

# MOHINGA MATTERS

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I WANT **YOU**  
FOR MY CRIMES



# Recap

In the month of the coup anniversary, what shook our lives was the regime's enforcement of conscription law as if life had not been hard enough. Since its announcement on February 10, every young and able person has considered ways to escape from mandatory military service. The regime announced that there are 13 million eligible individuals according to the census and that it would recruit 5000 personnel monthly starting in April and 50,000 personnel annually. This only creates all the more reason for young people to flock and find opportunities elsewhere. Within one week of the announcement, two people died in the queue in front of the passport office in Mandalay as people were desperate to get out of the country. In the past few weeks, the news reported on social media that young people had been arbitrarily taken by security forces, and hence, many worried that they were taken to serve in the military. The Rohingya community also fell victim to this enforced military service although they were not even granted citizenship in Myanmar.

Min Aung Hlaing extended the state of emergency on February 1, which marked the fifth extension since the coup in 2021. The civilian-elected National Unity Government (NUG), on the other hand, issued a joint statement with a few ethnic revolution organizations to reiterate their shared political directions: primarily to reclaim the country from the regime. As the parallel government, the NUG has been documenting the atrocities committed by the regime since the coup, and it announced this month that more than 80 incidents of mass killing have been reported since the coup. This is the only num-

ber that the NUG and affiliations are able to collect so the actual number and impact can be larger than this.

On the topic of atrocities, the regime launched an aerial attack on a school in Karenni State while the school was in session, killing four children, two teachers and injuring at least 10 children. Photos released from the scene broke our hearts. The NUG and Karenni Interim Executive Council jointly asked the UN to declare a No-Fly zone in the area since indiscriminate and disproportionate aerial attacks are the regime's last resort to the dissidents. This month also witnessed another loss of a hero, i.e. longtime political activist Ma Nobel Aye. She was arrested in the Bago region on January 29 with possession of firearms, and on February 8, she was shot dead during the regime's custody. She was known for her resilience and resistance against successive military regimes. Many, including the NUG's Foreign Minister Daw Zin Mar Aung, expressed condolences for her death.

On the warfront, while the active clashes in Northern Shan State died down after reaching a ceasefire agreement last month, the military suffered defeats in Rakhine State as the Arakan Army (AA) advanced its offensives. AA launched this military campaign on November 13 and as of February 16, it managed to take control of seven cities including Taung Pyo and Paletwa in Chin State. The ethnic armed group also issued an ultimatum to the regime's Regional Operations Command (ROC) based in Sittwe to surrender. Due to the escalation of violence, Bangladesh evacuated its diplomats from Sittwe to Yangon. The NUG's Min-

istry of Defence also published updates on clashes, the situation of its troops in Karen State, as well as the seizure of weapons from the regime.

This month, a UNOCHA report revealed that 2.7 million people have been displaced in Myanmar and are in need of humanitarian aid. Following its aid provision plan with the regime last month, Thailand further announced that its government had inspected Tak Province to open up a humanitarian corridor. The provision of aid is expected to begin in March. However, Karen National Union (KNU), the ethnic armed group that has been active on the Thai-Myanmar border for decades, was skeptical of Thailand's aid plan and criticized its collaboration with the military regime.

On the international front, the UK sanctioned two infantry units and two mining companies owned by the regime while Australia imposed sanctions on five regime-affiliated businesses including two state-owned banks MFTB and MICB, and private companies that facilitated importing jet fuel to the junta. Western countries have been insistent on creating inclusive dialogues to end the violence in Myanmar. But how do we sit at the same table with the military when all it does is tighten the rules and make it impossible to live?

To end on a slightly positive note, Kim Aris finally received a handwritten letter from his mom Daw Aung San Suu Kyi through the British Foreign Office earlier this month. She said that her health has declined but her spirit remains strong. So is the rest of the country.

**February 1, 2024**

The United Kingdom took decisive action against two infantry units and two military-affiliated businesses implicated in severe human rights violations and the oppression of civilians. The sanctioned entities include No. (101) Infantry Division, No. (77) Infantry Division, and two mining companies, No. (1) and No. (2) owned by the regime.

**February 3, 2024**

The Ministry of Planning, Finance, and Investment under the NUG announced that the total value of transactions using NUGPay has surpassed 1 trillion Digital MMK.

**February 5, 2024**

The UN Security Council convened to discuss the current ASEAN chair Laos' proposal for addressing the Myanmar crisis. Alounkeo Kittikhoun, ASEAN Special Representative for Myanmar, outlined the Lao plan, while Assistant Secretary-General Khiari briefed the council on the United Nations' efforts.

**February 8, 2024**

The National League for Democracy (NLD) reported that over a three-year span since the coup, there were 4,095 fatalities and 83 incidents of mass killings involving five or more individuals.

**February 10, 2024**

The regime enacted a conscription law mandating military service for young men and women, requiring a minimum commitment of two years. The National Unity Government (NUG) and the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) have jointly urged political parties registered with the military council's election commission to either revoke their party registration or have their members resign from the party.

**February 2, 2024**

Following the second meeting in Chinlong from January 30th to 31st, the Chinland Council officially declared the formation of the Chinland government. The new government, including the Executive, Judiciary and Legislative, and House of Representatives, was established in accordance with the directives from the first Chin State Council meeting.

**February 4, 2024**

The Ta'ang National Army (TNLA), having captured seven towns in northern Shan State, formally declared that all Ta'ang nationals are required to serve in the military. As per the regulation, every Ta'ang/Palaung male aged 16 to 35 must enlist, and in families with two or more brothers, one male per household must join the TNLA ranks.

**February 7, 2024**

Two brigadier generals and a colonel, who had surrendered to the Kokang armed group MNDAA in Laukkai town on the China-Myanmar border, were transferred to Insein prison in Yangon after receiving death sentences.

**February 9, 2024**

TNLA announced that its chairperson Lieutenant General Tah Ai Pon and AA Commander-in-Chief Major General Twan Mrat Naing attended the victory ceremony marking the eradication of the regime's military presence in the entire Kokang region.

The military council announced through state-owned newspapers on February 9 that more than fifty thousand (50,691) foreigners, including most of the Chinese nationals who came and lived illegally from the border areas, were returned to their respective countries.

### **February 11, 2024**

The Arakan Army (AA) revealed that several bodies were discovered in Mrauk-U and Min Bya townships after it had seized control from the regime's forces. Seven were shot and killed in the cell of the regime's Light Infantry Battalion 378 in Mrauk-U Township on January 31. The bodies were buried in the bunkers near the military hospital. One of the victims was identified as Ko Myat Thu Tun @ Phoe Thiha, a Rakhine journalist.

### **February 14, 2024**

206 Myanmar nationals held at the Tomao Immigration Detention Center in Ranong, southern Thailand, were deported to Myanmar. Thai authorities, along with officials from the regime's Immigration Ministry, oversaw the repatriation process, which involved transferring the detainees to civil officials on the Myanmar side.

### **February 16, 2024**

Observers noted a surge in visa applications at the Thai embassy, with reports of thousands of people forming queues outside the embassy following the enactment of conscription law.

### **February 18, 2024**

The junta enacted a regulation stipulating that if frontline soldiers fail to maintain contact with the army for a period of six months, their families will be vacated from military accommodations, and all salaries and benefits will be suspended.

### **February 20, 2024**

The regime's spokesperson General Zaw Min Tun stated that although women are legally required to be recruited into the military under the conscription law, there are currently no plans to recruit women.

Following the enactment of Myanmar's military conscription law, individuals attempting to cross the Thailand-Myanmar border via the Mae Sot-Myawaddy No. 1 Friendship Bridge faced new restrictions.

### **February 13, 2024**

During a meeting with political parties in Nay Pyi Taw, the coup leader Min Aung Hlaing expressed willingness to consider constitutional amendments. He emphasized that any necessary amendments should be pursued through the Hluttaw.

The regime's forces regained control of key areas in Kawlin Town, Sagaing Region, previously held by the resistance forces under NUG.

### **February 15, 2024**

Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun, spokesperson for the military council, announced that the military intends to recruit 50,000 individuals annually following the implementation of the conscription law. He emphasized that this number reflects a cap to ensure proper compensation and benefits for all recruits based on their qualifications and responsibilities in national defense.

AA announced its successful capture of all military council units and police stations in Myebon, Rakhine State, further extending its control to seven cities. During the three-month period from November 13 to February 16, the AA secured seven cities, including Taung Pyo and Paletwa in Chin State, amidst ongoing fighting in Rakhine State.

### **February 19, 2024**

Two women tragically died from suffocation amidst a large crowd waiting at the passport issuing office in Aung Myay Tharzan Township, Mandalay. The victims, 52-year-old Daw Khin Myo-Aye and 39-year-old Ma Khaing Wai from Aung Myay Tharzan Township, lost their lives, while 53-year-old Daw Htay Htay Win sustained leg injuries and received treatment at Mandalay General Hospital.



**February 21, 2024**

General Min Aung Hlaing held talks with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko to enhance bilateral relations and cooperation, including nuclear technology, as reported by state media controlled by the military council. Discussions focused on the peaceful utilization of nuclear technology, as well as collaboration in areas such as hydropower and solar energy generation, tourism promotion, and social and educational sectors.

In Mizoram, a northeastern Indian state bordering Myanmar, hundreds protested on February 21 against the Indian government's decision to revoke freedom of movement along the border between India and Myanmar.

**February 26, 2023**

NUG said a coalition of resistance forces led by the KNU seized 60% of Kawkareik town, Karen State.

**February 28, 2024**

The regime declared martial law on Mabein and Mongmit townships in Shan-north.

**February 29, 2024**

A dozen local residents, including children, were killed, and twenty others were injured in a market during a large-scale ammunition fired by the regime's forces in Rakhine state's capital, Sittwe.

**February 22, 2024**

Thai police have apprehended over 300 Burmese youths who crossed the border in the past week, with recent arrests occurring in the Turk district. On February 22, 24 Burmese youths aged between 18 and 30 were detained after crossing a river near Mae Sot, Thailand, comprising 7 women and 17 men.

**February 25, 2024**

U Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson for NUG, announced that individuals participating in executing the military service directive issued by the State Administration Council will face legal prosecution under the anti-violence legislation.

**February 27, 2024**

Regime's soldiers from the headquarters of the 99th Light Infantry Division in Mongmit, northern Shan State, have been accused by the Shan Human Rights Foundation of illegally killing civilians, committing gang rape, and burning homes during a month of clashes.

During the NUG's meeting, the interim president Duwa Lashi La warned that the NUG and the resistance forces on the ground must try to enhance political alignment, emphasizing that the NUG can offer effective assistance to displaced people fleeing the war only through close political collaboration with those forces.



**We write weekly to document the coup, to share our experience, and to contemplate. The daily entries can be read here:**

<https://mohingamatters.com/weekly-updates/>

# Post-Coup Exodus 2.0

On 10th Feb 2024, the junta declared that the State Administration Council (SAC), is going to enforce the conscription law. While the exact rationale behind this decision is unclear outside the junta's inner circle, the implications are dire and far-reaching. The most visible consequence of this is people leaving the country, both legally and illegally.

Since the military coup of 2021, the flight of personnel and money from Myanmar to abroad has been a common phenomenon. Post-coup political oppression and lack of employment opportunities pushed the middle class to try to leave the country legally, and more disadvantaged people to leave illegally since 2021 and it has increased with the removal of COVID restrictions in neighboring countries. The elites, including the richest families in the country, have been moving their families and assets outside the country too. People from conflict-affected areas are also finding leaving towards non-affected areas alone is not enough to work and send money back to their families living as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and attempt to leave overseas.

While the exact reasons are varying, the number of people trying to leave Myanmar since the coup is substantial, and this increased capital flight abroad and reduced domestic production capacity (which is directly related to the labor supply) led to a severe decline of Myanmar Kyat (MMK) over past three years, with the currency being valued today at one-third of pre-coup levels. Furthermore, while this is not the only root

cause, the ongoing flight led to a vicious cycle between people increasingly leaving because of lack of employment and businesses increasingly finding it difficult to operate (and hampering job creation) because of labor shortage.

However, most people leaving the country over the past three years can afford to plan and formulate their strategies. But this time, panic and desperation overwhelm people for valid reasons. Getting conscripted or even getting a mention could lead to a range of outcomes from facing torture and death at the hands of SAC to at the very least getting extorted to a large sum of money to postpone conscription. With even the most favorable outcome the latter, it is reasonable that people would rather spend their life's savings on leaving the country and living freely. Also, in the three weeks since the announcement of plans for conscription, the arbitrary arrest of civilians or extortions to get out of arrest are getting more frequent in SAC-controlled territories and this stirred up the public panic.

For SAC, if the aim of enacting conscription policy was to strengthen their position in the civil war, that proved counterproductive as enlistment towards anti-SAC armed groups exploded with the announcement. Moreover, the junta has been pushed deeper towards defeat because there is no stability across the country and this law only further panics the people and destabilizes society.

The impact of people leaving and



trying to leave is most visible in passport issuing authorities and in the Embassy of Thailand in Myanmar. At the passport issuing authority office in Mandalay, a stampede led to fatalities. The Thai Embassy, facing an exponential surge in demand for visas, restricts the issuance of 400 visas per day. Thailand, as a neighboring country with similar cultures and being part of ASEAN which allows two weeks of visa-on-arrival for Myanmar nationals, has long been the recipient of the first stage of human and financial flights from Myanmar and has been facing legal and illegal entries through different means since the coup, and it could be argued that this has favorable consequences to Thai business sector and concerning security consequences for Thai authorities. A week after the announcement of the conscription mandate in Myanmar, Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin remarked "They (Myanmar nationals) are welcome if they enter the country legally. But if they sneak into the country illegally, legal action will be taken against them. I already discussed the matter with security agencies", while also allaying concerns that Myanmar immigrants are going to take jobs away from the locals. From an economic perspective, while there could be cases of individual Thai workers losing out due to this influx of Myanmar mi-



grants, we believe that the overall Thai economy will benefit greatly from the inflow of both skilled and educated workers and general laborers.

However, from a security viewpoint, it is understandable that this sudden and dramatic increased inflow of immigrants (both legal and illegal) would pose a headache for Thai authorities. Since the coup of 2021, the failed state situation in Myanmar has empowered warlords at the border regions and their partner international criminal networks to expand their operations. For Thailand, the scam factories such as KK Park and Shwe Kokko in the

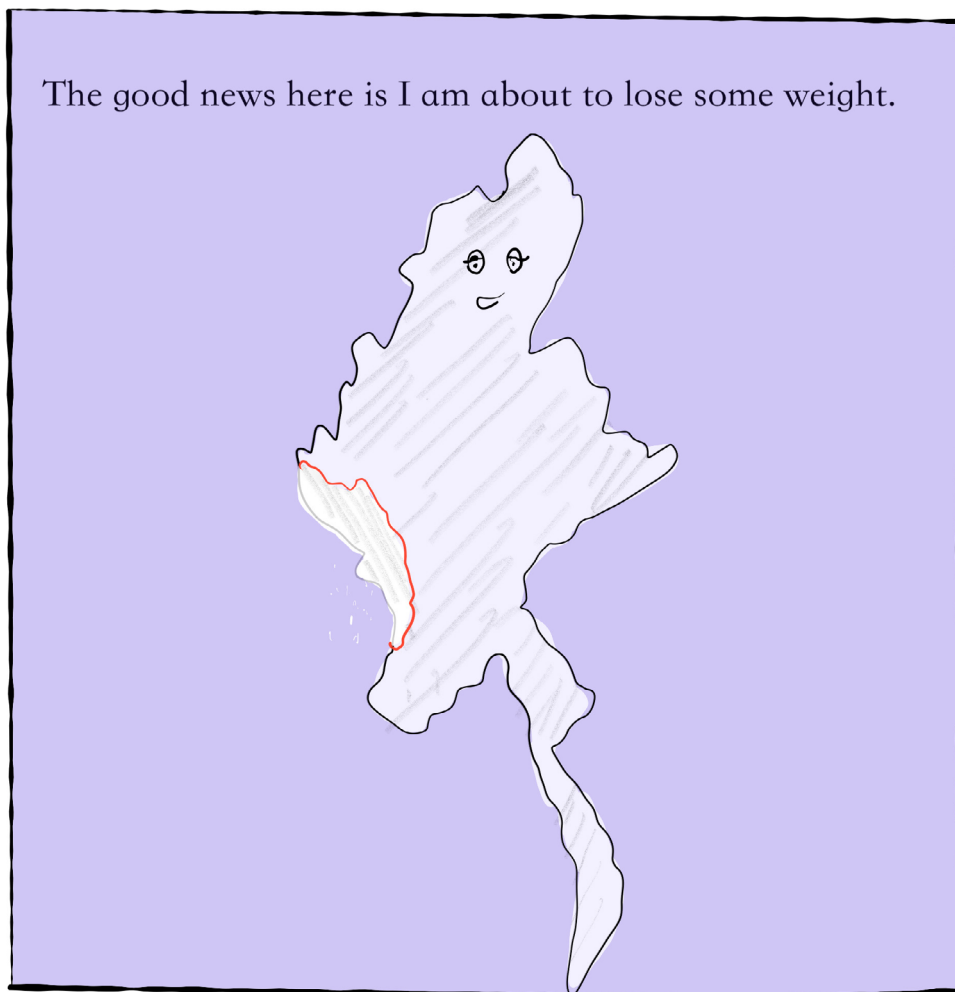
neighboring town of Myawaddy, just across the river from its borders, proved to be difficult security problems with international criminal gangs behind these operations using Thailand as human trafficking and smuggling routes, and setting up fronts in Thailand. It stands to reason that the criminal elements along the Thai border would now further exploit the current fear and desperation stemming from the conscription law. Many trying to flee the junta's conscription could fall victim to human trafficking and modern slavery.

For the international community, this latest exodus of people from

Myanmar is yet another reminder of how the coup in Myanmar has cross-border consequences. However, regardless of the magnitude of challenges faced by Thailand or other countries, that remains paltry compared to the suffering of the people of Myanmar.

Do we have a solution to alleviate this suffering for the people of Myanmar and the security concerns of the international community?

The first step would require the removal of the junta.





## Rakhine State

# The Arakan Liberation: An Interview with a Political Analyst

While the Three Brotherhood Alliance's offensives have slowed down in the Shan-north after the ceasefire agreement with the regime, the Arakan Army (AA) has accelerated its effort to control as many areas as possible in the Rakhine and Chin states. To this day, the AA has managed to capture Paletwa, Pauk Taw, Kyauk Taw, Minbya, Mrauk-U, and Myebon towns as well as over 200 regime stations. We talked with a former journalist/current political analyst to understand how far the AA will go and what impact it will have on the people.

**MM: We are hearing some very encouraging news from Rakhine State, where the Arakan**

**Army (AA) has achieved significant victories over the regime's forces in various areas and now controls the majority of the state. How do you feel about these developments?**

Analyst: First of all, I am so happy to hear the great victory news of the AA from Rakhine State. People can start to believe that they are going to be free from the dictatorship soon. At the same time, I am concerned that the regime would retaliate and oppress even more innocent people including Rohingyas and marginalized groups.

**MM: What do you believe is the AA's objective in this revolution? Do you anticipate the**

**AA will seek to assume control over the entire Rakhine State?**

Analyst: AA's political ambition may not be exactly the same as the other resistance forces in the rest of the country but share significant common grounds in eradicating the regime. And yes, I believe AA plans to take control of the entire Rakhine state.

**MM: What level of public support do you think the AA has in Rakhine State?**

Analyst: It's clearly seen in the victories of the AA how much public support it has in Rakhine State. No public support, no accomplishment.

**MM: The AA has been urging**



**displaced people to return to their homes following the conflicts. Do you believe it is safe for people to return now?**

Analyst: Honestly, I don't think there is complete safety for the displaced people in those areas. The regime would always try to bomb the regions they lost control and use civilians as human shields. Those risks always exist. And no party could guarantee a 100 percent safety. It's not time yet.

**MM: There have been reports of dozens of youths being arrested at Sittwe Airport by the regime last week. Do you perceive this as a retaliatory action in response to the AA's success? How do you think the AA and the people can address this challenge?**

Analyst: The regime will continue to be cruel and cunning; its troops will abduct youths and torture the elderly. It's a standard procedure for the military to take on the unarmed individuals and commit war crimes whenever it loses on the battlefield. The arrest of those youths was another example, of course. It was a retribution for the AA's victories. It is difficult to say how people can overcome this. Keeping accurate information flow and staying together in unity would be a start.

**MM: Due to the conscription law, many young people have fled major cities in search of safety abroad. Do you think Rakhine State could serve as a safe haven for these individuals? If so, do you believe the local Rakhine population will welcome them?**

Analyst: I don't think those areas under the control of AA in Rakhine State are ready for this purpose just yet, solely for safety issues. The regime would continue to attack. People migrating to

**“The military would continue to haunt Rohingyas in various ways. They are marginalized and helpless. Of course, the military would lure them into warfare with citizenship as a bait.”**

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those townships would weaken the AA's upper hand on the battlefield. In addition to that, the military would also try to stir racial and religious conflicts if people moved there right now.

**MM: Is the goal of achieving liberation in Arakan aligned with the broader goals of the entire resistance movement, or are they different agendas?**

Analyst: The Arakan Liberation may have a slight difference from those of the rest of the country despite sharing a common objective of resisting the junta. The people of Rakhine may have a stronger motivation and agenda. In the old times, Arakan had its monarch and lived independently from the mainland Myanmar. The push for such independence can be extremely strong.

**MM: Reports are suggesting that the military regime has armed Rohingyas and coerced them into joining the fight against the AA. It's also been said that Rohingya refugees have been promised citizenship if they serve in the military. How credible do you find these reports, and what impact might such incentives have on refugees?**

Analyst: The military would continue to haunt Rohingyas in various ways. They are marginalized and helpless. Of course, the military would lure them into warfare with citizenship as a bait. Back in 2010, same thing happened.

The generals asked Rohingyas to vote for their proxy political party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Understanding how ruthless the military has been and continues to be towards Rohingyas, nobody finds the generals credible enough to join them on the battlefield. Unfortunately, it may not even be an option, it's very likely they are forced to take up arms at gunpoint. There is no point of victim-blaming. We must continue to help them in every way to avoid such unfortunate circumstances.

**MM: In the midst of ongoing conflict, Rohingya refugees who are unable to seek refuge in the Rakhine mainland or bordering countries face challenges. Who do you think can provide the most support to these refugees?**

Analyst: It's an extremely difficult situation for Rohingyas. The idea of coexisting between the two communities of Rakhine and Rohingyas has merely materialized. It will take time to build into a fruitful relationship. Warfare is getting in the way now. Since no help can be expected from the outside world or even from the rest of the country at this stage, it's crucial that coexistence must be adopted and cherished by all parties involved.

# CONSCRIPTION LAW

## WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR

(not a lot tho)

Burmese leaders had entertained the idea of mandatory military service since the 1950s but no one in power except the freshest coup leader Min Aung Hlaing had the courage to enforce it. Outgoing Than Shwe's regime enacted the Conscription law on 4 November 2010 by order before the sham election that took place a few days later. Chaos and panic stirred up when it was announced. However, two successive quasi-civilian governments that took power in the following decade did not enforce the law until now. So here is what we know about the law so far.

**13 MILLION** individuals currently eligible for recruitment according to the census

**60,000** individuals will be recruited annually

**5,000** personnel will be recruited in each intake starting April 2024 and the recruitment of women will begin at fifth intake

**7 MILLION**



**18 - 35 years**



**18 - 27 years**

**6 MILLION**

**FOR TWO YEARS OF BASIC MILITARY SERVICE**

**18 - 45 years**

**18 - 35 years**

**FOR SPECIALISTS SUCH AS DOCTORS, ENGINEERS WITH THREE YEARS OF MANDATORY SERVICE**





## Conscription Law: Another Noose Around Our Necks?

Crowds are never a problem for Myanmar people as they are known to love hosting celebrations, carnivals, and funfairs so much in the olden and golden days. Especially for people in the Mandalay region, their Thingyan festival has always been extravagant, and the famous Taungpyone spiritual festival also receives thousands of visitors from near and far. Very rarely do tragic incidents or accidents happen in these celebrations.

Daw Khin Myo Aye and Ma Khine Wai might have visited these festivals in their lifetimes as they were originally from the Mandalay region. The 52-year-old and 39-year-old were in a crowd on

their last day on earth, but it was not this kind of fun-filled crowd that took their lives.

On the morning of 19 February, thousands of people were lining up in front of a passport office in Mandalay; some had even started the night before despite the regime's nighttime curfew. With no proper queue system enforced, people who were in line for long hours refused to get water and food, worrying that they might lose their spots. When the gates eventually opened, the crowd turned into a chaotic flood of people, pushing one another to get to the front. Since there was little to no intervention or management, the crowd be-

came out of control and stampeded from pushing eventually killed two women. Isn't it tragic that people died, not while running away from death threats or not while working for their livelihood, but simply while waiting at a passport office in the second most developed city in our country? Who's to blame?

In post-coup Myanmar, one can simply blame the coup leader Min Aung Hlaing for any tragic incident, and they are most of the time in the right. On 10 February during the 8 pm news, the newscaster read out that the junta chief approved the Conscription Law. Since then, abled men and women who are eligible to serve

**“According to the regime’s latest directive to administrative departments, the list of eligible persons should be sent by 21 February to respective regional governments. With this conscription law, Min Aung Hlaing robs money from the rich and loved ones from the poor.”**

the mandatory military service considered leaving the country, hence, thousands of people line-up to apply for travel documents. Daw Khin Myo Aye and Ma Khine Wai were not in the eligible age range, but one could say that they were collateral damage of the introduction of conscription law, so was the crowd in front of the passport office that morning.

This conscription law was initially developed by Min Aung Hlaing’s predecessor General Than Shwe back in 2010. There were rumors about the enforcement before but no one thought that the Min Aung Hlaing-led military would implement it since it was not seen as very beneficial for the regime itself.

“When I saw the news, my first thought was that the army had admitted its defeat,” recounted CDM Captain Htet Myat. He made

a valid point in our interview. Min Aung Hlaing’s military is experiencing great loss at every war front it opens against the ethnic armed groups and resistance forces all over the country. The captain who defected from the military to stand with the people never thought that the army he once worked for would be failing at this rate.

“Some people might think that they could join the military and then create change from within like ‘Let’s join the army first, and then turn the gun back to them’. It is simply impossible,” said the captain. As someone who lived and breathed inside the crooked institution, he knew what was coming from this law.

“The military will never provide arms to the newcomers, especially when they don’t trust them. These recruits will be doing the hard labor in battalions and outposts, and in the worst-case scenario, they’ll be used as human shields,” he said.

Captain Htet Myat continued, “If the National Unity Government (NUG) and resistance forces take the enforcement of this law as an opportunity, we can persuade young people who want to fight against the regime’s oppression to join our side. We need to question the NUG’s plan. So far, they issued a statement requesting the international actors to prevent this from happening.” Again, that was also a valid point.

A 17-year-old cousin of mine called and asked what he should do for his future. Three years ago when the coup took place, he was marching along fellow anti-coup protesters. As the revolution dragged on, he ended up living his life as usual, enjoying whatever fun remained in Yan-

gon, but now, the regime tightened the noose, he was out of ideas. So was I too.

To explore further what other younglings are thinking, I talked to another young man from Yangon. When I asked him what he thought about this new conscription law, he answered, “As soon as I heard the news, I immediately realized that they plan to make money through that law.” He is not wrong. Since the military staged the coup, civilians have become cash cows for so-called security forces. They would arbitrarily abduct civilians or conduct random checks of overnight guest lists. They extort money from civilians if they wish to avoid these unfortunate incidents.

The young guy from Yangon added, “These soldiers, police, and ward administrators have seen us civilians as gold mines for the past three years. And now, they can officially take people as the porters.”

To get away from the hands of the regime, some youth find an escape by picking up arms to fight against the regime as they go into liberated areas and take combat training provided by ethnic armed groups. The stake is high for them because they are gambling with their lives and futures. Others find a more liveable situation by going abroad as the country’s economy has been spiraling downward since the junta chief took office. While the living cost gets higher and higher, the value of Myanmar kyats is depreciated further. Hence, some youth leave their homes to find better opportunities elsewhere. There is another category of youth that flee or have fled from Myanmar. They are anti-coup protesters and protest leaders, pro-democracy activists, striking

civil servants who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), or civilians who showed support to the resistance. This category of youth has been targeted by the military regime, and most of the time, is being issued arrest warrants. To escape this, they leave the country by any possible means and take refuge elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the remaining youth in the country stay put. While some of them are middle-class people who still have manageable jobs, most of them are working-class youth who struggle for their livelihoods. The first group come from families with money or have decent professions so their lives remain more or less the same even under the Min Aung Hlaing regime. The latter aka the working-class youth are the most vulnerable group. They make bare minimum money inside the country, they have limited skills, and do not have the means to land a white-collar job abroad. Hence, overseas hard-labor opportunities are the only option they turn to. Such kind of jobs are also called 3D: dirty, dangerous, and demanding.

As a journalist who's always observing the trends, I notice that overseas employment agencies have become frequented by young people these days. In the past three months, some of these employment agencies in Yangon asked for three months' salary as their fees in advance without any guarantee for the job or the duration of the contracts. These skyrocketing service fees only mean that these working-class youths are already in debt before they go abroad for work.

The abovementioned young guy from Yangon is applying for a worker job in shipping contain-

**“With no proper intervention from the outside, the junta continues to suffocate the country, not only the two women in front of the passport office but all citizens.”**

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ers for ocean freights. He's pretty confident that he will be on board this year. I asked him about his alternative plans. He said, "I'll either cross the border to Mae Sot [Thailand] or enlist myself with the resistance forces to fight for our freedom." The choices are limited to those without money, it seems.

On the other hand, those with money have also been figuring out their options as soon as the law was passed. One of my sources, a merchant in his 50s who has a son and a daughter, said, "My daughter is studying in Singapore, and she doesn't want to come back. Who would want to?" It was a rhetorical question. "When she completes her course in Singapore, I'll tell her to move to Bangkok, and get her enrolled in another school." But he contemplated, "Nothing is certain..."

I asked him how the business was going. He answered, "If all the abled youth are going to flee the country, then the local businesses will be short of manpower." He also doubted if the two-year military service would be guaranteed, the years could be extended.

A father of a soldier in service told me. "I don't think they [military generals] honor their words. They will play whatever they wish to. The law is on the tip of their tongues."

These are legitimate concerns. The regime's military is no stranger to dishonest and untruthful manners. Starting with the unconstitutional military coup, Min Aung Hlaing has repeatedly said that it was a constitutional power takeover by declaring a state of emergency. In the said constitution, the military can extend the state of emergency every six months but only up to two years. As of 2024, the military has extended it for more than three years. It had promised to hold an election after two years of emergency rule in 2023, too. So it is not a surprise that people do not trust the military.

The soldier's father continued, "It seems that only children of lower rank soldiers will have to serve in the military. They might have already printed fake completion certificates for sons and daughters of higher-ranked generals, I think".

Soon after the announcement on 10 February, the regime made the moves pretty fast to implement the law. Min Aung Hlaing probably thinks the faster he can recruit, the sooner he can reclaim the territories he lost to resistance forces. According to the regime's latest directive to administrative departments, the list of eligible persons should be sent by 21 February to respective regional governments. With this conscription law, Min Aung Hlaing robs money from the rich and loved ones



from the poor.

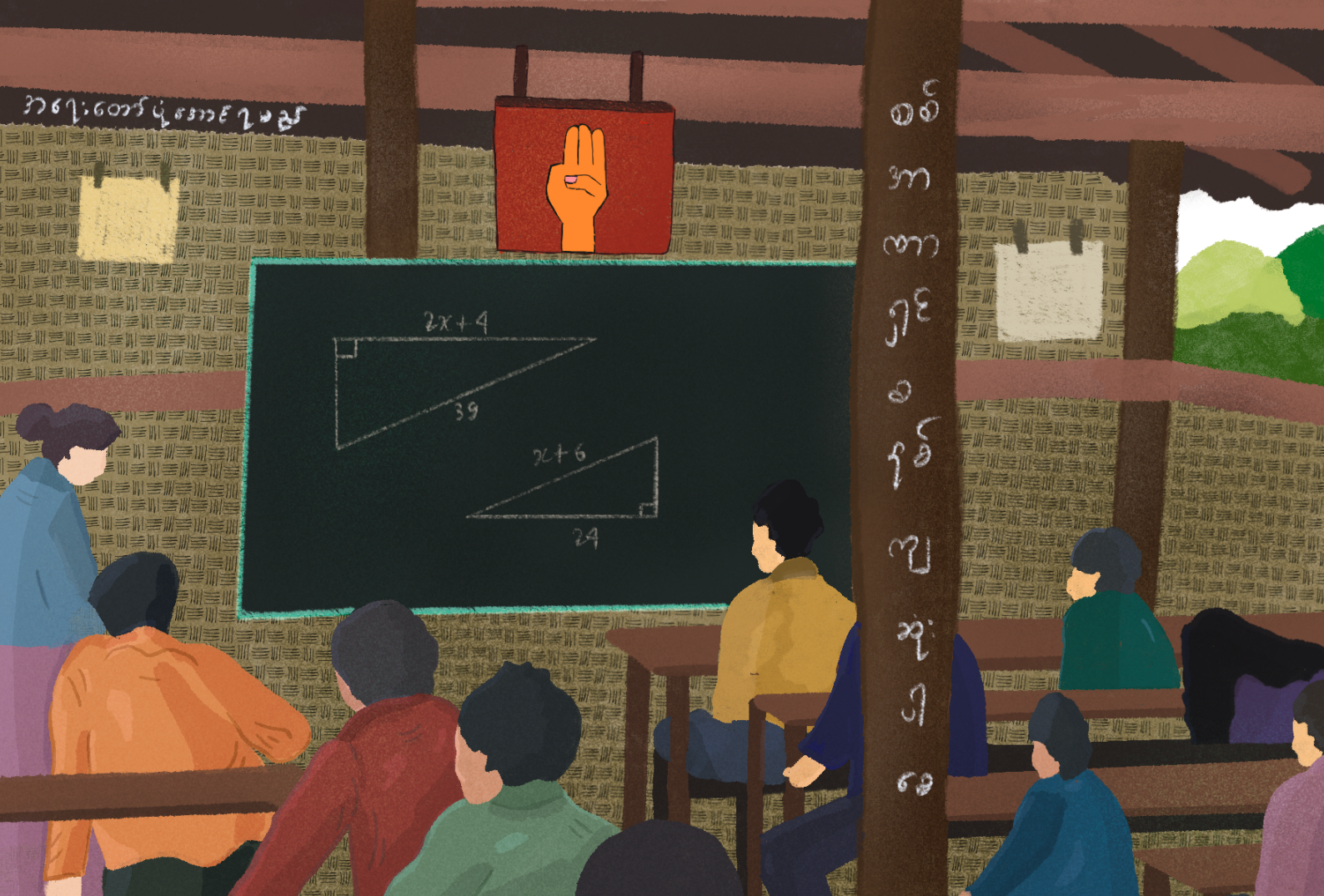
CDM Captain Htet Myat urged resistance forces to prepare accommodations, establish communication channels, and implement verification processes for potential newcomers. Meanwhile, a businessman is reaching out to real estate agents in Bangkok in hopes of finding accommoda-

tion for his daughter. My young cousin is worried about turning 18. The young guy from Yangon still harbors dreams of becoming a seaman by the end of this year. Despite the loss of lives, people continue to leave the country, and we will find more crowds outside passport offices. With no proper intervention from the outside, the junta continues to

suffocate the country, not only the two women in front of the passport office but all citizens.

As a former colleague of mine wrote on his Facebook after the tragic news at the passport office broke out, "What a miserable life we are living."





## Education Left Behind: COVID, Coup and Conscription

Myanmar's education system improved between 2010 and 2020, with high primary and secondary enrollment rates. Reforms began by then President Thein Sein and were carried out by the NLD government, with the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) and the curriculum was also reformed in the academic year 2016-2017 to align with basic education structures in other ASEAN countries.

However, from February 2020 to February 2022, Myanmar faced a major challenge when public schools were closed for 532 days due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This prolonged closure resulted in learning losses. Then the military coup led to a complete schooling crisis in Myanmar. Estimates sug-

gest that there are around 6-7 million children in Myanmar who are not attending school, including those who were out of school before the pandemic and those displaced due to conflict. Ongoing conflicts have forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes and have no access to education. In 2023, about 17.6 million people, nearly a third of the population, are believed to need urgent humanitarian assistance.

Moreover, the politicization of education has led to a lack of safe learning environments which has prevented thousands of teachers and millions of children from attending schools. Since the military coup started in 2021, around

150,000 teachers, nearly 35% of the total teacher workforce in public education, have joined civil disobedience movements (CDM). Both CDM and non-CDM teachers have faced physical violence or threats from various armed groups, including the military and local defense forces.

Enrollment in State Administrative Council (SAC) schools has dropped significantly from around 9 million in 2019-2020 to around 6.4 million in 2023-2024. Therefore, it could be assumed that over 40% of students of school-going age are no longer attending SAC schools, either by choice or because of the situation. There are also teacher shortages, with many replaced teach-



**“Schools, universities, and education infrastructure have been targeted in attacks, resulting in a dangerous environment for students, parents, and teachers. This interruption in learning is causing serious concerns about the future of education in Myanmar.”**

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ers being under-trained and under-qualified. The 2023 SAC schools' matriculation exam had a drastic decrease in the number of students compared to previous years, also with controversy over the pass rates with a near 100% pass rate reported for primary and secondary education.

Meanwhile, the National Unity Government (NUG)'s Ministry of Education (MOE) is offering interim education and it has reported approximately 150,000 enrolled students, mostly in areas of active armed resistance. This includes 50,000 in Sagaing Region and 45,000 in Chin State according to 2022 data. Education is provided online through 'federal schools' and in-person at community-led schools mostly taught by CDM teachers, especially in areas controlled by the People's Defense Forces (PDFs). The online schools are under the NUG-MOE, while community schools start independently but later become affiliated with NUG-MOE for accreditation. However, the effectiveness of online education is uncertain.

In 2023, the NUG-MOE conducted matriculation exams for the first time with nearly 60,000 students who took virtually or in-person in the NUG's Southern Military Command 3 area. It is unclear what higher education opportunities the exam will lead to; therefore, some federal schools

are, including General Educational Development (GED), suggesting that the NUG-MOE's interim education may be struggling to provide sufficient higher education opportunities, necessitating alternative paths.

Moreover, demand for ethnic basic education providers (EBEPs) also has increased due to several reasons as there has been an increase in the number of people displaced to areas controlled by Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). Additionally, some families choose to send their children to EBEP schools instead of SAC schools. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, EBEPs provided education to around 300,000 students annually. Key educational bodies, including the Karen National Union, New Mon State Party, Restoration Council of Shan State, Kachin Independence Organisation, and Karenni National Progressive Party oversaw numerous schools across Myanmar. For instance, the Karen Education and Culture Department managed 1,093 schools with over 90,000 students, while the Mon National Education Committee supervised 134 schools with 10,324 students. Additionally, the Restoration Council of Shan State Education Commission oversaw around 350 schools educating about 11,000 students. The Kachin Independence Organisation operated 250-plus schools, includ-

ing those in government-controlled areas managed by Kachin Education Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The Karenni Education Department ran 60-plus schools, often in collaboration with CSOs. These groups also extended educational services to children in refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border.

It is unclear how much EBEP enrollment has increased since 2021, but anecdotal reports are suggesting that some EBEPs have seen a 50% increase. In areas where new non-state ethnic minority groups have emerged, such as Chin and Karenni (Kayah), there has been a rise in minority-language education provision with low resources. This development can be viewed as a step towards self-determination, decentralization, and federalism by ethnic minority groups.

It has been three years since the military seized control, and two-thirds of the country is in conflict. As the conflict's tensions increase, education has become less of a priority for both sides. Schools, universities, and education infrastructure have been targeted in attacks, resulting in a dangerous environment for students, parents, and teachers. This interruption in learning is causing serious concerns about the future of education in Myanmar.

Recently, a mandatory conscription law has added to the worries of people in Myanmar. The law requires men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 to serve up to two years under military command. Avoiding conscription can lead to three to five years in prison. Some students plan to go abroad to continue their studies, while others consider joining the PDFs to avoid military service. This has made parents anxious



about sending their children to school or university, as they fear they may be forced to join the military instead.

The announcement of the conscription law has already had visible effects, with a significant increase in visa applications for Thailand and reports of young people being arrested for trying to leave Myanmar illegally. There has also been a sudden increase in passport applications, leading

to tragic incidents like the one in Mandalay where two women died and one was injured. Overall, parents and young people are in a state of panic, unsure of what the future holds and desperate to avoid military conscription.

Even though some students have been temporarily exempted from conscription, the uncertainty about their future after they graduate is causing a lot of worry. The COVID-19 pandemic, the

military coup, and the mandatory conscription law are all having a severe impact on education, crushing the hopes and dreams of young people in Myanmar. While some, especially those who are wealthier and more privileged, can choose private education, study abroad, or even use bribery to avoid conscription, most people in the country do not have these options.



# Highlights of the Armed Resistance

## **Regime forces retreated after unsuccessful mission to regain Shwe Pyi Aye town, Sagaing Region**

At least 50 regime troops attacking Shwe Pyi Aye town were injured and killed, leading to their retreat at midnight on February 3 in Sagaing Region's Homalin Township. The joint force of approximately 400 regime and Shanani Nationalities Army (SNA) troops initiated an offensive on January 23 to regain control of the town. The PDF joint forces successfully cut them off upon entry, countering attacks. Despite two additional attacks, the PDF forces, with unity, managed to hold their ground. The regime's joint column withdrew from Shwe Pyi Aye around midnight on February 3. Reports indicate 15 bodies were buried at the regime's temporary station and approximately 40 injured individuals after the 10-day battle. Shwe Pyi Aye has been under the control of allied PDF forces since November.

## **Only three townships remain under regime's control in Rakhine State**

The Arakan Army (AA) announced the complete capture of the No. 31 Police Battalion in Mrauk-U City, the ancient capital of the Rakhine State. Following the capture of Regime Infantry Battalions (377), (378), and (540) in the north, the last remaining No. 31 Police Battalion fell to the AA, effectively shifting control in administration. With this latest achievement, the AA has expanded its presence in Mrauk-U, Min Pyar, Kyauktaw, Pauktaw, and while ongoing battles are reported in Yanbye, Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Yathay Taung, Kyaukpyu and Ponnagyun townships. Sittwe, Myebon, Ann, and Tounggok towns are also prepar-

ing for imminent battles. Rakhine State comprises 17 townships, with only Gwa, Thandwe, and Manaung still under full regime control. The AA maintains control over the remaining areas, continuing its offensive operations. Additionally, the AA targeted and sank three warships on February 7 and 8, as the junta forces rejected surrender offers. Another warship also sustained damage. The incident was hailed as a historic victory for the Arakan Army at sea.

## **Regime's forces retook control of Kawlin, Sagaing Region**

On February 13, the regime's forces regained control of key areas in Kawlin Town, Sagaing Region, previously held by the National Unity Government (NUG) and the People's Defense Forces (PDF). A PDF member involved in the Kawlin clashes reported, "The junta's troops have reoccupied the general manager's office, police station, and schools. They have deployed troops throughout the neighborhoods, and most civilians are not present in the city." The regime launched a large-scale assault on both the southern and northern parts of Kawlin on the evening of February 3 in an effort to reclaim the city. NUG battalions faced airstrikes while local defense forces from surrounding townships joined the resistance. Despite the loss of Kawlin, a PDF member emphasized, "While some areas may have been surrendered, our fight continues. Our territory and influence continue to expand with each passing day. Losing Kawlin does not mean losing our overall victory in the revolution."

## **KNDF took full control of Shar Taw Town, Karenni State**

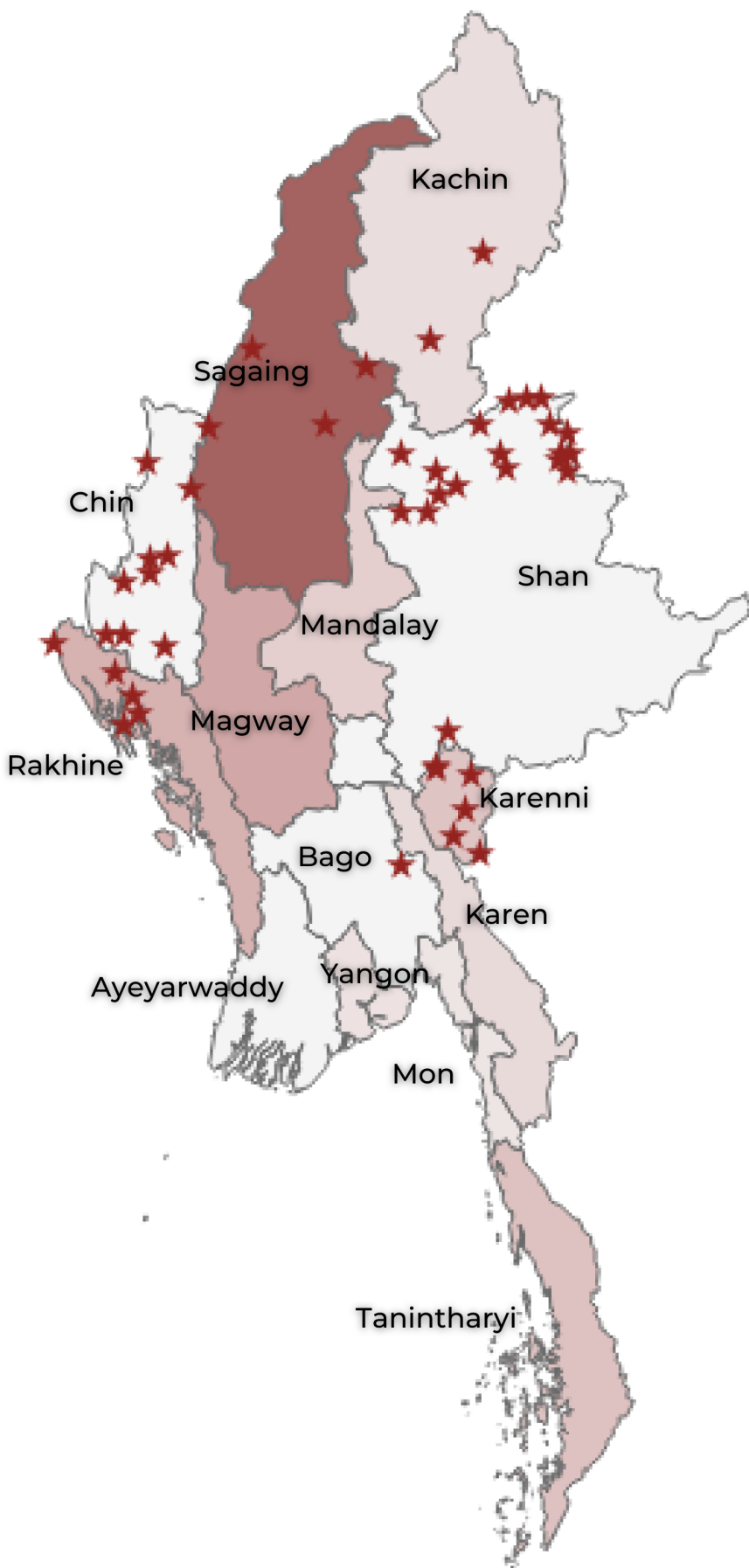
The Karenni National Defense Force (KNDF) declared its com-

plete takeover of Shar Taw Town in Kayah State on February 12. According to KNDF, the offensive began on January 15 with attacks on security posts surrounding a strategic hill in Shar Taw. By January 21, they successfully encircled and besieged the camp. Despite calls for surrender, the regime's troops fortified their positions and resisted, leading to a battle. KNDF finally captured the strategic hill on February 12, overcoming the defenses prepared by the regime's forces. The KNDF reported that over 70 military council troops, deployed via three helicopters during the battle, were defeated. The casualties included more than 160 soldiers of the military council, including a lieutenant colonel. Three KNDF soldiers lost their lives in the battle, alongside comrades from other battalions like the Karenni Army (KA) and Loikaw People's Defense Force (PDF), as per KNDF's statement.

## **KNDF's deputy commander in chief abducted and killed in Kalay tsp, Sagaing Region**

On February 23, Josua, the deputy commander in chief of the Chin National Defense Force (CNDF), along with two comrades named Ange and Amos, were reportedly ambushed and killed by the regime's forces in Kalay Township, Sagaing Region. This incident occurred amid ongoing clashes between the regime's army and resistance forces, including the CNDF, in Kalay Township since February 21. The three victims were abducted and slain by Pyu Saw Htee members and regime soldiers near Aungtha Village after their location was compromised.

# People's Resistance War in February



**46**  
CASUALTIES FROM  
RESISTANCE FORCES

**1416**  
CASUALTIES  
FROM SAC

**137**  
REGIME SOLDIERS  
SURRENDERED



46 Towns Captured and  
Controlled By Resistance Forces

(On February 13, the regime's  
forces reportedly regained  
control of key areas in  
Kawlin Town, Sagaing Region.)

Sources: NUG, Khit Thit Media



# Crimes Against Humanity

5

incidents (at least) of the regime's crimes against humanity were reported in February.

## Video proof of two PDF rangers being burned alive by regime soldiers surfaced online

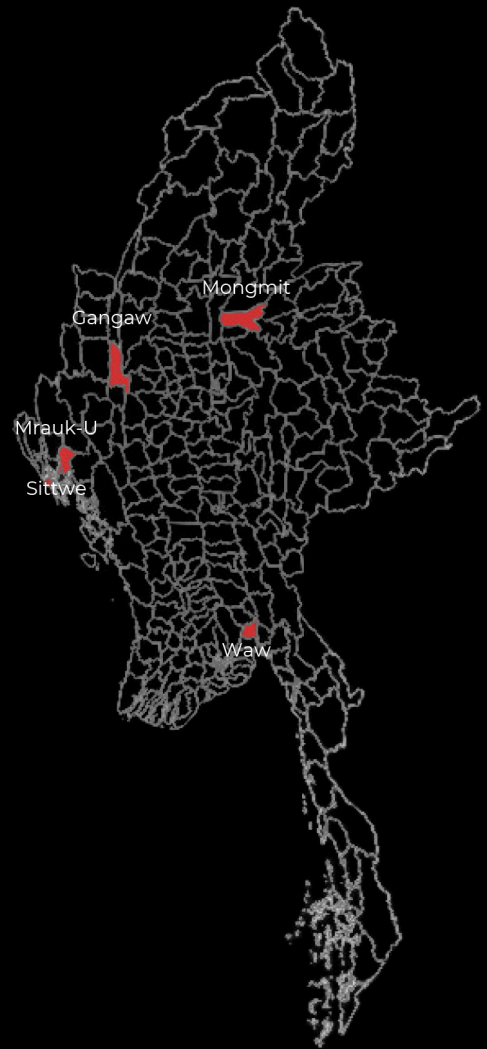
An incident, capturing two individuals being burned alive on video, surfaced on social media on February 6. The victims, identified as Ko Phoe Tay, a 23-year-old first-year student at Distance University, and Ko Thar Htaung, a 22-year-old tenth-grade student, were members of the Yaw Defense Force (YDF) in Ganggo District, Magway. According to a statement released by the YDF on February 6, the incident occurred on November 7, 2023 during clashes with the regime's forces in North Khin Yan Village, Gantgaw Township, Magway Region. The junta soldiers burned the victims alive under a tree in front of the local hospital in the village in front of the villagers. The delay in disclosing this atrocity was attributed to internet restrictions imposed by the regime in the affected area. Although many incidents where people were burned alive by the soldiers previously, this is the first time it was captured on video.

## Political activist Ma Nobel Aye reported to be killed by regime's soldiers

The former political prisoner Ma Nobel Aye was arrested by the regime's forces at an X-ray gate in Bago Region, where she was found with various weapons. Multiple reports, quoting her brother, later revealed that she had been shot and killed on February 8. According to the news, Ma Nobel Aye and an associate named Aung Ko Hein attempted to flee during a guarded trip to their trial, and soldiers gunned them down, resulting in both of their deaths. The regime has remained silent on the incident.

## Regime's soldiers killed seven detained civilians before leaving posts in Rakhine State

On February 11, the Arakan Army (AA) revealed that several bodies were discovered in Mrauk-U and Minbya townships after it had seized control from the regime's forces. Seven were shot and killed in the cell of the regime's Light Infantry Battalion 378 in Mrauk-U Township on January 31. The bodies were buried in the bunkers near the military hospital. The victims were identified as Ko Kyaw Zan Wai, Ko Myat Thu Tun (journalist), Ko Kyaw Thein Hlaing, Ko Kyaw Win Hlaing, Ko Ko Nyunt, Ko Win Naing and Ko Pyae Sone Win.



## Tragic Explosion in Sittwe Market: 12 Killed, 20 Injured

Twelve local residents, including children, were killed, and twenty others injured in a tragic incident in Rakhine state's capital, Sittwe, on February 29. The explosion, believed to be caused by a large-scale ammunition fired by the regime's forces, occurred in a market near Korea Port. Witnesses reported heavy artillery fire, with at least five residents claiming shots were fired from a nearby regime naval base. The incident occurred during a busy time at the market, resulting in significant damage and casualties, including children as young as two years old and women.

## Attack Claims Lives in Mongmit Township: 27 Civilians Killed, 12 Injured

Between January 1 and February 2, 2024, the regime's attack in Mongmit Township resulted in the deaths of 27 civilians and injuries to 12 others. The Shan Human Rights Foundation reported that 17 of the victims were killed by soldiers from Light Infantry Division 99, based in Meikhtila., based in Meikhtila.

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