a bid 27 billion kyats lower than the last price in order to facilitate a re-auction, which the court has now accepted.

Compound No. 54 covers an area of 1.923 acres (83,765.88 square feet).

Aung San Suu Kyi's legal team has also filed amendments and objections regarding the auction of this property, which was formerly owned by her mother, Daw Khin Kyi.

In 2016, the Western Yangon District Court ruled that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi would inherit the two-story house and half of the land, while Aung San Oo would receive a one-story house and the remaining portion of the land. Dissatisfied with this decision, Aung San Oo sought to auction the entire property, with the proceeds intended to be split equally.

After his appeal was dismissed by the Union Supreme Court on 12 December 2018, Aung San Oo refiled a special appeal on 11 January 2019. Following the 2021 coup, on 22 August 2022, the Union Supreme Court sided with Aung San Oo, allowing the auction of the entire Compound No. 54 and ordering an equal division of the proceeds.

Meanwhile, the National Unity Government (NUG) has designated Property No. 54 as an interim national cultural heritage site, warning that any sale, purchase, or demolition of the property would be considered illegal and could lead to severe repercussions.



Photo: AFP

DEFEND MYANMAR DEMOCRACY CONDEMNS THAILAND'S INVITATION TO MIN AUNG HLAING FOR BIMSTEC SUMMIT

On 25 March, Defend Myanmar Democracy (DMD) issued a statement strongly condemning the Thai government's reported decision to invite Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, leader of Myanmar's military junta, to the upcoming Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Summit, scheduled for April 3–4 in Bangkok.

The statement continues as follows.

Min Aung Hlaing, responsible for war crimes, mass killings, airstrikes on civilians, and dismantling Myanmar's democratic system, is being granted legitimacy by the Thai government—despite the Myanmar people's rejection of the military's coup attempt and the global condemnation against the junta.

BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) was formed to facilitate peace, economic development, and raise living standards among its member states in the Bay of Bengal region.

While ASEAN has excluded Min Aung Hlaing from Summits, BIMSTEC has chosen to legitimise the illegal junta, even inviting Min Aung Hlaing to sign the organisation's Charter in 2022.

Thailand's current reported decision to roll out the red carpet for a war criminal is not diplomacy, it is complicity. It's a betrayal of Myanmar's people and undermines the principles of justice and democratic cooperation in the region.

Spokesperson for Defend Myanmar Democracy, Naw Aung, comments: "Thailand should not invite Min Aung Hlaing to represent Myanmar. He leads a criminal military junta, not a government. Instead of honouring him by rolling out the red carpet, Thailand should honour the Argentinian court's decision under universal jurisdiction and arrest him for his role in the Rohingya genocide."

Defend Myanmar Democracy urges BIMSTEC and its member states to reject the criminal Myanmar junta and bar Min Aung Hlaing and his representatives from the Summit.



Photo: Shanana Foundation

NEW REPORT FROM SHANANA FOUNDATION EXPLORES GOVERNANCE OF RARE EARTH MINING BY KIO

A new report looking at the process of governance of rare earth mining in areas of northern Myanmar controlled by the Kachin Independence Organisations (KIO) was recently released by the Shanana Foundation.

The timely report which comes in the wake of the takeover by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the armed wing of the KIO, of rare earth mining areas along the Myanmar-China border in Kachin State in late 2024. Since the defeat of the pro-junta New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) and the dismantling of the Special Region-1 in November 2024, the KIO has assumed control over most rare earth mining areas in the state.

Based on 23 interviews between November 2024 and January 2025, the report takes a long view of KIO governance to explain how and when its resource governance relates to its nation building efforts since its formation in 1961. In addition to KIO governance, the report takes into account external factors, particularly the impact of Myanmar’s military and Chinese investors.

The report argues that the KIO’s governance of rare earth mining became politicised over time as it became entwined in the ethnic armed organisation’s nation building efforts. This process has left local villagers and their concerns behind as greater importance

was placed on the “economic interplay between KIO officials and Chinese investors.”

The result has been growing discontent among local populations and protests.

The Shanana Foundation makes three suggestions for moving forward. The first is that international actors could provide support and guidance with which the KIO’s governance of rare earth resources could be improved.

Its second is that that KIO should reform its current governance of the sector to improve transparency. It further suggests the KIO join the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI). Both steps, the group claims, would enhance the KIO’s governance capability while also helping address problems related to patronage politics.

The Shanana Foundation also calls for more research into the development projects that remain in place despite the ongoing conflict in Myanmar. These projects continue to affect the livelihoods of people but remain comparably little discussed compared to the reporting on the anti-coup movement.



Photo: MNDAA

TALKS BETWEEN THE MNDAA AND THE MYANMAR JUNTA IN KUNMING FAIL OVER LASHIO CONTROL

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the junta held negotiations in Kunming, China, from 22 to 24 March, regarding the return of Lashio – the largest city in northern Shan State – to junta control. However, the discussions ended without an agreement, according to a source close to the MNDAA and locals.

“The talks have concluded. The key issue was whether or not to return Lashio. I heard that the MNDAA is unwilling to relinquish control of 12 wards and two villages, and the negotiations are not making progress,” a source close to the MNDAA told Mizzima on 25 March.

Neither the MNDAA nor the junta has issued an official statement regarding the talks. Mizzima has yet to obtain a response from spokespersons or officials from both sides.

Despite the failed negotiations, the MNDAA continues its administrative and military operations in Lashio without withdrawing its forces.

A Lashio resident voiced concerns about the potential consequences of the city's return to military rule.

“If Lashio is handed back to the military, our people will be the first to suffer under military conscription laws. Porters will be forcibly recruited, and the

hundreds of security personnel working under the Kokang government will face hardship. Many municipal and electricity workers and their families will also be affected. There's no guarantee that the return of the military won't lead to further conflict. Armed groups in the region are closely watching the situation,” the resident said.

Following reports that the talks had not yielded a resolution, some residents feared the possibility of airstrikes by the junta.

A previous meeting between the two sides, mediated by China on 18 January, reportedly led to an agreement for MNDAA troops to withdraw from Lashio. A ceasefire agreement was signed the same day, as confirmed by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning on 20 January, though details of the agreement were not disclosed.

On 20 March, banners and posters appeared across Lashio, with residents urging the MNDAA not to withdraw and condemning Chinese interference in the city's affairs.

Meanwhile, the Lashio city government has announced plans to host a Thingyan festival in April, featuring dance competitions, traditional performances, and local foods.



Photo: AFP

INCREASED TENSION AT THAI-MYANMAR BORDER DUE TO ONGOING MILITARY OPERATIONS IN KNU-CONTROLLED AREAS

A source from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) has reported that the Karen National Union (KNU) and allied forces have been besieging and assaulting the junta's Khalaedae camp since 22 March. The camp is situated close to the KNU headquarters.

The junta has deployed jet fighters and Y-12 aircraft in support of the Khalaedae camp. The military camp is positioned to the east of Shan Ywar This village in Hlaing Bwe Township, near the Thai-Myanmar border.

An investigation into the casualties and damage from the military airstrike is currently underway.

The camp lies within the operating area of the KNU's Brigade 7. According to a Karen source, forces aligned with the KNU have been utilizing drones to target the junta camp.

As a result of the ongoing conflict, residents from nearby villages have temporarily sought refuge in Thailand by crossing the Thaungyin (Moei) River.

Some Thai news outlets report that the Royal Thai Air Force has increased patrols and surveillance along the Thaungyin River. Two aircraft were deployed around 11 am on 24 March, following the Myanmar military's aerial bombings and ongoing clashes near the border.

The Thai military has also raised security measures along the border after spotting two Myanmar fighters near the Thai border in Tha Song Yang District. The report prompted the scrambling of two F16 fighters from an airbase in Nakhon Sawan to this area of the border in Tak Province.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA'S AIRSTRIKES DEVASTATE LATWE-MYINNI VILLAGE, INJURING RESIDENTS AND DESTROYING HOMES

Military junta's airstrikes on Latwe-Myinni village, Natogyi Township of the Myingyan District, Mandalay Region, resulted in injuries to two individuals, including a 13-year-old girl, and caused the destruction of 22 homes, as reported by the Natogyi Township People's Administration.

Around 1 am on 23 March, junta aircraft released two bombs from a Y-12 aircraft, alongside additional munitions, according to a human rights officer from the People's Administration. Bombs destroyed 15 houses, while seven others suffered damage from artillery shelling, bringing the total to 22 affected residences.

The human rights officer said, "The area is frequently hit by airstrikes. Residents no longer feel safe enough to remain in the village, as nearly all houses have been affected."

The air assault resulted in a young girl sustaining a leg injury and a 65-year-old man was hurt in his hand and hip, the official reported.

The Natogyi Township People's Administration indicated that junta airstrikes, along with artillery shelling from the Myingyan-based Light Infantry Battalion 15, have led to significant property damage and distress among locals.

"People live in constant fear of air attacks and are compelled to seek refuge in bomb shelters. There have been cases where individuals were killed or injured in strikes while asleep," said a local resident.

Moreover, displaced residents are facing hardships due to a lack of job opportunities and urgently require assistance, according to aid workers in Natogyi Township. Notably, on 8 February, Light Infantry Battalion 15 shelled Latwe-Myinni village, leading to explosions and the destruction of five homes.



EU STATEMENT ON THE LAUNCH OF THE 2025- 2026 JOINT RESPONSE PLAN FOR THE ROHINGYA HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

The European Union Member States (EUMS) issued a statement on 24 March concerning the launch of the 2025-2026 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis. The statement reiterates the EUMS commitment to finding a solution for the Rohingya crisis.

The text of the statement is as follows.

Over seven years after the mass displacement of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh, prospects for a durable solution to the crisis unfortunately remain beyond reach.

The situation in the country of origin of the Rohingya continues to deteriorate, and the ongoing escalation in Rakhine State is posing additional challenges for neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh. The European Union renews its condemnation in the strongest possible terms of the military coup and its aftermath. We remain deeply concerned by the continuing escalation of violence and the evolution towards a protracted conflict in the country. We call on the military to release all detainees, immediately cease all violence, respect fundamental human rights, and take decisive steps to restore Myanmar's democratic path, respecting the will and democratic aspirations of the people of Myanmar. We are closely following the situation at the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh and urge all parties to respect international law and international humanitarian law, especially in relation to the protection of civilians.

The European Union and its Member States remain committed to helping establish the conditions necessary for the voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable repatriation of the Rohingya to Myanmar. However, until these conditions are met, supporting the Rohingya refugees in the region, and particularly in

Bangladesh, remains essential.

Today, as stated by Hadja Lahbib, Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management, during her recent visit to Bangladesh, we reaffirm our commitment to support Bangladesh in its generous response to the needs of the refugees and the communities that host them. The cost to Bangladesh and Bangladeshi citizens must be acknowledged and cannot be understated.

The European Union has maintained a consistent level of support over the past seven years. In 2025, the European Union has already allocated over EUR 32 million to support the Rohingya refugees and their Bangladeshi host communities. These funds are provided via the Joint Response Plan, which we are launching today.

The European Union also supports Rohingya refugees who have fled to other countries in the region, as well as the Rohingya who remain in Myanmar. Our total support for the Rohingya since 2017 equals nearly 1 billion EUR provided together by the EU and its Member States.

As global humanitarian funding continues to face unprecedented strain, we need to keep up our efforts to mobilise additional resources. We need to make the humanitarian response more efficient, and we need to reduce its total cost. We need to encourage the self-reliance of the Rohingya to end their dependence on aid, and to provide them with a more dignified life before they return to Myanmar.

It is more critical than ever to find ways of providing the Rohingya refugees with the basic help they need to sustain a decent life until their return to Myanmar. They will need food, so we will have to find a way to reverse the recently announced ration cuts, or to minimise their impact. They will also need safety – we have seen that hunger breeds violence, and the security situation in the camps is already a concern. As desperation increases, risky boat journeys to try and find a better life in Malaysia or Indonesia are likely to multiply.

We look forward to working closely with the Government of Bangladesh, the international community, and the United Nations to build a more realistic and compassionate response. The UN conference on the Rohingya, taking place on 30 September, will be an opportunity to come together and agree on solutions that enable the Rohingya to meet their basic needs that give them the tools to reintegrate back into their homeland once conditions allow, and that address the concerns of Bangladesh and other host nations in the region.

The Rohingya deserve to be allowed to imagine and prepare for a better future in Myanmar, when they will finally be able to voluntarily, safely, sustainably return with dignity.



Insein Prison in Yangon.
Photo: AFP

AAPP ISSUES STATEMENT ON ITS 25-YEAR FIGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN MYANMAR

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners released a statement on the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the organisation calling attention to the continued detention and mistreatment of political detainees in Myanmar.

The text of the statement continues below.

Over the past 25 years, AAPP’s founding objective has been to advocate for the release of political prisoners and to provide them with psychological and material support. We have also assisted with the healing and rehabilitation of former political prisoners and their families and their reintegration back into society.

Through these efforts, preparations are being made for a transitional justice process that is necessary in the establishment of the future nation, ensuring national

reconciliation and peaceful coexistence among diverse ethnic groups. In this process, we at AAPP have focused on promoting human rights and protecting civilians from human rights violations.

After the military coup on February 1, 2021, the junta committed widespread and systematic human rights violations, plunging the country into one of the most severe human rights crises in its history.

The military regime has arbitrarily amended and enacted laws to suppress dissent, unlawfully arrested and tortured political prisoners, and imposed unjust punishment. Additionally, the military junta has committed sexual violence against women, perpetrated the mass killing of innocent civilians, and targeted genocidal acts against persecuted groups. The junta has deliberately attacked residential areas, schools, hospitals, and religious sites through gunfire, ground

assaults, and airstrikes. Civilians have been forcefully displaced from their homes. These actions constitute serious war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Furthermore, as the military regime continues to lose territorial control, it has revived its military conscription law, forcibly recruiting young people and sending them to the battlefield. The younger generation has had its futures stolen from them, as they are being forced into the military against their will.

The military coup has left thousands of innocent civilians dead. Millions of people have been forced to flee their homes, leaving their belongings behind. Most of them are now internally displaced in the jungle, facing a shortage of food, water, and other basic necessities. Due to the military conscription law, many young people have lost their lives. Over the past four years, more than 28,000 political prisoners have been arrested and sentenced. Currently, more than 22,000 political prisoners remain incarcerated. At least 2,019 political prisoners have died whilst in detainment.

In response, AAPP systematically documents the conditions and experiences of political prisoners inside Burma's prisons, the challenges faced by former political prisoners, and the ongoing human rights violations across the country. This evidence is continuously shared with the people of Burma, the United Nations, and the international community. AAPP advocates for the release of political prisoners at the international level, applying pressure and lobbying for action. Additionally, AAPP documents crimes committed by the military junta, including genocide against ethnic minorities, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. This documentation is provided to relevant international organizations, to support the fulfillment of their own mandates.

AAPP is providing reparations and rehabilitation through its Mental Health Assistance Program, delivering counseling services to individuals, coping with stress and self-care mental health consultation services and psycho-social service provision. AAPP is also providing mental health awareness, basic coping skills and self-care training to several civil society

organizations, different ethnic organizations and activist groups, among others.

AAPP is supporting the future transition by working on institutional reform and supporting international efforts that aim to achieve justice and reconciliation. The goal is to ensure a smooth transition to a future federal union. To achieve this, AAPP collaborates with partner organizations and stakeholders, engaging in discussions, sharing knowledge, and carrying out training programs to support these efforts.

AAPP has been able to stand strong for 25 years. Our achievements are a direct result of the unwavering dedication of our current team, as well as those who have previously worked with us, the support from allied organizations, and the individuals who have provided material or moral support to AAPP. Therefore, we (AAPP) extend our deepest gratitude to every individual and organization that has been instrumental to our success.

In particular, we (AAPP) extend our special thanks to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and other domestic and international donor organizations, international diplomats, and individual donors who have continuously provided financial assistance to AAPP since it was established, ensuring the implementation of our activities.

On its 25th anniversary, AAPP reaffirms its determination to accomplish its mission with all its available resources and effort. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) will continue to play its role, working towards the release of all political prisoners, including President U Win Myint and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, ending military dictatorship, promoting human rights and democracy, pursuing justice, and building a federal country in the future.

UN SEEKS NEARLY \$1 BILLION IN AID FOR ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH

The United Nations announced Monday it was seeking nearly \$1 billion to provide life-saving aid this year for some 1.5 million Rohingya refugees and their hosts in Bangladesh.

The UN and more than 100 partners launched a two-year 2025-26 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya crisis, amid what it called "dwindling financial resources and competing global crises".

The appeal seeks \$934.5 million in its first year to reach some 1.48 million people including Rohingya refugees and host communities.

Around a million members of the persecuted and mostly Muslim minority live in squalid relief camps in Bangladesh, most of whom arrived after fleeing the 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar.

"In its eighth year, the Rohingya humanitarian crisis remains largely out of the international spotlight, but needs remain urgent," the UN said in a statement.

Launching the appeal in Geneva, UN migration agency chief Amy Pope said drastic foreign aid cuts were putting lives on the line.

'People will die'

US President Donald Trump imposed a freeze on foreign aid in January pending a review, after which Washington announced the cancellation of 83 percent of programmes at the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

"If we face cuts as organisations, the Rohingya don't eat, or they don't have protection, or they don't have basic life-saving needs met," Pope said.

She said the international community had failed to create the conditions whereby the Rohingyas would be able to go home safely.

"If we do not provide other options for the Rohingyas, we are leaving them completely dependent on humanitarian aid. And so cutting that aid, without giving them other options, means that people will die," she said.

"When you deprive people of hope and opportunity, you create conditions for more despair," added Pope, and "the problem gets much, much worse".

The overcrowded settlements around Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh are reliant on aid and suffer from widespread malnutrition.

UN chief Antonio Guterres visited the area earlier this month, in a show of solidarity.

Shifting picture in Rakhine

Khalilur Rahman, Bangladesh's high representative on Rohingya issues, said he was cautiously optimistic that a cessation of hostilities in neighbouring Rakhine State in Myanmar -- a pre-requisite for the return of refugees -- was now "within the realm of possibility".

The Arakan Army, an ethnic minority rebel group in Myanmar, is engaged in a fierce fight with the military for control of Rakhine, where it has seized swathes of territory in the past year.

"We look at it with cautious optimism that there are some fleeting lights at the end of the tunnel," he said -- adding that it was therefore not the time for donors to back out.

UN refugees chief Filippo Grandi added that ultimately, "the solution lies in Myanmar", and the situation was perhaps moving in ways "that may open up the door for the beginning of a solution".

The UN statement said that until the situation in Rakhine becomes conducive to safe and voluntary returns, "the international community must continue to fund life-saving assistance to refugees in the camps."

Any funding shortfalls could "force many to resort to desperate measures, such as embarking on dangerous boat journeys to seek safety", it added.

AFP



The late doctor with his wife and child. Photo: Facebook

CLINIC AIRSTRIKE IN MYANMAR'S MAGWAY KILLS 11 INCLUDING DOCTOR: LOCALS

A Myanmar junta airstrike on a remote village medical clinic killed 11 people including a doctor and his wife, locals told AFP.

Locals said the Saturday morning airstrike hit the village of Hnan Khar in the western region of Magway, in a zone currently held by anti-coup forces.

A spokesman for Myanmar's military could not be reached for comment.

"It flew very low and I heard a loud bomb blast when we were hiding," said one villager on Sunday, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

"When I went to clear up the area I saw only pieces of human bodies," he added. "It felt terrible to see it and my mind is still not clear of the image."

The eyewitness and a second man from the local area said a doctor and his wife were among the 11 killed when the explosion tore through a makeshift clinic opened in a house.

"The military is attacking more frequently with airstrikes in recent months and all civilians are very afraid," said the local resident, also speaking on condition of anonymity on Monday.

"They are always listening to the sound of military fighter jets and getting ready to hide."

While Myanmar's military has suffered stinging territorial losses, analysts say its powerful airforce, kept in the skies with Russian technical support, has been key to keeping its adversaries at bay.

The number of military airstrikes on civilians has risen year-on-year during the civil war, according to non-profit organisation Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), with nearly 800 in 2024.

That figure was more than triple the previous year and ACLED predicted the junta will continue to rely on airstrikes because it is "under increasing military pressure on the ground".

AFP



Gwen Robinson with her brother. Photo: Facebook

JOURNALIST GWEN ROBINSON REMEMBERED AS A FRIEND OF MYANMAR

The journalism scene in Thailand and Myanmar is reeling from the loss of an outstanding player, Gwen Robinson, who died on 29 March. She is remembered by many Myanmar colleagues.

The following is the Foreign Correspondent's Club of Thailand's obituary:

Gwen Akiko Robinson,

12 March 1960 – 29 March 2025, RIP (fuller obituary)

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand expresses its deepest condolences to the family, colleagues and many friends of Gwen Robinson, the FCCT's current past president and Nikkei Asia editor at large. She died early on Saturday morning at Chulalongkorn Hospital in Bangkok after a long and courageous battle with cancer that she rarely mentioned.

Gwen's funeral rites in Bangkok begin this evening. Her premature passing has prompted an outpouring of grief and disbelief from around the world:

"Gone too soon and too young," said FCCT President Elaine Kurtenbach. "Gwen will be deeply missed, for so many reasons. She kept the club going during the dark days of the COVID-19 pandemic, and did so very much for so many people. Her warmth and generosity changed my life as it did those of so many others, and she set an example of courage and determination to live life absolutely to the fullest."

"She was an incredible person -- kind, funny, brilliant, sometimes acerbic, helping people in need

everywhere," said Narisa Chakrabongse, a Bangkok-based publisher. "Above all she was an amazing friend. I will miss her more than I can say."

An Australian and British citizen born in Japan to an Australian father and Japanese mother, Gwen graduated from the Australian National University in Canberra. At the time of her death, she was also a senior fellow at Chulalongkorn University's Institute of Security and International Studies.

From 1995 to 2013, she was a senior editor and correspondent with the Financial Times, latterly based in Bangkok covering Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. She held numerous positions at the FT, including eight years in London as comment editor, foreign desk editor and online news editor. She was also posted to Tokyo, Jakarta, Washington and other FT bureaus.

Gwen worked as a freelance Southeast Asia correspondent in the 1980s, with time in the Philippines that included the People Power Revolution in 1986 before moving to Bangkok and then Tokyo.

Much of her later work in Bangkok was focused on Myanmar as it underwent major political and economic changes that continue to unfold. In her final hours on the 27th floor of the hospital, she was rocked by strong tremors from an earthquake in Sagaing near Mandalay, Myanmar, and in an ill-judged move was temporarily relocated.

Gwen moderated her last Myanmar programme at the FCCT on March 10, and had to be helped from her seat. She served as club president in 2019 and 2020.

As a past president, she remained a key board member and was passionately involved in programming.

"When I said goodbye to her in late January, we both knew it was probably the last time," said Laetitia van den Assum, a retired Dutch ambassador who continues to monitor Myanmar closely. "I have rarely met a journalist with an address book as large as Gwen's. It included many in the diplomatic community, where she was highly respected."

"Gwen was an insightful reporter, commentator and editor, and a journalist steeped in Asia from her family background through her academic training to her long and varied career," said Andrew Gower, her editor at the Financial Times over 20 years ago. "She was also enormous fun to be with, as anyone who worked with her in the field can attest. Her voice and her zest for life and the region will be widely missed."

"Gwen's energy and commitment to journalism set an impossibly high bar for many of us," said Michael Vatikiotis, a former editor of the Far Eastern Economic Review and former FCCT president.

"She was a tireless and effective networker; she was generous to a fault and she stayed the course when others grew bored. Beneath her steely and sometimes truculent exterior lurked a kind and gentle soul with a huge heart and a soft spot for the underdog. At Nikkei, Gwen helped many of us get published in an increasingly sparse and frugal news environment. She was a strict editor with strong views of her own -- but that's what good writers need. Gwen's devotion to the FCCT, carrying us all through the pandemic with flair and skill, will long be remembered."

"My heart is heavy," posted Nirmal Ghosh, an FCCT past president and former Straits Times correspondent. "We travelled together a few times back in the day in Burma... We squabbled a lot on the road; she joked that we were like an old married couple! Even in this sadness, memories of her bring a smile. Just the other month we were out for a drink at the jazz bar at the Kimpton in Bangkok and the waitress had to ask her twice to stop vaping behind her white napkin. 'Can't take you anywhere,' I told her. Gwen just rolled her eyes at me and carried on."

"Gwen's favor to a young journalist was like sunlight to a plant," said Francesca Regalado, Nikkei Asia's departing correspondent in Thailand. "When I arrived in Bangkok three years ago, Gwen took me under her wing, encouraged my reporting instincts, praised and critiqued my stories. It's hard to fathom never getting a late-night phone call from her again or an all-caps email, or plotting reporting trips or hearing her war stories. Since we lost her amid the earthquake in Myanmar and Thailand, the only thing that has kept me going is her voice in my head, saying, 'Get on with it, we have a story to cover.'"

"Gwen's networking skills were exemplary, and her passion for Myanmar inspiring," said Panu Wongcham, a senior correspondent with Reuters and returning FCCT president. "But it will be the general conversation about work and life with her that I shall miss most. She was a motherly figure in my journalism career."

"As those who worked for her will confirm, whatever time zone you were in, Gwen would answer your emails displaying her preternatural capacity to eschew sleep in favour of work," journalist Fiona MacGregor recalled.

One very late night in Yangon, she was on the floor of a mutual friend's flat in Yangon, alternating between frantically typing, smoking and doing an occasional yoga exercise," recalled veteran Dutch journalist Minka Nijhuis. "It was then that I started wondering if this woman ever slept."

"Gwen often sent long, stream of consciousness emails in the middle of the night, and was notorious for her unpunctuality," said Dominic Faulder, another FCCT past president and a Nikkei Asia associate editor. "She could exasperate treasurers, but her utter devotion to the club and worthwhile causes, particularly vulnerable regional journalists, was never in doubt. She was a force of nature with so much still to give."

"What a force you were," posted Cherie Hart, an old friend. "You were like no one else in your generosity, loyalty and intensity. Your exit has left a gaping hole in our world."

"I am smiling through tears as I savour your humour, wit, outrageousness and irreverence, as well as your eye rolls and your 'Well, I don't know about that,' said in your gravelly, jazz singer's voice," posted close friend Lyndal Barry. "But beyond your sometimes sharp elbows was such a kind and thoughtful soul, who I loved. See you on the other side girlfriend..."

"I met her in Tokyo in 1995, so I have known her as long as I have been a correspondent," posted Richard Lloyd Parry, Asia editor of The Times. "She was fierce, warm, dynamic and loyal. I have never known anyone who had so many friends -- genuine and intimate friends, not superficial acquaintances. She had the gift of intimacy. She made life funnier and more interesting."

"Larger than life is just three words, but its picture in my mind is Gwen Robinson," said Sean Turnell, the Australian economic adviser to State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi prior to their imprisonment in Naypyitaw, Myanmar's capital.

"When I saw her last Thursday, in a touching moment, she asked to hold my hand," wrote Vatikiotis. "It was warm and full of life! She fought to the very end. Vale Gwen. Your legacy lives."



Chinese soldiers. Photo: AFP

THE 2027 COUNTDOWN: CHINA'S CALCULATED THREAT TO GLOBAL STABILITY

SUN LEE

The spectre of conflict looms large over the Taiwan Strait, with Taiwan's recent military exercises crystallizing a warning. China's invasion ambitions are not mere rhetoric but a meticulously planned strategic objective. The island nation's annual Han Kuang Exercise has, for the first time, pinpointed 2027 as a potential year of Chinese invasion, transforming geopolitical speculation into a tangible timeline of potential confrontation.

This year's military drills are more than a routine demonstration of preparedness. They represent a critical response to escalating Chinese military pressure and a direct acknowledgment of growing regional tensions. Taiwan's defense minister, Wellington Koo, has been unequivocal: the exercises simulate scenarios that

could unfold within the next one to two years, with a laser focus on potential offensive strategies by 2027.

The timeline is not arbitrary. Multiple strategic voices have converged on this year, lending credibility to the potential threat. U.S. Strategic Command Commander Anthony J. Cotton recently warned that the Chinese People's Liberation Army could "seize Taiwan by 2027". This assessment is echoed by various security experts, including former US Indo-Pacific commander John Aquilino and Japanese security expert Takashi Kawakami, who have urged accelerated preparedness. Chinese President Xi Jinping's directive to the PLA to "be prepared for invasion" by 2027 is a calculated move that transcends mere military posturing. It reflects China's broader geopolitical ambitions to challenge

and potentially replace U.S. influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The potential invasion is not just about territorial claims but represents a fundamental challenge to the existing international order.

China's military expansion is deliberate and multifaceted. The development of dual-use shipyards, nuclear weapons launch platforms, and aggressive maritime activities reveal a comprehensive strategy of military modernization. These are not isolated actions but interconnected efforts designed to create a strategic environment conducive to potential military intervention. Taiwan's response has been resolute. President Lai Ching-te has committed to increasing defense spending to more than 3% of GDP, a significant escalation from the current 2.4%. This move is not just a financial commitment but a strategic declaration of intent to fortify the island's defensive capabilities. The expansion includes plans to double military drill durations and deploy more reserve brigades, signaling a comprehensive approach to national defense.

The international community is taking notice. NATO's recent draft communique explicitly labels China as a "decisive enabler" of Russia's war efforts in Ukraine and a systemic challenge to global security. This recognition transforms the Taiwan issue from a regional conflict to a global concern about power dynamics and international norms. Taiwan's defense ministry has been unambiguous in its messaging. Responding to Chinese claims of inevitable reunification, they invoked the lessons of World War II, stating that "any form of aggression and expansion will end in failure." This is more than diplomatic rhetoric; it is a pointed reminder of historical consequences for expansionist ambitions.

The geopolitical landscape is increasingly complex. China's military activities extend beyond Taiwan, with tensions escalating in the South China Sea and

confrontations with the Philippines. The region has become a chessboard of strategic maneuvers, with U.S. allies like Australia and Japan increasingly active in military preparations. What makes the 2027 timeline particularly volatile is the potential intersection of political and military objectives. Experts suggest Xi might seek a fourth term, and a military action could be a mechanism to justify his continued leadership. The combination of territorial ambitions and political consolidation creates a dangerous "perfect storm" of potential conflict.

Taiwan's stance remains unequivocal. The government repeatedly emphasizes that only the Taiwanese people can determine their future. This assertion of sovereignty is not just a political statement but a fundamental rejection of authoritarian claims of ownership. The approaching 2027 deadline is not a countdown to inevitability but a critical period of global strategic recalibration. It demands heightened international vigilance, diplomatic engagement, and a unified response to potential aggression. The stakes are not confined to Taiwan or the Indo-Pacific region; they represent a fundamental test of international principles of sovereignty, democracy, and self-determination.

As military exercises continue and tensions simmer, the world watches. The 2027 timeline is more than a date—it is a moment of potential transformation in global geopolitics, where the actions of today will shape the contours of international relations for decades to come.

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



CCP PUSHES NATIONWIDE AI ADOPTION - EXPERTS WARN OF DEEP SOCIETAL CONSEQUENCES

SUN LEE

China's rapid and aggressive push into artificial intelligence (AI) is profoundly reshaping its economy at an unprecedented speed. The launch of "Deep Seek," a cutting-edge AI model, serves as a significant symbol of the Communist Party's high-stakes AI ambitions.

From corporate offices to government agencies, the country is witnessing a swift deployment of AI applications that are hailed as a necessary leap towards technological dominance. However, as AI becomes more embedded in everyday life, concerns are growing that its widespread adoption will bring not just efficiency but also massive job losses, further deepening China's existing economic woes.

Premier Li Qiang recently emphasized the importance of vigorously promoting AI consumption to drive economic growth. State-backed academics

have also hailed AI as a historic opportunity to gain an edge in the global tech race. The messaging is clear—Beijing sees AI as a strategic weapon in its competition with the West. However, the rollout of Deep Seek has sparked international pushback. The rapid expansion of AI is not just an economic experiment; it is also a geopolitical flashpoint.

China's AI sector has grown exponentially, with over 4,500 AI firms by mid-2024 and nearly 250 million users of generative AI services by year's end. This growth has spurred widespread automation in industries ranging from healthcare to logistics. In Shenzhen, more than 70 robots have been deployed in government service centres, eliminating the need for human staff. Hospitals in Guangdong have rolled out AI-powered consultations, replacing frontline medical personnel with algorithms that diagnose and prescribe treatments.

"China is rushing into AI without considering the full implications," said an independent writer. "This 'AI Great Leap Forward' will transform the workforce overnight and bring massive instability." The fallout is already evident. Leaked documents from Shanghai Shenme Cosmetics Co. revealed that its chairman ordered sweeping layoffs, instructing departments to keep only employees proficient in AI. The customer service division saw a 95% reduction, while the legal and content innovation teams were slashed by 50% and 80%, respectively. This trend is expected to accelerate as companies embrace automation to cut costs.

In the midst of China's economic challenges, the potential impact of AI on the workforce is becoming increasingly worrisome. While the efficiency gains from AI may contribute to GDP growth, concerns are being raised about the possibility of a growing wealth gap and reduced consumer demand. Experts have indicated that the spread of AI could lead to significant structural unemployment, emphasizing the need for retraining programs to prevent widespread job obsolescence.

Skepticism over Deep Seek's future persists, particularly given its reliance on U.S. semiconductor technology. As Washington tightens export controls, China's AI ambitions may soon collide with hard technological limitations. Beijing's AI revolution is at a crossroads: it is either a breakthrough that will reshape the nation's tech landscape or a huge gamble that will exacerbate economic instability now and even worse in the years to come.

According to a report by the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT), the AI industry contributed approximately 1.3 trillion yuan (\$200 billion) to the national GDP in 2023. The number of users of generative AI services reached nearly 250 million by the end of the year, highlighting the rapid adoption and integration of AI technologies across various sectors.

The integration of AI into different industries has led to significant automation. A report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) estimated that AI-driven automation could displace up to 30% of jobs in certain sectors by 2030.

The widespread adoption of AI is expected to have profound economic and social consequences. On one hand, AI-driven efficiency could boost GDP growth. The CAICT report projected that the AI industry could contribute up to 3 trillion yuan (\$460 billion) to the national GDP by 2030. On the other hand, the displacement of workers and the resulting structural unemployment could widen the wealth gap and reduce consumer demand. Experts warned that without robust retraining programs, millions of workers could become obsolete, leading to social instability.

The rollout of Deep Seek has not been without controversy. South Korea banned its use, citing security concerns, while U.S. and European government agencies flagged it as a potential security risk. The reliance on U.S. semiconductor technology for AI development has also raised concerns. As Washington tightens export controls, China's AI ambitions may face significant technological limitations. This geopolitical tension highlights the broader strategic competition between China and the West in the field of AI.

In conclusion, while China's aggressive push into AI holds the promise of technological dominance and economic growth, it also poses significant risks. The potential for job losses, economic instability, and geopolitical tensions cannot be ignored. Beijing's AI revolution is at a critical juncture, and its future will depend on how these challenges are navigated in the years to come.

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



WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

“I have to work to save another life. I have to forget the past! That’s what revolution taught me: You have to accept death, and keep moving to save the rest,” Hector tells the Insight Myanmar Podcast, encapsulating the resilience and determination that have defined his and Dr. Paing’s experiences in Karenni State. Their story offers a raw and detailed account of the challenges they have faced in providing urgent medical care under the most adverse conditions.

Before the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, Dr. Paing was already established in the field; meanwhile, Hector had been a medical student for 10 years. They met as medical volunteers during the COVID-19 outbreak. But the coup shattered both their career plans, culminating in a decisive and perilous decision to leave their homes and lend medical expertise to the revolution.

Their decision to go to Karenni State in particular was motivated by reports of inadequate medical support in the face of intense conflict. Strangers to the region and its predominantly Karenni population, they were initially met with mistrust due to their Bamar background. They explain that the Karenni people, having suffered under decades of oppression, equate the word “Bamar” with “soldier” in their language. Therefore, building trust required persistent, patient effort, starting with the establishment of clinics in villages, and proving their commitment and trustworthiness through their work.

At first, resources were painfully scarce. And what is worse, in February 2022, a nighttime bombing raid reduced the town’s hospital they were working out of to rubble, forcing the team to relocate to a jungle setting. Despite the constant threat of drones and airstrikes, they constructed a makeshift clinic with bamboo and wood. Over time, it evolved with brick structures and ceramic tiles, reflecting incremental progress despite limited funding and resources. Throughout that process, secrecy was paramount: the new hospital’s location remains carefully hidden to avoid detection by the regime, ensuring the safety of patients and staff.

The conditions early on were particularly grueling, and they have certainly not improved much since. Medical supplies were sourced through convoluted and often unreliable channels, and needed to be smuggled across the border. International aid, which could have been transformative, was largely unavailable due to bureaucratic and political barriers. Generators provided electricity, while water—a precious resource—was rationed and had to be shared with nearby villages. Internet connectivity only became feasible in 2023 with the arrival of Starlink. This was crucial, as it replaced the long, laborious, daily trips to reach somewhere they could pick up a signal! So in order for their mission to succeed, Dr. Paing and Hector are forced to rely on ingenuity, the goodwill of local communities, and the few donors who knew of their predicament and stepped forward to help.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/3/1/episode-322-welcome-to-the-jungle>



Photo: AFP

JUNTA CONTINUES DEADLY AIRSTRIKES ACROSS MYANMAR DESPITE DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE DISASTER

Myanmar's military junta has persisted with its brutal air campaign across multiple areas even as the country struggles to cope with the catastrophic aftermath of the March 28 earthquake that has killed over 2,000 people, according to reports.

While international aid efforts focus on earthquake relief, the regime conducted at least eight airstrikes between March 28-30, targeting both active conflict zones and civilian areas.

In the latest attack, military jets bombed Kachin Independence Army (KIA) territory in Kachin State's Monghnyin District on March 31, reportedly killing 38 civilians and injuring 28 others. There was no ground fighting when the junta launched the airstrike, a Kachin

source confirmed.

The Myanmar junta's airstrikes have also targeted Kachin State's Bhamo for two consecutive days, while launching separate airstrikes on Mrauk-U in Rakhine State and Chaung-U Township in Sagaing Region

Locals in the areas said that the junta is inviting international aid while simultaneously targeting suffering communities with airstrikes.

Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan on March 30 called for an immediate ceasefire in Myanmar, noting this should be a time focused on saving lives.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

HEARTLESS: FURY ERUPTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AS MYANMAR JUNTA REJECTS EARTHQUAKE CEASEFIRE OFFER

Social media users across Myanmar have responded with outrage after the military junta rejected a temporary ceasefire proposed by the Three Brotherhood Alliance following March 28's devastating 7.7-magnitude earthquake.

"While international aid workers are gathering to help, Min Aung Hlaing is about to show his cruelty, cunning, and wickedness. He's as small-minded," wrote a Facebook user in a comment.

The junta's Ministry of Information announced on April 1 that while the traditional Thingyan water festival in mid-April would proceed without music and dancing out of respect for earthquake victims, military operations would continue.

Junta chief said that despite some ethnic armed groups not currently engaging in combat, they were "gathering and preparing for attacks" which he claimed justified his ongoing military operations.

Another social media user wrote, "May they face all kinds of disasters in this life and all future lives,

suffering in a living hell," while a third commented, "The terrorist military leaders aren't interested in saving people, they're only interested in killing the citizens."

The anti-junta Three Brotherhood Alliance comprises Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, Ta'ang National Liberation Army and Arakan Army.

The catastrophic 7.7-magnitude tremor that devastated central Myanmar on March 28 has resulted in a death toll exceeding 2,700, with survivors in the hardest-hit areas now facing severe shortages of basic necessities including food, clean water, and critical supplies.

Meanwhile, the exiled National Unity Government (NUG) has also announced it will pause all offensive operations against the junta for two weeks, continuing only defensive actions.

UPDATE: The junta announced a 20-day ceasefire on Tuesday, just prior to Min Aung Hlaing's visit to BIMSTEC.

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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