

Lessons from the Myanmar Earthquake

A devastating 7.7-magnitude earthquake centered in Myanmar has claimed more than 1,600 lives according to official estimates, with the death toll rising dramatically within just 24 hours. The number of injured stands at around 3,400, and a significantly higher casualty count cannot be ruled out as information continues to trickle in.

The damage to infrastructure has been massive, with large sections of densely populated cities such as Mandalay and Naypyitaw left without electricity. Hospitals are overwhelmed, and people are camping in the streets, their homes reduced to rubble.



by OJAANK IAS



International Response



India

Military aircraft made multiple sorties into Myanmar over the weekend, ferrying supplies and search-and-rescue crews to Naypyitaw



China

Several Chinese rescue teams have arrived, including one that crossed overland from Yunnan province



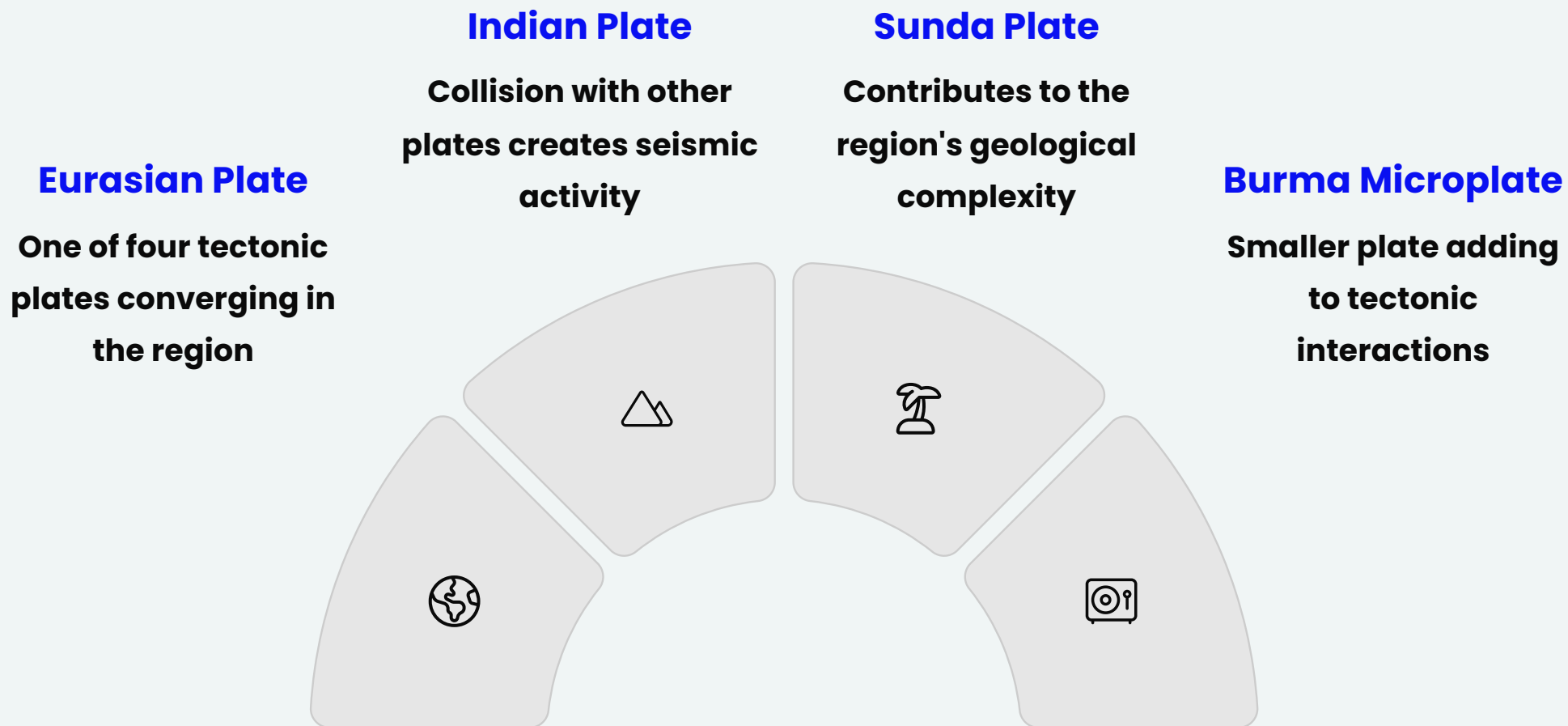
Thailand

Providing aid despite suffering casualties when a skyscraper under construction in Bangkok collapsed

Myanmar's neighbours have responded swiftly to the crisis, dispatching warships and aircraft loaded with relief materials and rescue personnel. The international community has mobilized quickly to provide assistance to the earthquake-stricken nation.



Geological Context



Myanmar lies in a seismically active region at the convergence of four tectonic plates. The constant shifting and collision of these plates are responsible for most earthquakes in the region. The Sagaing Fault, one of Myanmar's most active, has produced six to eight earthquakes of similar intensity since 1900, according to the United States Geological Survey.



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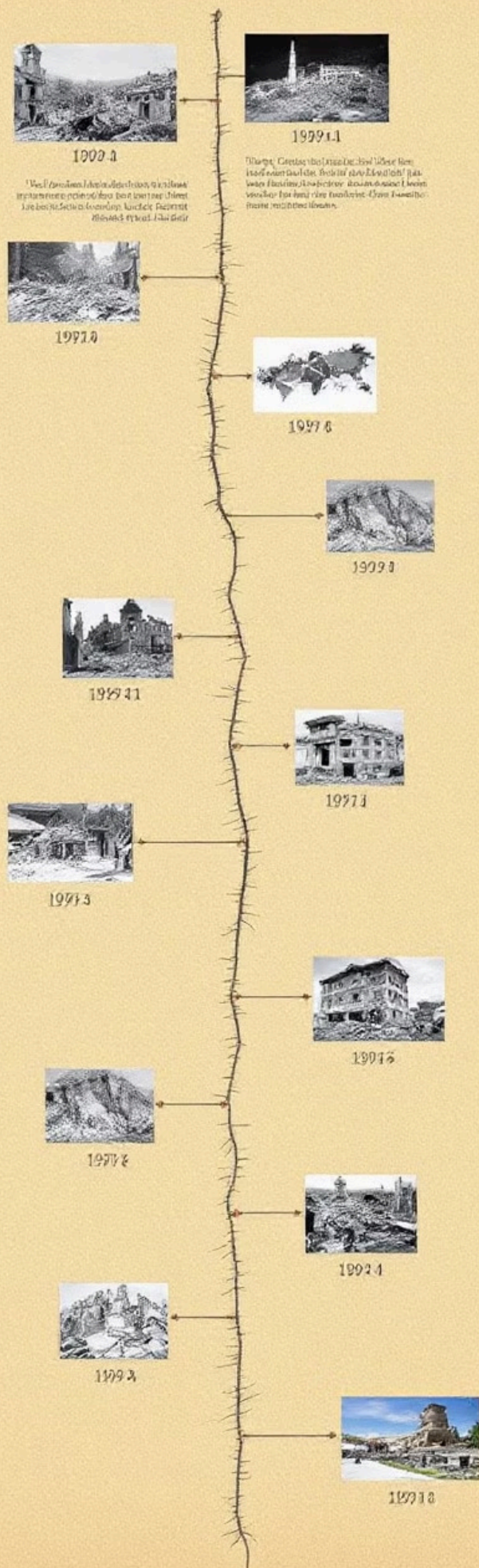
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Major Earthquakes

Midweek - 2018



Historical Perspective

1

Since 1900

Sagaing Fault has produced 6-8 earthquakes of similar intensity to the current one

2

2021

Military coup in Myanmar diverted attention from essential governance issues such as enforcing building codes

3

2023

7.8 magnitude earthquake in Türkiye and Syria killed at least 55,000 people

4

2023 (Current)

7.7-magnitude earthquake in Myanmar claims over 1,600 lives with thousands injured

Quakes of the magnitude witnessed on Friday are not uncommon in this region. The Myanmar earthquake brings back memories of the 7.8 magnitude quake in Türkiye and Syria in 2023 that killed at least 55,000 people, highlighting the devastating potential of such seismic events when they strike populated areas.

Current Situation on the Ground

Power Outages

Large sections of densely populated cities such as Mandalay and Naypyitaw left without electricity

Healthcare Crisis

Hospitals overwhelmed with approximately 3,400 injured requiring medical attention

Displacement

People camping in streets as homes have been reduced to rubble

Infrastructure Damage

Massive damage to buildings, roads, and essential services

The immediate aftermath of the earthquake has created a humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. With essential services disrupted and thousands homeless, the situation remains dire. Recovery efforts are hampered by pre-existing infrastructure weaknesses and the sheer scale of the disaster.



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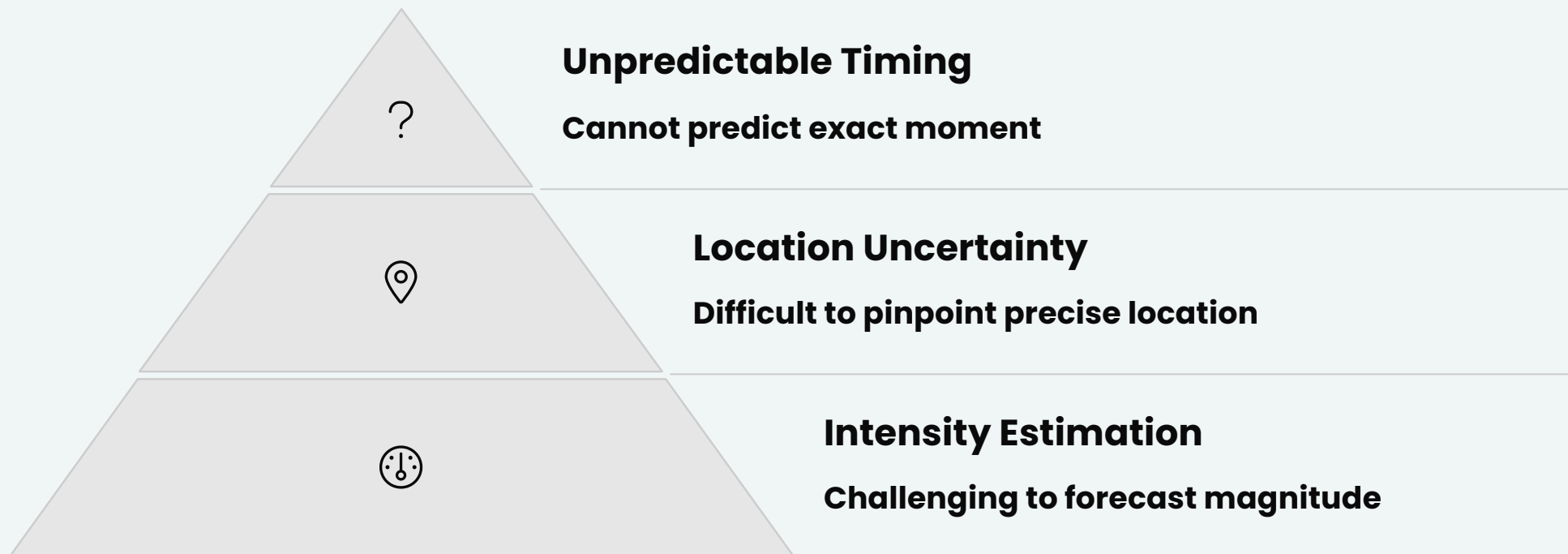
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Limitations of Earthquake Prediction



While accurately predicting the timing, location, and intensity of earthquakes remains beyond current scientific capability, probabilities can be estimated. Scientists can identify high-risk zones and provide general forecasts, but precise prediction remains elusive.

This limitation underscores the importance of preparedness rather than prediction. Building resilient infrastructure and implementing strict construction codes are essential strategies for mitigating earthquake damage.

Political Factors Affecting Disaster Preparedness



Building Code Enforcement

Weak enforcement increases vulnerability



Governance Priorities

Political instability diverts attention from safety



International Cooperation

Limited engagement restricts expertise sharing

Myanmar's political instability since the coup in 2021 has diverted attention from essential governance issues such as enforcing building codes. The political situation has complicated disaster preparedness efforts and limited international cooperation on infrastructure standards.

The relationship between political stability and disaster resilience is evident in the current crisis, where pre-existing governance challenges have amplified the earthquake's impact.

Path Forward: Building Resilience

1600+

Lives Lost

Current death toll from
the earthquake

3400+

Injured

People requiring medical
attention

7.7

Magnitude

Strength of the
earthquake on Richter
scale

While the current damage is irreversible and recovery will take months, the existing ceasefire offers an opportunity to push for political stability. This can foster investment, attract expertise, and ensure better regulatory enforcement – critical steps in protecting the country against future disasters.

Building earthquake-resistant infrastructure, implementing and enforcing strict building codes, and developing comprehensive disaster response plans are essential for reducing casualties in future seismic events. The tragedy presents an opportunity for Myanmar to rebuild with resilience at the forefront.





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