

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



BURMA'S ELECTION, MADE IN BEIJING

- Europe's concern over Myanmar crisis
- Shock over deadly Thadingyut festival strike
- Myanmar junta says Malaysia to observe election

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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.

ASEAN ABOUT TO MAKE A SERIOUS MISTAKE?

At the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur later this month, Malaysia is expected to raise Myanmar's intention to hold general elections and its invitation for ASEAN member states to send observers. While the move is framed as an attempt to bring Myanmar back into a more inclusive and democratic regional fold, critics argue it risks legitimizing a process widely viewed as neither free nor fair.

The planned polls, spearheaded by Myanmar's military junta following the 2021 coup, have been condemned by rights groups, opposition parties, and international observers as a façade designed to entrench military rule rather than reflect the will of the people.

The military regime, which seized power by overthrowing the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, has spent the past four years cracking down on dissent, imprisoning opposition leaders, and waging a brutal campaign against armed resistance movements and civilian populations. More than 20,000 political prisoners remain behind bars, and entire regions of the country are under martial law or in open conflict. Under such conditions, critics say, the notion of holding credible elections is implausible. They argue that any poll organized by the junta cannot be inclusive or transparent when opposition parties are banned, press freedoms are curtailed, and civil liberties are virtually nonexistent.

Malaysia's push to include ASEAN observers in the process is seen by some as an effort to assert a more active role for the bloc in addressing Myanmar's crisis. However, critics caution that participation in observing the junta's elections could inadvertently grant a veneer of legitimacy to an electoral process that lacks fundamental democratic safeguards. The risk, they argue, is that ASEAN could be used as a prop in a political theater designed to validate military rule while

sidelining the voices of millions who continue to resist authoritarianism.

Past regional responses to Myanmar's crisis have already drawn criticism for being weak and ineffectual, often constrained by ASEAN's principles of non-interference and consensus. Sending observers, some warn, may simply perpetuate this trend by giving the appearance of engagement without addressing the core political realities on the ground.

In addition, many question how meaningful any election can be in a context where widespread violence persists. Civil society groups both inside and outside Myanmar argue that real democratic legitimacy cannot be achieved through elections held under military rule. Instead, they call for a broader political solution involving dialogue with all stakeholders, including the National Unity Government (NUG) and ethnic armed organizations, none of whom are part of the junta's proposed electoral process.

As Malaysia brings the issue to the summit table, the broader credibility of ASEAN is also at stake. Observers warn that if the bloc appears complicit in rubber-stamping a sham election, it could further erode trust in ASEAN's ability to address democratic backsliding and human rights abuses within its ranks.

While engagement with Myanmar remains essential, critics argue that any support for the electoral process must be conditional on clear commitments to genuine political reform, the release of political prisoners, and an end to military violence. Without these, they say, the elections will be nothing more than a carefully choreographed performance aimed at entrenching a regime that rules without the consent of its people.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of Shwedagon Pagoda by AFP





Photo: Victor He

BURMA'S ELECTION, MADE IN BEIJING

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

The Burma junta is set to begin general elections on December 28, 2025, the first since the 2021 coup that overthrew the democratically elected government. These elections are widely expected to be a sham designed to legitimize continued military rule. Beijing, however, is backing the process and stands to benefit if the junta secures victory.

The Union Election Commission has functioned as a junta-controlled institution designed to legitimize military rule rather than conduct free and fair polls. The commission has announced that elections will begin December 28, 2025, as part of a "step-by-step" process, with further dates to follow. State media reported that 55 parties have registered. Yet the most important opposition forces have been banned or excluded.

In February 2023, the junta enacted a new Political Parties Registration Law that effectively crushes opposition participation. The law bars anyone with a criminal conviction from joining a party, disqualifying leaders such as Aung San Suu Kyi and former President Win Myint, both imprisoned on fabricated charges. It also prohibits groups labeled as "terrorist organizations," such as the National Unity Government (NUG), the CRPH, and the Arakan National Party denied on the

grounds of links to the Arakan Army, which has been designated a terrorist organization. The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, which came in third in 2020, has declined to register.

Alongside these measures, the junta extended emergency rule, imposed martial law in dozens of townships, and severely restricted political freedoms. Human Rights Watch concluded that the electoral law fails to meet international standards, ensuring that any future vote will be dominated by junta-backed parties and the military itself.

China has emerged as the junta's key backer, pressuring Southeast Asian nations and ASEAN to accept the planned elections as a path to "peace and reconciliation." Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi even promised technological support for the census that underpins the "all-inclusive election." Critics warn, however, that a sham election will create only a "negative peace" by ignoring decades of political and ethnic grievances, while entrenching authoritarian rule under a veneer of legitimacy.

The junta has suffered major battlefield losses this year and now relies on forced conscription, drones, and airstrikes to maintain control. For Min Aung Hlaing,



Junta administration officials check a voting machine.
Photo: AFP

the planned elections are a means of legitimizing his rule. China supports the process to ensure that no alternative leadership emerges, which could jeopardize trade deals and force Beijing to renegotiate its strategic interests from scratch. As a result, Min Aung Hlaing is counting on the elections to perpetuate his power, while China leverages its ties with the junta to advance its Global Security Initiative and safeguard its investments.

Initially, Beijing kept its distance after the 2021 coup, viewing Min Aung Hlaing as incompetent and reluctant to shut down scam centers defrauding Chinese citizens. It even allowed a UN Security Council resolution on Burma to pass in 2023, withheld recognition of the junta's ambassador, and tacitly supported the Three Brotherhood Alliance's offensive that dismantled scam hubs in Shan State. But by mid-2024, after a series of regime defeats, China feared the junta could collapse entirely. Seeking to prevent instability and the rise of the West-leaning NUG, Beijing shifted course, providing military aid, diplomatic recognition, and brokering ceasefires.

China's most striking intervention came in January 2025, when it mediated a ceasefire with the Kokang MNDAA, and in April, pressured the group to hand Lashio back to the regime. The MNDAA retained significant territorial control, but the deal humiliated the junta and highlighted Beijing's dominance. China even dispatched senior envoys to oversee the transfer, underscoring how far it was willing to go to shape outcomes in northern Burma.

China's intervention in Burma is driven by economic priorities, particularly reopening the Mandalay-Lashio-Muse highway, once worth millions in daily trade but now largely controlled by ethnic armed groups such as the MNDAA, TNLA, KIO, and SSPP, who operate checkpoints and collect fees. To restore this commerce, Beijing has pressed armed groups to halt offensives, though its ceasefire efforts often collapse.

On September 29, 2025, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing met Chinese officials in Kunming to discuss border trade with Yunnan and progress on Belt and Road projects. The talks, attended by Beijing's special envoy Deng Xijun, underscored China's focus on stabi-



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing meets with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in China. Photo: AFP

lizing northern Shan State. Deng had earlier overseen the handover of Lashio to junta control, showcasing Beijing's leverage, though it has secured only limited ceasefires and continues pressuring the TNLA and United Wa State Army to fall in line. Analysts say China's immediate priority is reopening key hubs such as Kyaukme, Hsipaw, Hseni, and Kutkai, with the Kunming stopover signaling growing impatience for results.

Beyond border trade, China seeks to revive the stalled China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, a central Belt and Road Initiative project linking China to the Indian Ocean through highways, railways, and special economic zones. Yet instability in central Burma and Rakhine State continues to block progress.

Pressure from China has encouraged other regional powers to re-engage with the junta. At the April 2025 BIMSTEC summit in Bangkok, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and leaders from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand all met Min Aung Hlaing, marking his broadest high-level contacts since the coup. Thailand, which had once delayed the summit over controversy about inviting him, moved ahead after Beijing's support at a 2024 Kunming meeting eased concerns.

Beijing has been cultivating ties with regime-aligned parties and institutions. Since the 2021 coup, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has invited more than ten Burma political parties, mainly those approved by the junta's election commission, for study tours, with nearly half a dozen visits in 2025 alone. The military's proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and the People's Pioneer Party (PPP) have been the main beneficiaries.

Delegations, which include junta-appointed election officials, are guided through surveillance hubs like the Guizhou Big Data Center, state-owned enterprises, rural development projects, and CPC political training institutions. These trips provide Burma's generals with a political survival blueprint, showing how elections can be staged for controlled outcomes under a system of "civilianized authoritarianism." The involvement of the Union Election Commission (UEC) underscores China's role in shaping the mechanics of the vote itself.

Beyond political grooming, China has pledged technological assistance for the election process, while maintaining close ties with UEC chairman Thein Soe. By grooming regime-friendly actors and lobbying the parties, China can secure a win for itself, by shaping who runs, how the process unfolds, and how the outcome is received.

On February 6, 2025, a coalition of international election experts and organizations issued a joint state-

ment rejecting the junta's plan to hold elections, warning that under current conditions, marked by violence, repression, detention of political leaders, censorship, and an unreliable census, genuine democracy is impossible. They described the planned polls as a sham designed to legitimize military rule, deepen divisions, and prolong Burma's crisis.

Despite this, Beijing has portrayed the elections as a political transition and pressed ASEAN neighbors to treat the process as a step toward "stability" and "reconciliation." China's backing has encouraged regional states to re-engage with Naypyidaw, reducing fears of regime collapse. India shifted its approach, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi meeting Min Aung Hlaing during the April 2025 BIMSTEC summit in Bangkok.

At that summit, Min Aung Hlaing also held bilateral talks with leaders from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, his broadest high-level contacts since the coup. Thailand, which had initially postponed the gathering due to controversy over inviting him, proceeded after China's endorsement of his participation in the Kunming meeting the previous year reassured regional partners.

The March 2025 earthquake that rocked central Burma killed thousands and destroyed tens of thousands of homes. Poorly handled by the junta, which resumed bombing quake-hit areas almost immediately afterward, the disaster nonetheless became a catalyst for government-to-government interaction as foreign countries sent aid.

This humanitarian opening accelerated a broader geopolitical shift already underway, as many states, weary of Burma's protracted war, began to see engagement with the junta as less disruptive than continued alienation. Combined with China's backing, these dynamics nudged diplomacy toward greater engagement with the regime. While few expect the upcoming elections to be credible, some governments may accept the results out of pragmatism, viewing the installation of a nominally civilian administration in 2026 as convenient diplomatic cover to reset relations with Naypyidaw. And with this recognition, or de facto recognition, of the election results, China will secure the win it needs.

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

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



Photo: AFP

CALLS INCREASE FOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S RELEASE

Calls for the release of Myanmar's detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi are growing amid increasing concerns over her deteriorating health and the continued lack of transparency about her condition and whereabouts.

Her son, Kim Aris, told The Irrawaddy that his 79-year-old mother is suffering from a serious heart condition but has been denied access to a specialist by the junta authorities. "She is suffering terribly," he said, adding that the military regime has refused all requests for medical treatment outside the facility.

Public figures around the world have joined in urging Suu Kyi's release. Among them are a contestant from the "You Is U 2025" transgender pageant, British Foreign Minister David Lammy, and Czech President Petr Pavel, who called for her freedom during the 29th Forum 2000 conference in Prague.

Despite growing appeals, little is known about Suu Kyi's exact condition or the circumstances of her detention. Neither her family nor her legal team has been allowed to see her since her transfer from prison. A source familiar with the situation told DVB that Suu Kyi is not being held inside the main Naypyidaw Prison but rather at a separate residence "equivalent to the level of a deputy minister's residence."

The Myanmar Prisons Witness (MPW) group reported on June 28 that Suu Kyi is being held in a special compound within the No. (6) Bureau of Special Operations, located near the office of junta chief Min Aung Hlaing. The area is said to be under tight security and supervised by a lieutenant general.

Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to a total of 33 years in prison on 19 charges following the 2021 military

coup. Although the junta granted partial pardons in 2023, she still faces 27 years behind bars.

Border trade route remains closed

The key Thai-Myanmar border trade route between Mae Sot and Myawaddy remains closed, with no sign of reopening as the Myanmar junta continues to block the resumption of trade. The regime has accused border trading activities of providing significant tax revenue to resistance forces and has intensified crackdowns under the supervision of Deputy Senior General Soe Win, the junta's second-in-command and head of the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC).

Last month, around 500 fully loaded trucks bound for Myanmar were stranded on the Thai side of the



Trucks lined up at the Myanmar-Thailand border in Mae Sot. Photo: AFP

border after the junta halted cross-border trade. Some goods have been rerouted through alternative crossings, including ferry transport across the Moei River and trading routes via Ranong–Kawthaung and Mae Sai–Tachileik. However, these alternatives have driven up transportation costs compared to the main Mae Sot–Myawaddy road.

Traders said that even goods successfully ferried across the river are now stuck in Myawaddy, as junta forces have imposed tight restrictions along the Myawaddy–Yangon highway. Multiple trucks have reportedly been seized in Hpa-An and Kyaikto under accusations of “illegal trade.” Checkpoints in both Kayin State and Bago Region have also increased scrutiny of imported goods from Thailand heading toward Yangon.

In an unusual move, the junta has taken disciplinary action against its own personnel in connection with the situation. The deputy commander of the Southeastern Military Command, based in Hpa-An, was reportedly arrested after more than 100 trucks passed through his jurisdiction without inspection. The arrest underscores the regime’s growing determination to control cross-border commerce.

At the entrance to Yangon, authorities have maintained strict checks on Thai goods for the past three months. The restrictions began in August when the junta’s Foreign Currency Supervision Committee banned the import of 35 types of goods—including medicines—under the pretext of foreign currency control. The decision has effectively brought most trade to a standstill.



Photo: Chin Brotherhood

A truck driver told Myanmar Now, “We don’t dare to drive on the road anymore. As soon as they [the junta] see lorries, the drivers get arrested and both the trucks and goods are seized.”

While the junta continues to block overland trade via Mae Sot–Myawaddy, it has allowed limited maritime shipments through the Ranong–Kawthaung–Yangon route under the so-called Myanmar Automated Cargo Clearance System (MACCS), which remains tightly controlled by the military authorities.

Chin State crisis continues

Tensions remain high among Chin revolutionary forces as internal clashes continue despite repeated efforts by religious and civil groups to mediate reconciliation.

The Chin Brotherhood (CB)—an alliance formed on December 30, 2023—comprises six southern Chin armed groups: the Zomi Federal Union (ZFU/PDF-Zoland), Chin Defense Force–Mindat (CDF–Mindat), Chin National Organization/Defense Force (CNO/CNDF), Mara Territory Council/Maraland Defense Force (MTC/MDF), CDF–Kanpetlet, and CDF–Matupi. The CB maintains close ties with the Arakan Army (AA), which has provided training, weapons, and ammunition support since its formation.

Another major alliance, the Chinland Council (CC), was established earlier in September 2023. It includes the Chin National Army (CNA), CDF brigades from Matupi, Lautu, Zotang, Paletwa, Hualngoram, Tonzang, Hakha, Thantlang, KKG, Dai, Zophei, and Mara, as well as the PDA–Tedim and CDM–Siyin.

Despite shared goals of opposing the junta, tensions between the two coalitions erupted in early 2025. The first major confrontation occurred in Matupi after the CB detained a member of the Chinland Council, sparking battles between the two sides. On July 2, 2025, fighting broke out again between the CNDF (a

CB member) and CDF–Hualngoram (a CC member) in two villages in Falam Township. Just three days later, on July 5, 2025, the Chin National Front (CNF)—the most influential group within the CC—seized the CNDF headquarters, escalating the conflict further. According to local reports, there have been at least eight armed clashes between member groups of both alliances over the past year.

The escalating tensions derailed planned peace talks that were to be organized by the Mizoram Chief Minister’s Advocacy Group for Peace, which had hoped to mediate between the rival factions. Following the collapse of that initiative, the Mizoram Kohhran Hruaitute Committee (MKHC)—a coalition of Christian churches—has taken new steps to facilitate dialogue and reconciliation among the Chin resistance groups.

Meanwhile, the situation in northern Chin State has also deteriorated. The Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA), which operates around Tonzang, recently attacked CDF positions, killing five fighters and wounding several others. Military analysts warn that the ZRA appears to be preparing for a larger offensive to seize Tonzang, reportedly receiving artillery support from the junta’s Northwest Military Command.

Residents of Tonzang have been ordered by ZRA fighters to leave their homes without explanation. While some families have fled, others remain after CDF–Tonzang reassured locals that there was no immediate threat. However, tensions remain extremely high as both sides reinforce their positions.



EUROPE'S CONCERN OVER THE MYANMAR CRISIS

Where does Myanmar currently stand on the global stage? With the US government effectively “missing in action,” the “Golden Land” is largely in the grips of China and Russia as the illegal military junta seeks to cement its role through what critics have dubbed as “sham elections”.

At such a juncture, the role of European pro-democracy and pro-free speech supporters matters more than ever. To a large extent, Myanmar’s resistance and pro-democracy activists have been let down by US President Donald Trump’s administration due to its “bull in a China shop” approach to switching off foreign aid and with its attention focused on the much-heralded Gaza deal in the Middle East and efforts to end to Russia’s war in Ukraine.

As reporter Antonio Graceffo points out in a story in this magazine issue, the Myanmar military junta has ratcheted up its attacks on resistance strongholds and massacred civilians as it seeks to gain more ground ahead of their election set for December and January.

Few Myanmar citizens will be fooled by the “civilian government” that the junta seeks to line up in the wake of the poll – hoping for local and international recognition, while continuing to bomb its citizens.

Given the gap left by the US administration in terms of attention to Myanmar at this crucial time, the nations of Europe matter when it comes to keep shining a spotlight on the crisis.

Cognizant of the need to bolster support from Europe, a group of Myanmar independent media house representatives spent much of September visiting several countries in Europe where they met politicians, academics and non-governmental officials to discuss the Myanmar crisis and to highlight the challenges for media in reporting.

The following stories cover the key elements of the study trip and the engagement of European officials in following Myanmar developments and offering support.



The Myanmar independent media delegation outside the Demogog office in Poland. Photo: Mizzima

WHY EUROPE MATTERS WHEN ENCOURAGING FREE INDEPENDENT MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE MYANMAR CRISIS

A recent visit by a group of independent Myanmar journalists to several countries in Europe has helped to highlight why Europe matters in the wrestling of control over the future of crisis-ridden Myanmar.

The study visit to Europe in September offered a chance for Myanmar independent media houses covering the crisis in Myanmar sparked by the military coup in February 2021 to explain their challenges in terms reporting, the threats from the junta, and the current difficulties with funding.

The Myanmar delegates included Ms Tin Tin Nyo, Managing Director of Burma News International (BNI),

Mr. Myint Zaw, Bureau Chief, Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), Ms. No No Lin, Deputy Director, Mizzima Media, Mr. Kyaw Zwa Moe, Executive Editor, The Irrawaddy, Mr Toe Zaw Latt, General Secretary of the Independent Press Council of Myanmar, and Ms Htike Htike Aung, Director of the Myanmar Internet Project. Mr Soe Myint, Founder and Editor In-Chief of Mizzima Media, acted as facilitator.

What is happening in Myanmar matters to Europe and all who favour a free press and democracy, particularly given the geopolitical changes that have taken place globally over the last few years. Ever since Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and president Win Myint were arrested and jailed in

2021 by the military junta, and the public push-back developed into civil war, a number of governments in Europe have expressed concern, and juggled the need for a presence on Myanmar soil with the greater goals of encouraging democracy and freedom of the press in the "Golden Land".

General Secretary of the Independent Press Council of Myanmar Mr Toe Zaw Latt said Myanmar domestic politics not only internal conflict but also regional and international conflict impacts millions of ordinary citizens.

"Global geopolitics is changing toward a new paradigm if you look at recent regional gathering by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization where China hosted Russia, North Korea, Myanmar's junta leader and most of world's authoritarian regions, a 'bad guy clique' seeking to run world affairs, which badly impacts democratic society on a global scale.

"The Myanmar military junta, shielded by these rogue states, is a danger for the region and a security threat especially being proxy to Russia and China. The absence of the USA and USAID will badly impact the whole liberalism and democratic movement in the region," Mr Toe Zaw Latt said.

Myanmar is strategically important and is one of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) members. The country is sandwiched between Southeast Asia, South Asia and China – and offers China a gateway to the Indian Ocean. The potential for the country to act as a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia is blocked by the actions of the military junta and the ongoing civil war.

European governments showed interest in the country during the decade-long partial democratic

window from 2011 to 2021, and continue to show concern. That window was an era when the West as a whole were more engaged with Myanmar. US President Barack Obama visited Aung San Suu Kyi twice during this period to embrace Suu Kyi and cheer on the drive towards democracy.

For Europe, Myanmar mattered due to trade, aid and support for the cautiously blossoming democracy under a leader – a Nobel Laureate – who grabbed attention. Many European officials visited during this era.

BNI's Ms Tin Tin Nyo said the United States has lost its interest in Myanmar, focusing instead on its national interests with the rise of nationalism in the country. However, some US officials show a keen interest in China's influence over Myanmar. They are particularly interested in China's countermeasures and involvement in illicit drug trafficking. Additionally, the US recently appointed a senior advisor for Myanmar, which is a unique development that requires close monitoring.

Mizzima's Ms No No Lin said the main geopolitical changes for Myanmar are a shift toward closer alignment with Russia and China, who support the junta, reducing Western influence. US engagement has declined, as seen in USAID funding cuts, signaling less interest in Myanmar. This has increased Myanmar's isolation from the West while strengthening the military junta's ties with China and Russia.

What was clear from the Myanmar media delegates' visit to Europe was a keen interest from their hosts.

"European politicians, government officials, and NGOs were receptive and engaged. They showed interest in Myanmar's independent media situation,

asked questions, shared advice, and discussed potential ways to collaborate or provide support," Ms No No Lin said.

Irrawaddy's Mr Kyaw Zwa Moe said this global shift towards Russia and China is unfortunate. "This is an era where authoritarian regimes have risen across the globe. Before the 2021 coup, Myanmar was perhaps the most promising country in Southeast Asia in terms of political openness, its elected government, and its people's dedication to building a genuine and peaceful federal democracy. But the military destroyed it. Since then, the world has lost Myanmar as a fledgling democracy in the region. Russia and China quickly got Myanmar in their pockets as an ally. In global terms, Myanmar is now in the camp of authoritarian regimes, including Russia, China, North Korea, Belarus, and more. But the Myanmar people continue fighting alone without much international support - even moral support is lacking," he said.

"The US has been the biggest supporter of Myanmar's pro-democracy movement over the past decades. I don't think the US has completely changed its stance yet. But the key question is how the current administration will steer its policy toward Myanmar - especially regarding the regime on one side and the people and pro-democracy groups on the other. We still hope the US and other democracies will continue to support Myanmar as much as they can, despite the problems they face at home," Mr Kyaw Zwa Moe said.

DVB's Mr Myint Zaw said: "China remains one of the most influential external actors in Myanmar's political development. Beijing prioritizes stability and its own national interests over democracy and openly supports the military regime while turning a blind eye to the suffering of the Burmese people. Russia has also become an important partner for the junta, though as a

later ally compared to China. Moscow and Naypyidaw share a strategic alignment in resisting Western influence. For Russia, Myanmar provides an entry point to expand its influence in Southeast Asia, as well as a partner willing to cooperate in military technology and arms production. In return, the regime benefits from Russia's diplomatic support - such as veto power at the UN Security Council - and sees Moscow as a potential enabler of its long-standing ambition to acquire nuclear capabilities, though this remains far from realization. The United States, meanwhile, has not abandoned Myanmar, despite recent USAID funding cuts that have affected the broader aid sector globally rather than Myanmar specifically. Washington's strategic interests remain tied to Myanmar's geostrategic location, particularly in countering China's regional influence and securing access to rare earth resources that Myanmar possesses. Recent US military engagement near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border further indicates continued attention to developments in the country."

Overall, the geopolitical balance around Myanmar has shifted toward deeper support from China and Russia for the military regime, while US policy reflects a more cautious, strategic engagement shaped by broader global funding constraints rather than outright disengagement. Europe remains engaged but is hampered by the restrictions and limitations imposed by the military junta.

Given these changes, it is clear that European support matters to Myanmar, both in terms of maintaining a pragmatic foothold in the country and also supporting the drive for freedom and democracy in this embattled land.



Myanmar media delegates meet at the OSW office. Photo: Mizzima

MYANMAR INDEPENDENT MEDIA DELEGATES SHARE REPORTING CHALLENGES ON EUROPE STUDY TRIP

The challenges of reporting on the Myanmar crisis were discussed with politicians and government and NGO officials on a multi-country visit to Europe by representatives of Myanmar's independent houses in September.

The Myanmar delegates included Ms Tin Tin Nyo, Managing Director of Burma News International (BNI), Mr. Myint Zaw, Bureau Chief, Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), Ms. No No Lin, Deputy Director, Mizzima Media, Mr. Kyaw Zwa Moe, Executive Editor, The Irrawaddy, Mr Toe Zaw Latt, General Secretary of the Independent Press Council of Myanmar, and Ms Htike Htike Aung, Director of the Myanmar Internet Project.

Some of these Myanmar media delegates visited Poland, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Netherlands, Ireland and the Czech Republic between 8 and 24 September to hold discussions with local politicians, academics and NGO personnel about the difficulties for Myanmar journalists, particularly important given the recent geopolitical changes in Europe and in Asia involving Russia, China and the United States of America, the challenge of disinformation and misinformation globally, and the drive by the Myanmar junta to hold elections that many critics consider a "sham".

CHALLENGES FOR MEDIA

Myanmar's independent media houses face a number of concerns during this crucial period in the wake of the 2021 Myanmar military coup.

BNI's Ms Tin Tin Nyo said that after enduring over four years of a military coup, the media face significant challenges in terms of their press freedom.

"This limited press freedom severely restricts the rights to information, free flow of information, and freedom of expression, creating an extremely perilous situation. The junta systematically and increasingly arrests, prosecutes, and jails journalists using harsh laws, including counter-terrorism laws and the recent cybersecurity law. Independent media rely heavily on donor funding as they have lost local revenue and have little hope of generating revenue from digital platforms. Independent media houses have always been financially unstable, and this situation has been exacerbated by the recent funding cuts imposed by the United States and Sweden," she said.

General Secretary of the Independent Press Council of Myanmar Mr Toe Zaw Latt said the visit to lobby European countries centred on the challenges and opportunities and potential media funding for

the proposed junta election on 28 December; the on-the-ground situation regarding Myanmar army sponsored sham election; and the disinformation and misinformation campaign actively using Myanmar army psywar operations supported by Russian and China and how Europe handles this state sponsor misinformation campaign and what are the lessons that can be learned by Myanmar media houses.

"Independent media houses must survive in order to report on the ongoing conflict and proposed election. We can't afford to go silent due to scarce resources.

"Russian aggression in the Europe not only affects Europeans but also affects Myanmar domestic politics as the Myanmar army actively using Russian text book on psychology warfare on Myanmar citizens," Mr Toe Zaw Latt added.

Irrawaddy's Kyaw Zwa Moe said there were two main messages. "Firstly, not to forget Myanmar's cause to regain democracy, to continue to support its people, pro-democracy groups and independent media which is a lifeline of accurate news and important information for the people of Myanmar inside and outside the country.

"Secondly, Myanmar's cause is not only a domestic issue but also a global one in which authoritarian regimes like China and Russia have supported the military junta in Myanmar. Myanmar under the junta has fallen into the hands of Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Russian leader Vladimir Putin, which means the democracies in the West lost Myanmar as a democratic state. To regain it, it is very crucial for the Myanmar

people to receive sustainable and tangible support from democratic countries around the world. The Myanmar people have been struggling to take their country back from this ruthless regime," he said.

COVERING THE ELECTIONS

The Myanmar media delegates stressed the importance of covering the Myanmar regime's national elections set for December and January, given this was an attempt by the illegal military junta to gain local and international legitimacy in the face of a resistance movement that has managed to grab over half of the country's territory.

DVB's Myint Zaw noted that his personal view was that European delegates are fully aware that the junta's planned elections will not be free or fair. They recognize that such an exercise will not contribute to democratization in Myanmar but instead risks fueling greater instability and violence, both during and after the elections.

"At the same time, European embassies continue to maintain a presence in Myanmar. This reflects a pragmatic approach - engaging at a diplomatic level while knowing that meaningful change is unlikely under current conditions. In practice, their policy often translates into limited action, with little expectation that the elections will provide a genuine political solution," he said.

DISINFORMATION & MISINFORMATION

On the visit to Europe, useful discussions were held on the challenges of disinformation and misinformation



Myanmar media delegates meet at the PISM office. Photo: Mizzima

and the cyber threats for both Myanmar media and European media.

The visit included a session presented by Poland's NGO Demagog entitled: "Fighting Falsehoods – How Journalists Can Fight Disinformation". As a Demagog representative noted, they are keen to collaborate in countering disinformation, especially Russian propaganda, and offered training resources to the visiting delegates.

The Myanmar delegates noted the care they have to take with news and data given this was as much a media and psychological war as a physical war.

Apart from the blatant lies the junta presents through its statements and junta-aligned media, it also is pursuing a cyber war against independent media and critics. This online war involves junta propagation of falsehoods and the use of bots to attack Myanmar independent media's social media accounts.

The Myanmar junta uses disinformation and misinformation to control narratives, suppress dissent, and legitimize its rule. It spreads false information through state-run media and social platforms, portraying pro-democracy movements as violent or foreign-backed. The military manipulates social media algorithms, floods platforms with fake accounts, and disseminates propaganda to discredit opposition voices. Misinformation is also used to sow fear, confusion, and distrust among the public. By distorting facts and fabricating events, the junta undermines independent journalism and obstructs access to truth, making it harder for both domestic and international audiences to discern reality from regime-manipulated narratives.

DVB's Mr Myint Zaw said: "One of the heaviest crackdowns by the regime is freedom of expression and attacks on independent journalism."

BNI's Ms Tin Tin Nyo said: "After enduring over four years of a military coup, the media face significant challenges in terms of their press freedom. This limited press freedom severely restricts the rights to information, free flow of information, and freedom of expression, creating an extremely perilous situation. The junta systematically and increasingly arrests, prosecutes and jails journalists using harsh laws, including counter-terrorism laws and the recent cybersecurity law."

DIFFICULTIES WITH FUNDING

All the Myanmar media delegates stressed the need for European support during these difficult times.

Mr Soe Myint, Managing Director and Editor In-Chief of Mizzima, said there was a need for sustainability given the difficult financial position independent media houses face, particularly given the recent cuts in USAID funding.

BNI's Ms Tin Tin Nyo said: Independent media rely heavily on donor funding as they have lost local revenue and have little hope of generating revenue from digital platforms. Independent media houses have always been financially unstable, and this situation has been exacerbated by the funding cuts imposed by the United States and Sweden.

As she notes: "The main challenges include financial instability, operational challenges such as a lack of protection when operating in a host country like Thailand, and personal safety, where journalists' jobs



Myanmar media delegates meet with the Center for International Relations. Photo: Mizzima

are akin to walking on the edge of life or death reporting the news on the ground in the Myanmar war zone."

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This visit to Poland was part of a wider trip to a number of European countries carried out by several of the delegates – particularly important at this time given the recent geopolitical changes in Europe and in Asia involving Russia, China and the United States of America – and the drive by the Myanmar junta to hold elections that many critics consider a "sham".

TWO-WAY DISCUSSION

The Myanmar media delegates had an opportunity to describe the ongoing crisis in Myanmar and to explain the challenges independent media face in covering the ongoing brutal civil war. There was also an opportunity for the delegates to gain an understanding of the challenges the media in Poland faces.

Mr Kyaw Zwa Moe, Executive Editor of Irrawaddy, said: "It was an important and critical trip for our media houses to have explained to our donors and friends in Europe the overall political situation Myanmar is facing. Few people really understand the reality on the ground."

As BNI's Ms Tin Tin Nyo noted, the primary objectives of the visit programme were to offer valuable insights into Poland's political, social, and media landscape, as well as to engage in cultural activities that would enhance the participants' overall experience. The programme was meticulously designed to facilitate discussions. The primary focus of these discussions was on media development and humanitarian support for Myanmar. The visit provided a unique opportunity for the delegation to share their insights on Myanmar's current situation and explore potential avenues for continued support from European governments and civil society.

As Mizzima's Ms No No Lin explained, the visit was aimed at sharing the media landscape in Myanmar and the situation of independent media in Myanmar under the military junta, which took power in an illegal coup in 2021. It was also an opportunity to learn about the media landscape in Poland and media houses in Poland, get insight into Russian disinformation and misinformation in Europe, and to share insight into Russia's involvement in Myanmar, plus look at how the independent Myanmar media can collaborate with media in Poland.

DIRE CRISIS IN MYANMAR

Independent Press Council of Myanmar General Secretary Mr Toe Zaw Latt said the visit was a good opportunity to explain the dire situation Myanmar is in following the coup and how journalists are reporting on the crisis. Following initial public protests after the coup, the crisis developed into a civil war, in which the military junta has killed thousands, the majority of them civilians. Safety for journalists is a key challenge and a shortage of available resources threatens the quality and quantity of independent journalism.

"Independent Myanmar media houses must survive in order to report on the ongoing conflict and proposed election. We can't afford to go silent due to scarce resources," Mr Toe Zaw Latt said.

As he noted, what is happening in Myanmar is part of greater geopolitical changes in Europe and Asia on a range of levels.

As he noted: "Russian aggression in Europe not only affects Europe but it also affects Myanmar domestic politics as the Myanmar army actively uses Russian text book psychology warfare on Myanmar citizens," and Russia provides military support to Myanmar's illegal regime.

BRUTALITY OF THE MYANMAR REGIME

This is a crucial period for the people of Myanmar. As Mr Myint Zaw from DVB said, noting it was his personal view, by February 2026, it will be five years that Myanmar has been under the military regime, which is the most oppressive and brutal military junta they have ever seen in the country since it became independent in 1948. Since the military coup, tens of thousands of activists, opposition leaders, and human rights defenders have been thrown into prison. One of the heaviest crackdowns by the regime has been against freedom of expression and attacks on independent journalism.

"The regime has zero tolerance on any kind of opposing voices - even giving a 'like' or 'thumbs up' on someone's social media post which is critical toward the junta or supports opposition activities is enough for a person to get arrested and thrown into jail, no matter whether the person is politically active or simply an ordinary citizen - young or old," Mr Myint Zaw said.

According to the Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the Myanmar media freedom index is among the lowest, ranking 171 out of 180 countries around the world with 64 journalists still being detained, the second highest jailer of journalists after China.

On a practical level, the independent Myanmar media house delegates highlighted the difficulties in operating in this crisis situation.

As Mr Myint Zaw notes: "Journalists in Myanmar face constant threats, including arbitrary arrest, extrajudicial killings in some cases, and long-term prison sentences without fair trial.

"Internet access is heavily restricted and monitored by the regime. Gathering and sharing information with publishing houses is criminalized under unjust laws, making basic reporting a high-risk activity.

"For exile-based media, the working environment is also far from free. Journalists face restrictions on movement, difficulties in accessing reliable information from inside the country, and limited protection mechanisms. There is no strong backup system or emergency support network available for journalists in crisis situations. Operational costs remain extremely high.

"Funding is another critical challenge. Due to recent cuts, the continuity of operations is under serious threat. At the same time, cyberattacks orchestrated by the regime and its affiliated individuals and organizations frequently target exile media websites and attempt to disrupt social media platforms through coordinated harassment campaigns.

"In short, Myanmar's independent media face a combination of legal, physical, financial, and digital threats that place their survival at great risk," Mr Myint Zaw said.

GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES AND FUNDING CUTS

The delegates noted that Myanmar media houses face serious challenges due to recent funding cuts. Myanmar independent media houses remain the key to success in reporting from this "closed country" and are working hard to be the main sources of information for the people of Myanmar and the international community.

Ms Tin Tin Nyo said: "When meeting with politicians and government officials, from my observation, they still show some interest in Myanmar and commit to continuing their humanitarian support. However, their political perspectives seem disappointed with the lack of unified leadership in the Myanmar pro-democracy movement and are reluctant to support armed struggle. They listen to our perspectives on the junta elections and seem likely to continue standing by us based on their principles, where they would not support or endorse the junta-led election and its results."

AWARENESS ABOUT THE ELECTIONS

The Myanmar media delegates said the officials they met in Poland appeared to understand the concerns about what have been labelled as the Myanmar junta's "sham elections".

"Fortunately, we managed to explain what the upcoming elections in Myanmar will look like, and what potential scenarios might follow," said Mr Kyaw Zwa Moe of Irrawaddy. "I think they understood our points. But regarding the media, we told them we have to cover the upcoming elections no matter whether they are free or a sham. That is our responsibility. But without their support, we will find it very difficult to cover the junta's elections, which will definitely be rigged. Under these circumstances, independent media are even more necessary and important to expose fraud and manipulation in the election."

Mizzima's No No Lin said the Polish officials generally viewed the Myanmar junta's election plans with skepticism. They questioned the fairness, transparency, and credibility of the process and expressed concern that the elections would not reflect the will of the people. They are interested in the plight of Myanmar because of human rights concerns, threats to press freedom, the impact on regional stability and democracy, and the potential for supporting or collaborating with Myanmar's independent media.

"I would like to emphasize the continued resilience and dedication of Myanmar's independent media despite the challenges," Ms No No Lin said. "Support from the international community remains crucial to help them provide accurate information and promote democracy. In addition, we need financial support to ensure that independent media can continue to operate. We, the independent media in Myanmar, need their continued support - not only to maintain access to independent information and news, but also to uphold democracy, human rights, and the plan for a federal union in Myanmar."

Ms No No Lin's stance echoed the views of the other visiting Myanmar media delegates on the Poland study trip.

"We are doing everything we can despite the challenges and risks - not only to our own lives but also to those close to us. While the regimes of China and Russia are supporting the Myanmar military junta to suppress the people of Myanmar, we need you to stand with us. This is a collective struggle for greater democracy and human rights, not only in one country but across the world."



Myanmar media delegates meet with members of the Poland Press Agency in Warsaw. Photo: Mizzima

POLAND VOICES SUPPORT FOR THE FREEDOM OF MYANMAR'S EMBATTLED INDEPENDENT MEDIA ON STUDY TRIP

Polish politicians and government officials have voiced support for the Myanmar media and free speech to a delegation of Myanmar independent media houses on a recent study trip to Poland that included a workshop on disinformation and misinformation.

The study trip for Myanmar independent media was supported by the Embassy of Poland in Bangkok.

The Myanmar delegates included Ms Tin Tin Nyo, Managing Director of Burma News International (BNI), Mr. Myint Zaw, Bureau Chief, Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), Ms. No No Lin, Deputy Director, Mizzima Media, Mr. Kyaw Zwa Moe, Executive Editor, The Irrawaddy, Mr. Toe Zaw Latt, General Secretary of the Independent Press Council of Myanmar, and Ms Htike Htike Aung, Director of the Myanmar Internet Project.

The Myanmar media delegates visited Poland from 7-13 September and met with local politicians, academics and NGO personnel, holding meetings at the Civitas University and Warsaw University, the Polish Institute of International Affairs, the fact-checking organization Demagog.org, and the Center for International Relations, and media offices including Gazeta Wyborcza and the Polish Press Agency.

The visit included a session presented by Demagog

entitled: "Fighting Falsehoods – How Journalists Can Fight Disinformation". As a Demagog representative noted, they are keen to collaborate in countering disinformation, especially Russian propaganda, and offered training resources to the visiting delegates.

This visit to Poland was part of a wider trip to a number of European countries carried out by several of the delegates – particularly important at this time given the recent geopolitical changes in Europe and in Asia involving Russia, China and the United States of America – and the drive by the Myanmar junta to hold elections that many critics consider a "sham".

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objectives of the visit programme were to offer valuable insights into Poland's political, social, and media landscape, as well as to engage in cultural activities that would enhance the participants' overall experience. The programme was meticulously designed to facilitate discussions. The primary focus of these discussions was on media development and humanitarian support for Myanmar. The visit provided a unique opportunity for the delegation to share their insights on Myanmar's current situation and explore potential avenues for continued support from European governments and civil society.

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Myanmar media delegates meet with Civitas.
Photo: Mizzima



Olle Thorell

THE SILENCE OF THE VALKYRIES

A SWEDISH PARLIAMENTARIAN'S UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO MYANMAR'S STRUGGLE FOR FEDERAL DEMOCRACY

INSIGHT MYANMAR

“ I’m still asking questions, I’m still perplexed by the complexity of Burma. What impresses me is the will and patience of the people in mobilizing for a common good, trying to create something better out of the chaos.”

These words from Olle Thorell, a seasoned Member of Parliament for Sweden’s Social Democratic Party, offer a window into his almost two-decade-long journey working with Burmese activists. From his unique vantage point on the Foreign Affairs Committee, Thorell, now in his fifth and final parliamentary term, has become an important figure in Sweden’s long-standing engagement with Myanmar. His story is not merely one of political duty; it is a deeply personal narrative, a microcosm of Sweden’s historical allyship

with the oppressed, set against the backdrop of contemporary challenges facing international solidarity in an increasingly fragmented world.

His story did not begin in the hushed corridors of power, but in a small, close-knit industrial town in Sweden—a place he affectionately described as the “rust belt.” Here, community ties were strong, deeply rooted in the labor movement and the principles of social democratic governance. This upbringing instilled in him an understanding of collective effort and mutual support.

However, it was a childhood decision that irrevocably shaped his worldview. At just 12 years old, Thorell faced a choice: remain in his familiar hometown

or embark on an adventure to South Africa with his newly divorced father. Opting for the latter, he spent three formative years, from 1979 to 1981, immersed in a society grappling with the stark realities of apartheid. Though he lived a relatively privileged life, residing in, as he says, a “big house with a pool” and attending the private Pretoria Boys High School, the insidious nature of racial segregation seeped into his consciousness. “I learned about racism, and what a society can become if you let prejudice and division of people [govern], what kind of society you get from that,” he recounts. Upon his return to Sweden as a teenager, this exposure to injustice fueled his passion to enter the anti-racist movement, cementing the bedrock of his lifelong commitment to human rights.

Thorell's early career as a teacher honed his diplomatic sensibilities. His grounding in community fostered a deep understanding of human connection, which became particularly relevant during the 1990s, a period when he taught Swedish to refugees and immigrants from the war-torn Balkans. “I found myself with a classroom full of Serbs and Croats and Albanians and Bosnians, all together in the same classroom while the fighting was going on in their countries,” Thorell recalls. This experience provided an unfiltered education in “what happens when a country falls apart, when there is a division among neighbors and friends,” he recalls. These daily interactions, steeped in the realities of human conflict, displacement, and resilience, influenced his approach to international affairs long before he formally stepped into the national political arena.

While initially engaged in local politics, Thorell's journey shifted upon his election to the National Parliament, or Riksdag, in October 2006, representing Västmanland County. He found himself placed on the Foreign Affairs Committee, a role he embraced with enthusiasm. His initial four years in Parliament, with the Social Democrats in opposition, saw him entrusted with the critical responsibility for Asian affairs. This period coincided with dramatic changes unfolding in Myanmar—a time that would deepen his engagement with the country.

Thorell immersed himself in learning about Myanmar's complex political landscape, and he learned extensively from advocacy groups in Sweden. His commitment extended beyond borders, leading him to travel to Thailand, where he met with activists in Mae Sot and Chiang Mai, gathering firsthand accounts and creating connections. His personal bond with the struggle was cemented in 2011, when he was among the first European politicians who met Aung San Suu Kyi just months after her release from prison. This clandestine meeting, held in her villa with utmost secrecy to avoid jeopardizing her fragile freedom, was, for Thorell, a promising interaction. Thorell notes that this encounter occurred before “her halo fell, and her international reputation was damaged.” At that moment, Aung San Suu Kyi stood as an important figure for democracy and change in Myanmar.

Between 2015 and 2020, during Myanmar's period of perceived openness and democratic development, Thorell looks back with a bittersweet nostalgia. He acknowledges the immense difficulties that persisted but emphasizes the palpable hope that permeated the air. During one visit, he witnessed a real transformation taking place across the country. “I could travel to Burma, and I could meet with people,” he recalls. “I traveled the country meeting activists, and saw people printing newspapers by hand like we [in Sweden] did in the 1920s or 30s, and everywhere in the street. We could see the difference in plurality of expression [more than before], and it was quite inspiring.”

For Thorell, hailing from a country with “a very old, mature democracy where we take a lot of democratic development for granted, such as freedom of expression and free media, as if it is a given,” this burgeoning civic engagement in Myanmar was profoundly moving. He found inspiration in the sight of “all these poor people who you would expect to be busy finding food for the day, but instead engaging themselves in printing newspapers, spreading the word of democracy to others.”

Yet, this inspiring image was juxtaposed with a reminder of the hardships that continued to plague the

nation. On the same trip, driven by the Social Democrats' foundational connection to trade unions, he visited a textile workers' union in Yangon. What he encountered in the industrial zone was deeply disturbing: "It was really tough to see how the children were working there - 7, 8, 10 year old kids working, you could see even younger kids playing in the puddles." These puddles, tragically, were "colored by the chemical dye from the factories, with 3, 4 year old kids playing" in their toxic depths. He also witnesses parents bravely striving to organize, protest, and to adapt better working conditions, along with a living wage. Unsettled by these realities, they further cemented his belief that allyship with Myanmar is essential in the international sphere.

Delving into the historical roots of Sweden's involvement with Myanmar, Thorell articulates the underlying principle that has long guided the Swedish Social Democratic Party: international solidarity. "We are as far from a nationalist party as you can be," he states proudly, and goes on to invoke the towering figure of Olof Palme, the assassinated Swedish Prime Minister and party leader as the embodiment of this ethos. Palme, he explains, was a critical figure in global geopolitical history, a man who famously "criticized the US for Vietnam as harshly as he criticized the Soviet Union for the Afghanistan war, and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia." Thorell describes Palme's moral compass as unyielding, regardless of geopolitical alignments. As a young man, Palme had traveled through Asia, including Burma, and chronicled the inter-ethnic conflicts he found there, particularly in the context of colonization and then independence. His observation about the naivety of colonial powers attempting to govern lands they did not truly comprehend resonates deeply with Thorell until this day.

Considering Sweden's integral allyship with Myanmar, a fascinating question arises: the unique role of Nordic countries in championing human rights and democracy on the global stage. "We've reached a level of welfare and wealth in our societies that we can afford ourselves the luxury of caring about more than ourselves," Thorell explains. He also speaks to their identity as "small countries, not superpowers,

dependent on other countries for economy, trade, and a workforce coming here." Sweden's long history of welcoming immigration from across Europe, he notes, cemented a tradition of open borders and a deep-seated understanding that "we are a corner of the world that needs other people, we're curious of other cultures, and understand that we are all dependent on each other in this world."

During the Cold War, Sweden consciously carved out a "middle way," steadfastly refusing to align with either extreme communism or unbridled capitalism. This independent stance allowed them to create strong relationships with newly independent nations, unburdened by colonial baggage. Myanmar, in this historical context, became an example of a place where Sweden genuinely believed it could do good.

However, Thorell voices an unsettling concern about a recent shift in the global paradigm: A growing trend where nations are increasingly prioritizing narrow self-interest over aid and development. While traditionally, Sweden and other like-minded countries sought out "places where the conflicts were the most complicated, where problems were the greatest, where poverty was the worst," Thorell sees a growing tendency to instead engage only where there's a direct national benefit—such as trade or security. This regrettable turn, he believes, inevitably leads nations to stay away from the most difficult conflicts and countries—a category that Myanmar certainly falls under.

"Burma and Sweden have no connection really, logically, as it is such an isolated country and there are not many Myanmar people in Sweden," he notes. Yet, through the efforts of civil society, particularly Svenska Burmakommittén or Swedish Burma Committee, and the focus of successive Swedish political governments, a bond has been developed over the years. For him, Myanmar has tragically become "the last bastion of military rule where we feel we need to help out," a remnant of the authoritarian regimes that Sweden had actively opposed in places like Argentina, Chile, Portugal, and Greece.

This paradigm shift is also characterized by a fundamental challenge to multilateralism and a heightened focus on national borders. These borders, he stressed, are no longer just lines on a map, but increasingly “borders within minds of people, where you tend to see the interest of your own people in your own country, and feel that if someone else gains something, you will lose something.”

The rise of what he terms as “nationalistic populism” troubles him. In the face of this tide, Thorell is thankful that the Swedish Social Democrats have stayed true to their values. For them, solidarity is not merely a gesture of charity or compassion. “It’s a matter of being. We’re all dependent on each other, and we are a global family,” he says. However, this vision is now under siege. Populist narratives, fueled by “myths about development aid and prejudice about foreigners and anti-Islamic sentiment, have spread like wildfire through society,” Thorell admits.

He expresses a concern about the changed media landscape since he entered Parliament in 2006. The age of 10-second sound bites, TikTok dances, GIFs, and memes has supplanted nuanced discussion. “Algorithms are rigged to benefit strong emotions like anger and hate and fear and prejudice,” creating echo chambers where people “gather today with the ones who agree with you.” This fragmentation, he warns, makes for a “politically dangerous scenario where populists can grow limitlessly.” Not mincing words, he believes “the democratic part of the world, the liberal forces of the world need to unite and regulate us somehow so we can have a shift, because I’m worried for the future democracy.”

Despite these concerns, Thorell remained an optimist. He believed in the pendulum movement of history, asserting that extremes eventually swing back towards a more balanced normalcy. While uncertain if the post-WWII liberal world order was an exception, he strongly desires a future where the UN Charter is viable and human rights are respected, “where countries and people should be able to decide for themselves through

democratic elections their future.”

Paradoxically, the same communication revolution that fuels populism also holds immense potential for innovation. For him, it has also made national borders less important at the same time in some areas, by enabling people to inform themselves of what’s going on in the world. He highlights its transformative power for the Myanmar opposition, allowing them to “stay in touch with each other, even though scattered all around the world, enabling the National Unity Government [to] organize itself and reach out to people.” Considering this, he believes “liberal values and values of democracy and human rights are impossible to quench in the long run.” Thorell further expresses hope that “the democracies and liberal forces of the world will see the danger now that’s going on and mobilize.”

“We who are born in wealthier countries have an obligation to help,” he reiterates. “We should be where it’s most difficult to get things to grow, because we have the possibility to make it grow there. We shouldn’t just go to the easy places!” His vision for Sweden’s future role, especially in light of the perceived retreat of the US and UK from global leadership, should be one of renewed engagement: “there is a vacuum where Sweden could make themselves present and mobilize other countries in being responsible.”

“Myanmar deserves better,” he says in closing. These words extend directly to his vision for Sweden’s sustainable commitment to Myanmar, by challenging the military junta and supporting a new federal democratic state that respects the diversity of Myanmar.

LISTEN TO THE PODCAST

[https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/9/25/episode-405-the-silence-of-the-Valkyries](https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/9/25/episode-405-the-silence-of-the- Valkyries)



MYANMAR JUNTA SAYS MALAYSIA TO OBSERVE ELECTION

Myanmar's junta said 10 October that Malaysia would send observation teams to its long-delayed election, as it battles multiple rebel forces opposed to the poll.

A civil war has consumed Myanmar since the military snatched power in a 2021 coup, jailing democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi and deposing her civilian government.

The military has touted elections -- due to start in phases on December 28 -- as a path to reconciliation.

However, monitors are slating the poll as a ploy to legitimise continuing military rule, while it is set to be boycotted by many ousted lawmakers and blocked by armed opposition groups in enclaves they control.

Malaysia's Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan arrived in capital Naypyidaw Thursday to meet with Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

State-run Global New Light of Myanmar said Friday that Mohamad "vowed to send election observation teams to Myanmar".

As chair of the ASEAN bloc of Southeast Asian nations, Malaysia "guaranteed that ASEAN will emphasize the best cooperation with Myanmar in its endeavours," it said.

The Malaysian foreign ministry did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

A statement from the Malaysian foreign ministry Thursday said that Myanmar's planned elections, as well as the cessation of hostilities, were on the meeting agenda.

Global New Light of Myanmar also said that 57 political parties "that comply with legal requirements" and over 5,000 candidates would run in the national election.

The military-led government has said that polls would be held in phases, starting on December 28, with a result date expected at the end of January.

AFP



INTENSIFIED FIGHTING AND THE MYANMAR JUNTA'S UPCOMING 'ELECTION'

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

As Burma approaches its first election since the 2021 coup, the junta has intensified ground and air operations across multiple fronts. On a macro level, observers report that resistance forces are losing territory as the military regains ground. But for people on the ground in Burma, this renewed fighting means rising civilian deaths, increased displacement, children cut off from education, women losing their husbands, children losing their fathers, and most of the nation facing food insecurity while suffering from a lack of access to medical care.

In October, the military launched large-scale coordinated offensives against Arakan Army (AA)-controlled areas across Arakan (Rakhine) and Chin states, using airstrikes, naval bombardments, and artillery. Beginning on September 26, attacks on Taungup, Thandwe, Paletwa, and Rathedaung killed four civilians and injured at least 26. U Myo Kyaw of the Arakan League for Democracy accused the regime of deliberately targeting civilians to spread fear and weaken support for the AA.

Former junta officer Captain Zin Yaw, now aligned with the Civil Disobedience Movement, said the military aims to retake southern Arakan townships such as Ann, Taungup, Thandwe, and Gwa before the vote, relying heavily on air and naval strikes because overland routes are blocked by Chin resistance forces.

Despite widespread desertions and battlefield setbacks, the junta is pushing to secure areas it can include in the first phase of voting, limited to the townships of Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Manaung, among the few still under its control. Meanwhile, resistance attacks continue in central and northern Burma, particularly around Mandalay and Yangon, threatening the regime's already tenuous hold on power.

The military's recapture of Kyaukme in southern Shan State underscores its drive to project stability before the polls. After a 21-day offensive against the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), state media announced that the town, seized by the TNLA in August 2024 during Operation 1027, was once again under government control. Kyaukme lies on a key trade route linking central Burma to China and had been one of the resistance's most important strategic gains. The junta blamed retreating resistance fighters for setting fires that destroyed public buildings, while resistance media offered a more plausible explanation: the destruction was caused by Burma Army drone strikes. The regime celebrated the reoccupation, claiming residents "welcomed" troops.

State media wrote, "As the Tatmadaw was able to regain control of Kyaukme Town today, local ethnic civilians joyfully and enthusiastically welcomed the Tatmadaw columns with victory wreaths and floral garlands in great numbers." The State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC) said that voting would soon take place there.

The TNLA is part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance alongside the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Arakan Army (AA). The alliance made sweeping advances in 2023 and 2024, capturing major towns like Lashio and Nawnghkio and inflicting some of the junta's worst defeats in history, 91 towns and 167 military battalions lost. That momentum has since slowed under China-brokered ceasefires and pressure from Beijing, which reportedly cut fuel, internet, and electricity to rebel-held zones and even detained an MNDAA commander to enforce compliance.

Although the TNLA still holds parts of Shan State and the AA dominates much of Rakhine, the junta's recent territorial gains, including Kyaukme, have partially stabilized its position.

While the broader picture is crucial to understanding the geopolitical dynamics ahead of the elections, reports from the ground more accurately illustrate how people are suffering.

"Between September 12 and 19, Rangers documented 35,573 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Zayatagyi Township in northern Karen State, including 942 widows suffering from a lack of medical aid and disrupted education for their children. They fled Burma Army shelling, forced portering, arbitrary arrests, and landmines in their area," wrote the Free Burma Rangers Weekly Dispatch for October 1.

These numbers are staggering, 35,000 more people displaced in a single district and 942 widows lacking medical aid and access to education for their children. Multiply that figure across all the districts of resistance-held territory in Burma, and the scale of human suffering becomes even more apparent.

Across Karen and Karenni states, Rangers provided medical care to hundreds of displaced civilians in IDP camps, where populations ranged from 122 to 988 people. Those living in the camps continue to face food insecurity, housing shortages, and severe health problems.

As admirable as this assistance is, it is dwarfed by the total number of displaced persons, officially over 3.5 million but almost certainly much higher. Even those who do not qualify as displaced still face food insecurity and the constant threat of government airstrikes. The suffering has only intensified as the election date approaches.

The junta's plan to hold elections is a desperate attempt to gain legitimacy with the international community while pro-democracy forces continue to retain substantial territory. Resistance groups still control peripheral and mountainous regions, but they face mounting pressure in Shan, Karenni, and Karen states. Intensified offensives backed by Chinese support - including drones, surveillance systems, and air power - have pushed many resistance units into retreat or defensive positions.

Voting is scheduled to begin on December 28, 2025, in a staggered process extending into January, with only about one-third of constituencies expected to participate due to widespread insecurity. The junta continues its offensives to seize territory before the polls, seeking a veneer of legitimacy for what many view as a sham election intended to entrench military rule. Its limited but symbolically important gains allow it to project an image of stability.

The elections have been rejected almost universally, both domestically and internationally, as opposition parties and resistance-controlled regions are excluded from participation. During the census period, armed conflict was reported in 233 of Burma's 330 townships, making accurate data collection impossible. Rather than serving as a fair electoral foundation, the census functioned as a counterinsurgency tool to identify dissidents rather than as a legitimate population survey.

Behind the intensified fighting and the upcoming election stands China. The International Crisis Group notes that Beijing's open support has given the junta a geopolitical lifeline, allowing it to stabilize militarily and diplomatically after years of isolation. Western diplomats in Yangon believe China's goal is to ensure the regime can stage an election that projects legitimacy while maintaining leverage over both the junta and the resistance.

China's expanding support has shifted the balance of Burma's civil war in favor of the military regime. Beijing has been supplying military technology to the junta, pressuring ethnic armed groups to accept ceasefires, and restricting cross-border access to supplies. The Kachin News Group reports that these measures have made it increasingly difficult for resistance forces to obtain drone components and related materials. In short, Chinese drones, technology transfers, and diplomatic intervention have transformed the battlefield, helping the junta regain territory and momentum while deepening Beijing's influence over Burma's future.

Both Naypyidaw and Beijing hope that certifying a deeply flawed election will add a final layer of legitimacy to Burma's government. The next step will likely be to label all ethnic armed organizations as terrorists and to increase diplomatic engagement worldwide, using Beijing's backing as an entry point. Initial outreach is expected toward countries firmly within Beijing's orbit, such as Russia, Iran, North Korea, Afghanistan, and possibly Pakistan, before expanding to nations heavily indebted under the Belt and Road Initiative, which includes much of the developing world. The strategy mirrors China's approach to silencing criticism of its Uyghur genocide, condemned by the United States and Israel but not by a single Muslim-majority country.

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



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

HUMAN RIGHTS MYANMAR WARNS OF WIDESPREAD ABUSES AHEAD OF 2025 "SHAM ELECTION"

In a statement released on 8 October, Human Rights Myanmar (HRM) described the Myanmar junta's upcoming election as a "strategic component of its war against the people," not a democratic exercise. The rights group warned that the vote, expected late this year, will be marked by systematic repression and manipulation designed to entrench military rule.

The military junta has already laid the groundwork for large-scale rights abuses through new laws and crackdowns on dissent, the rights group alleges. HRM cited the 2025 "Law Protecting Against the Obstruction, Hindrance, and Destruction of Multiparty Democratic General Elections" as a tool being used to arrest critics, activists, and journalists under vague charges of "disrupting" the electoral process.

The group said fundamental rights required for genuine elections – including freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly – have been "systematically violated." The junta's 2023 Political

Parties Registration Law has already dissolved major opposition parties such as the National League for Democracy (NLD) and disqualified candidates through politically motivated convictions.

HRM warned that during the election, millions of citizens, especially those in conflict zones and in displaced communities, will likely be excluded from voting. In ethnic minority regions, the military is expected to cancel polls under the pretext of security concerns, further suppressing ethnic representation. The Rohingya population will remain disenfranchised under discriminatory citizenship laws.

The statement also cautioned that foreign governments may use the staged vote to re-engage diplomatically with the junta, granting it a veneer of legitimacy. HRM urged the international community to reject the election's outcome, deny any form of support or observation, and instead document the regime's violations.



IRELAND'S FOREIGN MINISTER CONFIRMS IRELAND HAS 'SERIOUS CONCERNS' OVER MYANMAR JUNTA ELECTIONS

The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) has helped raise the issue of the Myanmar junta's election plan in Ireland's parliament, a poll which many critics consider a "sham".

Building on CHRO's advocacy in Dublin, Deputy Paul Murphy raised a Parliamentary Question on 7 October calling on Ireland to refuse recognition of any junta-organized elections in Myanmar.

In his response, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr Simon Harris echoed deep concern over escalating violence and confirmed that Ireland and the EU have serious concerns about the holding of elections under the current repressive conditions. He seeks a meaningful outcome from sustained engagement — keeping Myanmar's crisis on the international agenda.

The following question was asked by Paul Murphy, member of Ireland's parliament and Member of the European Parliament.

QUESTION

To ask the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in view of the systematic violence being employed by the Myanmar military including airstrikes on civilian areas with a view to clearing territory ahead of planned elections, if Ireland will state unequivocally that it will not recognise any election conducted by the Myanmar military while it is engaged in aerial attacks and forced displacement of civilian populations; and if Ireland will press this stance at the European Union and UN General Assembly.

REPLY

Ireland has consistently condemned the junta and has called for a return to a democratic path. I am appalled by the escalation in violence, the displacement of large numbers of people and the dire humanitarian and human rights situation in Myanmar.

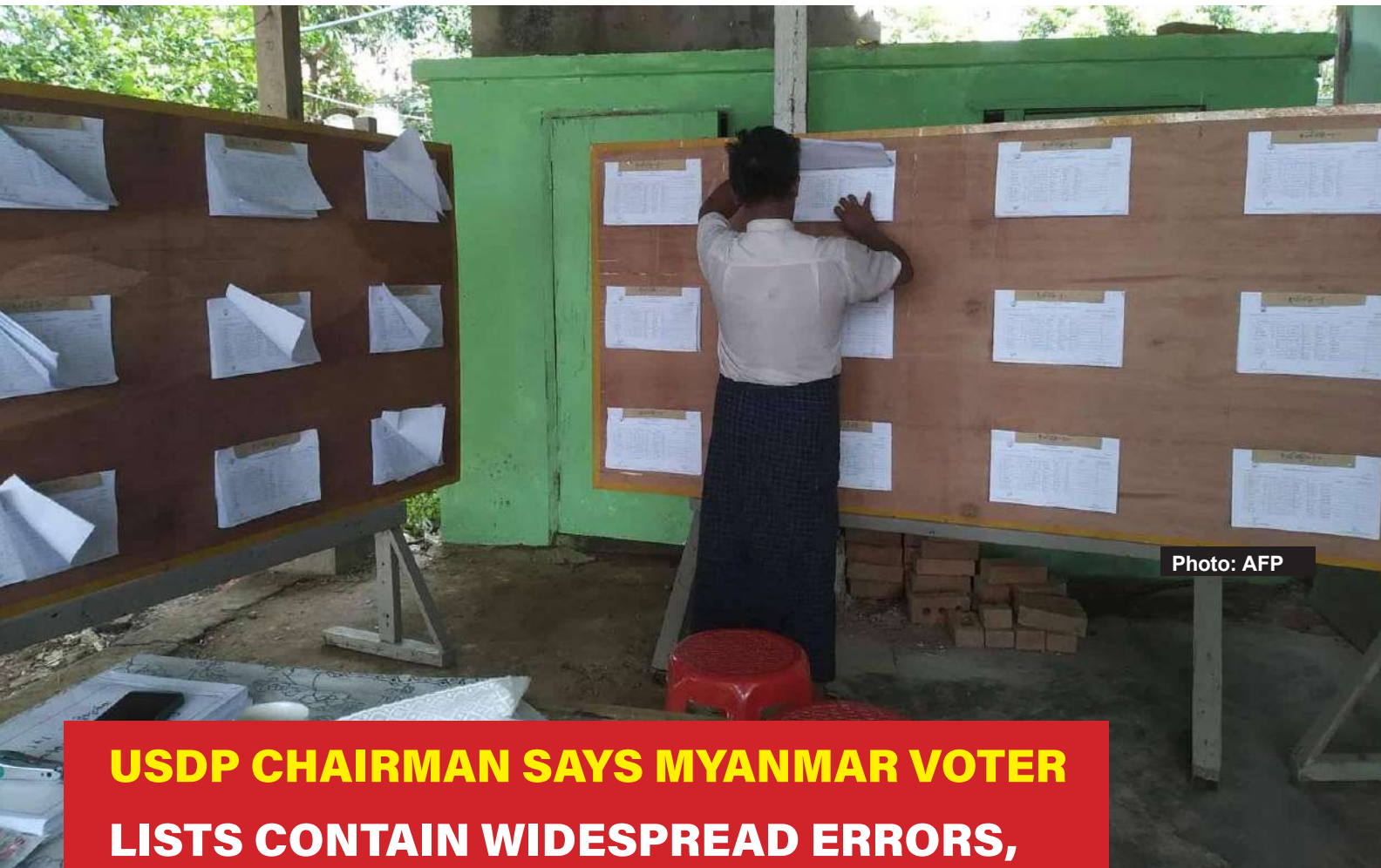
Since October 2023, the conflict between the Myanmar Armed Forces and a number of armed groups has escalated. Significant areas of Myanmar are now under the control of non-state armed groups, and there have been increasingly brutal attacks by the military, and by other armed groups, with civilians bearing the brunt of the violence. Conflict dynamics and natural disasters have compounded the existing humanitarian crisis, with an estimated 3.6 million persons displaced internally, while 16.7 million face acute food insecurity.

We note that the military junta has announced the holding of elections at the end of December 2025. While an orderly return to real democracy in Myanmar is highly desirable, Ireland and our EU partners have serious concerns about the holding of elections in the current context.

Territorial control continues to shift between different groups due to the ongoing conflict, with millions of people displaced from their homes. Although a national state of emergency has been lifted by the junta, local states of emergency remain in place in numerous townships. A number of opposition parties have been dissolved or banned from participating in the election. Civil society, media, and opposition voices operate under intense surveillance and censorship, with severe restrictions on speech, assembly, and campaigning. In early August, the junta introduced new measures imposing harsh penalties including life sentences and even capital punishment, for activities portrayed as 'disturbance to the elections'. It is clear that this is not a conducive environment for a free and fair election.

The EU has urged the establishment of an inclusive dialogue, which is key to the crisis resolution process. The EU calls on all groups opposing the coup to work together towards a common platform with the aim of restoring a peaceful and democratic path and ensuring the rights and freedoms of all people of Myanmar. As the EU High Representative stated earlier this year, any elections held without a prior inclusive dialogue between all parties, and lacking popular support and broad participation, are likely to exacerbate violence and instability in Myanmar.

My Department remains engaged on this issue, and will continue to engage both with EU partners and at the UN to urge a return to democracy, stability, and respect for human rights.



USDP CHAIRMAN SAYS MYANMAR VOTER LISTS CONTAIN WIDESPREAD ERRORS, OUTDATED DATA

UHla Swe, chairman of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) for the Naypyidaw Council Area, said on 5 October that the voter lists released by the military-controlled Election Commission are riddled with errors, including the names of deceased and relocated individuals.

In a post on his social media page, U Hla Swe said he personally inspected the lists displayed at various ward offices and found significant inaccuracies.

"In a ward like Mingalardipa, for example, even the ward administrator and his family are missing from the list. Don't even mention the rest of the people. These kinds of problems are happening. People who have died are still listed, and those who have permanently moved away are also included. This is happening on a large scale," he wrote.

He added that the current lists appear to be based on outdated data from the 2020 general election rather

than newly updated records.

"The discrepancies run into the hundreds between one township and another," U Hla Swe said, calling for a complete overhaul of the voter rolls.

The military junta, which seized power in February 2021 citing alleged voter list fraud as a key justification, has announced that the first phase of its planned election will be held on 28 December.

The voter lists are currently on public display at ward offices from 30 September to 13 October, according to the junta's Election Commission.

No official response has been issued by the Election Commission regarding the alleged errors.

SHOCK OVER DEADLY THADINGYUT FESTIVAL STRIKE

A junta airstrike on a Thadingyut oil lamp strike in Chaung U Township, Sagaing Region, killed over 25 civilians, including women and children, and injured about 40 others, according to local sources.

On the full moon day of Thadingyut, 6 October, a paramotor aircraft from the Northwestern Military Command dropped two 120-mm mortar bombs on a school in Bonto village, Chaung U Township.

"So far, 17 people have died. Some victims suffered severe injuries, including broken or missing limbs, and there are serious concerns about the condition of the injured, so the death toll may rise," a Chaung U resident told Mizzima.

He said the attack occurred while residents were gathered for a joint oil lamp strike marking the Thadingyut full moon, held in defiance of the military dictatorship.

A second bomb was dropped near Bonto village while locals were treating the wounded, though the extent of the damage is still unclear, the resident added.

Locals and defence forces suspect the attack may have been based on intelligence from a military informant and have urged the public to remain cautious.

At the same time, military supporters were holding an opening ceremony for a public park along Kyaukka Road in Monywa, playing music and singing, according to residents.

That night, artillery stationed in Kyauk Sit Pon village near Monywa fired heavy weapons at nearby villages, killing one resident, local defence forces said.

On the night of the full moon, paramotors from the Northwestern Military Command reportedly flew over Kampya, Taungpulu, Kho Than, Nyaung Phyu Pin, and Naga Twin villages in Monywa Township.

A member of the local defence forces said paramotors cannot be brought down with small arms and require heavy weapons, such as .50 calibre machine guns. He appealed for public support to obtain the necessary equipment.

Strike committees across the country had urged the public to light oil lamps in their homes, yards, and religious sites on the full moon day, symbolizing the people's ongoing resistance.

Organizers said the nationwide candlelight strike was aimed at calling for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners, the repeal of the forced conscription law, and a total boycott of the military's planned elections.

Myanmar's military confirmed that it had attacked a protest, where dozens were killed according to residents, with the junta saying rebel fighters were among the crowd.

The woman, who requested anonymity for security reasons, said the bombing on a crowd of hundreds gathered in Chaung U township for the Thadingyut full moon festival left some bodies unidentifiable.

The military accused "so-called PDF terrorist groups" of forcing people to join an anti-government protest and using them as "human shields" in Chaung U.

"According to a detailed report by a responsible citizen who was among those forced to do so, the security forces chose to attack as a counter-terrorism operation to minimise harm to innocent civilians," it said in a statement.

It said four "PDF terrorists" were killed in the attack, releasing photos of four men who several anti-coup campaign groups identified as their members.

Reporting: Mizzima and AFP



Photo: Supplied

MASSACRES ACROSS MYANMAR KILLED 637 CIVILIANS BETWEEN MAY AND AUGUST

At least 637 civilians were killed in massacres across Myanmar between May and August last year, according to a report released on 8 October by the Nyan Lin Thit Analytica Group.

The group documented 68 incidents of mass killings defined as events claiming five or more civilian lives across 38 townships nationwide. The perpetrators included the Myanmar junta, armed resistance groups, and unidentified armed actors.

Of the 68 incidents, 66 were attributed to the junta that seized power in the 2021 coup, while one incident remains unconfirmed. One case involved a targeted attack by resistance forces that killed relatives of junta personnel, the report stated.

Airstrikes carried out by the junta accounted for the largest number of civilian deaths, with 39 incidents, followed by 13 cases of killings during ground incursions. Five more incidents of mass casualties were recorded during clashes between junta forces and armed resistance groups.

According to the report, Sagaing Region recorded the highest number of civilian deaths, with over 200

people killed in multiple incidents. Northern Shan State, Magway, Bago (East), and Tanintharyi regions saw the third-highest number of civilian deaths, with victims killed by artillery fire, airstrikes, and military raids.

The report also cited a mass casualty event in Mandalay Region resulting from a prison bombing.

The Nyan Lin Thit Analytica Group said most of the killings were linked to operations by the Myanmar junta and pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee militias, who entered villages near revolutionary strongholds and People's Defence Force (PDF) areas. These groups reportedly carried out mass arrests, sexual violence, executions, village burnings, and used civilians as human shields before killing them.

The findings were based on press statements from revolutionary organizations and data compiled from 40 independent media outlets.

According to Nyan Lin Thit Analytica, civilian deaths in mass killing incidents have steadily increased since the coup: 570 in 2021, 612 in 2022, 939 in 2023, 1,484 in 2024, and 1,122 from January to August 2025.



Inside a bunker school. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR AIR STRIKES FORCE YOUTH INTO BUNKER SCHOOLS

Before a Myanmar student descends into a classroom entombed in a concrete bunker, she prays for compassion and her community's safety, knowing her appeal will go unanswered.

"May the fighter jets not come. May the pilots show kindness to us. May the bombs not explode," 18-year-old Phyto Phyto said, recalling her unspoken wishes.

She is enrolled in a class of around a dozen at the subterranean academy, founded in June after a junta strike obliterated a nearby school and killed at least 20 pupils and two teachers, according to witnesses.

"Our school days used to be free and full of fun," said Phyto Phyto, a pseudonym used for security reasons.

"Ever since the air strikes started, we've lost our happiness," she added. "The students have grown quiet."

Myanmar's military has increased air strikes every year since it triggered civil war with a 2021 coup, conflict monitors say -- a response to guerrilla factions opposed to junta rule besieging its ground forces.

The deluges and gales of the May to September monsoons typically offer a reprieve.

But partial data from this year's wet season shows the military conducted more than 1,000 air and drone strikes, killing more than 800 people, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) organisation, which tallies media reports of violence.

A Myanmar junta spokesman could not be reached for comment.

The junta is waging a campaign to recapture territory ahead of elections it has said will start on December 28.

But rebels have pledged to block the polls in their enclaves, and analysts describe the vote as a ploy to disguise the continuation of military rule.

In a rebel-held area, around 110 kilometres (70 miles) north of Mandalay city where junta jets scour the skies, Phyto Phyto and her classmates learn in the dank and dark but relative safety of their underground classroom.

It was built in the jungle with donations and resembles a spartan prison cell.

"We want education, no matter the obstacles," Phyto Phyto said.

'Superior air power'

Bowing her head to study Burmese literature -- her favourite subject -- the teenager is watched over by a poster of Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratic leader ousted by the military in February 2021.

Democracy activists formed guerrilla units and found common cause with myriad ethnic minority armed groups, which have long fought the military for self-rule.

Their scattered organisation failed to make much headway until a combined offensive starting in late 2023.

The back-footed military then stepped up its aerial campaign using China- and Russia-supplied jets against rebels who possess neither their own air fleets nor anti-air defences.

"The reason they use air strikes is they feel our revolutionary armed groups have the power to take them down," said Zaw Tun, a member of the democracy movement's self-declared National Unity Government in a rebel-held area of northern Sagaing region.

"They can't win the ground battle, but they have the power to attack us with air strikes," he said.

Rarely a week passes without civilians being killed in a mass-casualty bombing, often of schools or monasteries occupied by children or monks, and sometimes also sheltering people already displaced by fighting.

"The military targets crowds intentionally because they want to incite fear," said ACLED Asia-Pacific analyst Su Mon Thant.

"When people are more uncertain with their life and desperate, they don't want to support the resistance cause."

But while "superior power in the air" allows the military to stave off defeat, she said, it is not enough to secure victory -- creating a stalemate where casualties mount but front lines stay largely unchanged.

While there is no official death toll for Myanmar's war and estimates vary widely, ACLED reports more than 85,000 people have been killed on all sides.

Of those, nearly 3,400 were civilians killed by state forces in targeted air or drone strikes.

Under cover of darkness

State media has previously described reports of civilian casualties as "false information" being spread by "malicious media".

But for farmers, who slosh through paddies in Sagaing region to tend their rice crops by torchlight, the threat is real.

"We transplant paddies at night so that we can focus on hiding in the daytime," said one farmer who did not share their name.

During daylight hours, in central Mandalay region's Thabeikkyin township, rebels surveil the skies and use crackling walkie-talkies to relay the last-known location of junta jets -- an improvised air raid warning system.

Thwat Lat sounds the siren up to 15 times daily, voicing the most urgent warnings through a pink and gold microphone plugged into a system of speakers that can be heard from eight kilometres away, sending residents skittering to bunkers.

"Every time a person's life is saved, I feel what I'm doing is worthwhile," he said during one of his recent 19-hour shifts.

But bunkers and siloed schools cannot protect their occupants from psychological wounds.

"I have no words to express how nervous I am," said Khin Tint, 67.

"Sometimes I think I am already dead but my heart is still pounding."

AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS FOUR, INCLUDING THREE STUDENTS, AT SCHOOL IN CHIN STATE

A school in Htinchaung village, Mindat Township, Chin State, was struck by a junta airstrike on 8 October, killing four people – three students and one disabled woman – and injuring 22 others, according to the Interim Mindat Township Public Administration Team.

The attack was carried out by two jet fighters at around 7 pm, when students were having dinner and studying in their dormitories.

“The attack happened around 7 pm, when it was not school time. Most of the children were having dinner, and others were studying. Since the dormitories where the students lived were hit, the number of casualties was high,” said Salai Yaw Man, an official from the Interim Mindat Township Public Administration Team.

The school, which was previously an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp, had been converted into a boarding school for children from displaced families. It operates under the education system of the National Unity Government (NUG) and provides classes from primary to high school levels.

On the same night, junta aircraft also bombed another school in Wammathu village, Mindat Township, though no casualties were reported.

Mindat town was captured by the Chin Brotherhood Alliance which includes the Chinland Defence Force of Mindat (CDF-Mindat) and its allied forces in December 2024. Although junta troops have withdrawn from the area, airstrikes continue to occur frequently.

Chin resistance leaders said the air attacks were intended to instil fear among civilians and create divisions within the resistance forces. Due to repeated air raids, the Interim Public Administration Team has urged residents to dig bomb shelters for their safety.

Mindat is one of 63 townships under the State of Emergency and Martial Law declared by the junta on 31 July. Four airstrikes have been reported in the township since August.

The junta has intensified air operations in recent weeks. On 6 October, during the Thadingyut Full Moon Day, a military airstrike targeted a candlelight protest in Bon To village, Chaung U Township, Sagaing Region, killing 27 people and injuring about 50, according to local public administration and defence forces.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE HITS MONASTERY SHELTER IN NATOGYI, KILLING ONE CIVILIAN AND INJURING TEN

A Myanmar military airstrike on a monastery sheltering displaced civilians in Makyikone village, Natogyi Township, has killed one woman and left at least ten others injured, according to the Natogyi Township People's Administration Team.

The strike occurred around 8:30 am on Sunday morning, targeting a forest monastery where villagers had sought refuge amid escalating military operations in the area.

"Because a junta column was advancing in that area, villagers avoided staying in the village and took temporary refuge in a monastery they thought would be safe. That monastery was bombed," said Ko Yangon, Human Rights Officer for the township's People's Administration Team, speaking to Mizzima.

The monastery building sustained significant damage. The deceased has been identified as 45-year-old Daw Kyin. Details of the injured are still being confirmed, Ko Yangon added.

"Fearing another air raid, the wounded were immediately relocated and sent for treatment. Some of the injured are children," he said.

Makyikone village is situated in the southern part of Natogyi Township. Local residents report that airstrikes have increased in frequency following the Myanmar military's recent advances from the Mahlaing-Taungtha area into Natogyi.

"Children and the elderly are constantly fleeing from one place to another. Their mental and physical health is deteriorating, and they are suffering greatly," Ko Yangon said.

The area is now home to a growing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom fled from conflict zones in Mahlaing Township.

Local sources say these civilians are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including food, shelter, and medical support.

As conflict continues to escalate in central Myanmar, community leaders and aid organizations warn of a deepening humanitarian crisis, with civilians bearing the brunt of airstrikes and ground offensives.

Photo: Supplied

TWO CIVILIANS KILLED IN MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON TNLA-HELD MONGNGAW, SHAN STATE

Two civilians were killed and at least two others injured in an airstrike launched by junta forces on Mongngaw Town, which is under the control of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), according to a TNLA report released on 8 October.

The attack occurred at 11:05 am, when two 250-pound bombs and four rockets were dropped from military aircraft over various locations in the town, located in northern Shan State.

The TNLA said the bombs targeted three areas: two 250-pound bombs were dropped in front of the police station in Manlon Ward, two rockets hit the town's market area, and two more landed in Talone Ward.

Daw Hla Ye, 50, and U Shwe Htone, 56, were killed by bomb shrapnel, while Ma Htwe Htwe Aung, 18, and U Tin Maung Aye, 50, sustained injuries. Additionally, eight homes were reported damaged in the strikes.

The previous day, 7 October, at around noon, two 250-pound bombs were dropped on Manhtone village

in Monglone Township. That attack killed 10 civilians, including one child, injured three others, and destroyed six houses.

In a statement, the TNLA urged civilians to remain constantly alert for military air raids and to follow air defence protocols to reduce the risk of casualties.

The TNLA accused the junta of deliberately targeting civilian populations, not only in Ta'ang areas but also in territories held by other ethnic armed organizations and local resistance groups.

On the full moon day of Thadingyut, 6 October, during a peaceful "Revolutionary Candle Procession" jointly held by revolutionary committees and local residents in Bon To village, Chaung U Township, the military reportedly carried out another airstrike. The attack resulted in nearly 30 civilian deaths, according to the TNLA.

The military junta has not responded to the allegations at the time of reporting.



THOUSANDS OF MYANMAR IDPS IN BANMAUK FACE FOOD CRISIS AMID CLASHES BETWEEN SNA AND RESISTANCE FORCES

Around 5,000 long-term internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Banmauk Township, Sagaing Region, are facing acute food shortages as fighting continues between the Shanni Nationalities Army (SNA) and resistance forces.

The displaced people are sheltering in areas controlled by the SNA in the western part of Banmauk as well as in southern areas held by resistance groups.

"The situation is especially hard for pregnant women and the elderly. Water for drinking and daily use is scarce, and food has become increasingly difficult to find," a local Katu man told Mizzima.

Locals reported that SNA troops have stationed heavy artillery on Pin Hinkar hill and are shelling nearby villages.

"Some people who tried to return home to retrieve their belongings were killed by artillery fire. Villagers

now dare not go back. Internet shops have also closed, cutting off communication," another resident said.

Due to the ongoing shelling, an estimated 5,000 residents from Set Taw, A-Lal Ywar, and Kan Ywar villages have fled to safer areas.

On 30 September, an artillery shell believed to have been fired by the SNA hit A-Lal Ywar village, killing a displaced Katu woman and seriously injuring four others.

According to the National Unity Government's Ministry of Defence (MOD) Military Region 1, allied forces launched an offensive on 15 September against Banmauk town, which was jointly controlled by the junta and the SNA, and captured it on 20 September.



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MYANMAR JUNTA MILITARY CONVOY AMBUSHED NEAR KHON TAING VILLAGE, MULTIPLE CASUALTIES REPORTED

A junta convoy traveling from Mindon Township to Aa Le Chaung police station was ambushed near Khon Taing village at around 8 am on 5 October, resulting in multiple military casualties, according to the United State of Burma Army (USBA).

The convoy, which included around 40 junta soldiers and police personnel, was reportedly moving on foot toward the Aa Le Chaung camp after abandoning their vehicles.

"The battle lasted around 15 minutes, and eyewitnesses reported military casualties, though the exact number remains unknown," said Thar Cho, head of the USBA press office.

The military column reportedly retreated toward Mindon town following the ambush. Soldiers looted several villages and detained local residents along the way, the USBA claims.

"They dragged young people along the way, arbitrarily arrested some, and stole food and valuables from residents' homes," Thar Cho said.

This is the second reported ambush in the region this week. On 3 October, guerrilla forces attacked two junta vehicles near the entrance of Pe Ma Khan village on the Thayet-Mindon road in Thayet Township.

The vehicles, carrying around 60 soldiers, were returning from a checkpoint at Kyauk Taing District Hospital in Mindon Township when the attack occurred, resulting in further casualties, according to the USBA.

The military has not yet released a statement regarding either incident.

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS 5 CHILDREN IN MON STATE

Five children have been killed and ten people injured by a Burmese military airstrike on Htee Hpa Doh Hta village, western Mon State at 10.10pm on 9 October, according to the Karen Peace Support Network in a press release 10 October.

The explosion from the airstrike also destroyed and damaged homes, killed livestock and left a deep crater in the ground.

The village is in an area controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU) but had no soldiers or military presence and no fighting was taking place nearby. The village has homes, a school, a health clinic and a monastery. The Burmese military deliberately targeted a civilian village. This is a violation of international law.

Medics from the Karen Health and Welfare Department of the KNU provided emergency medical assistance to those injured. Heavy rain prevented the immediate evacuation of those injured to hospitals.

The use of airstrikes against civilian villages and camps for internally displaced people is a deliberate strategy to maximise casualties by bombing at a time when families are all likely to be in their homes or shelters.

Htee Hpa Doh Hta village is located in the Htee Hpa Doh Hta tract of Belin township, Doo Tha Htu district.

Note: As part of their Burmanisation policies Burmese authorities tried to erase local Karen names and call Doo Tha Htu district Thaton district in Burmese.

The names of the children are:

Saw Tun Tun Min, a boy, age 6

Saw Lin Htet, a boy, age 7

Naw Meh Kala Paw, a girl, age 9

Naw Mu Hsi His, a girl, age 10

Naw Ma Po Lo a girl, age 12

The Burmese military have been escalating airstrikes and military offensives across KNU controlled areas in recent weeks, in line with a nationwide escalation of attacks and offensives ahead of sham elections the Burmese military are planning at the end of December.

"The international community is failing to impose sanctions to limit the ability of the Burmese military to carry out airstrikes and is now cutting aid to those forced to flee their homes because of airstrikes," said Naw Wahku Shee, Director of Karen Peace Support Network. "The Burmese military could not survive without international support and more must be done to cut that support."

HRW SLAMS MYANMAR JUNTA'S INCREASED USE OF PARAMOTOR BOMBING ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS

Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a statement on 9 October condemning the Myanmar junta's growing use of paramotors in bombing attacks on civilians. The human rights group calls on the international community to step up sanctions on the military junta that target its revenue and ability to import aviation fuel.

The text of the statement by HRW Asia Division Researcher Shayne Bauchner is as follows.

On Monday evening, Myanmar military paramotors, or motorized paragliders, dropped munitions on a candlelit Buddhist festival in Sagaing Region, killing at least 21 people, including three children as young as 2. Hundreds of villagers had gathered in a primary school compound to celebrate the Thadingyut holiday and demonstrate against military abuses in the embattled region.

Junta airstrikes have surged this year, including unlawful attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure—schools, hospitals, religious sites, and displacement camps—killing and wounding thousands. Some of these strikes appear to be deliberate attacks on civilians intended as a form of collective punishment in areas that support opposition armed groups.

The laws of war prohibit attacks that do not or cannot discriminate between civilians and combatants.

The junta's increasing use of armed paramotors—from which pilots drop 120mm mortar rounds “without any capacity for precision targeting,” according to the United Nations—has created grave new threats to civilians. More than 135 paramotor attacks have been reported since December 2024.

Monday's attack in Sagaing's Chaung-U township marks the deadliest paramotor strike to date. An opposition alert that paramotors had left the nearby Northwestern Regional Military Command came less than 10 minutes before the strike, leaving little time for people to seek cover. “As of this morning, we were still collecting body parts from the ground,” a witness told AFP the day after the attack.

More than 40 people were reportedly injured, including at least 20 children, many severely. The junta's blockade on humanitarian aid has impeded access to desperately needed medicine and blood transfusions for the wounded.

Aid blockages sustain the military's longstanding “four cuts” strategy—designed to isolate and terrorize civilians—while contravening the December 2022 UN Security Council resolution and Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) 2021 five-point consensus. At the ASEAN summit starting October 26, member states should seek ways to pressure the junta to allow civilians unfettered access to aid in contested areas.

To cut off Myanmar's military from the revenue funding its atrocities, governments should expand and fully enforce sanctions as well as coordinate a ban on the sale of aviation fuel. Nearly five years since the February 2021 coup, the junta has yet to face genuine consequences for its ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity. Until it does, unlawful attacks against civilians can be expected to continue.



MYANMAR ENVOY URGES GLOBAL SUPPORT FOR MYANMAR'S PEOPLE AMID ONGOING CRISIS

On 8 October, Myanmar's Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun urged the international community at the UN to support Myanmar amidst crises following the 2021 military coup and called for renewed commitment to the Doha Programme of Action.

The Myanmar envoy's statement continues below.

In his report, the SG [Secretary General] highlighted that persistent conflicts in some LDCs, geopolitical tensions, rising external public debt and the lack of fulfilment of ODA commitments are likely to undermine the long-term growth prospects and economic stability of LDCs.

Against this backdrop, Myanmar calls for renewed urgency in implementing the Doha Programme of Action and its six key focus areas. Effective implementation of the DPoA will contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Mr. Chair,

Ongoing conflicts in several LDCs are also undermining governance, peacebuilding and the implementation of the DPoA. As of 2024, a total of 24 LDCs were classified as fragile and conflict -affected, including my own, Myanmar.

Although Myanmar met all three criteria to graduate from the LDC status for the first time as per the 2018 triennial review by the CDP, our graduation process has been disrupted by the illegal military coup.

The 2024 triennial review has, again, deferred a decision on Myanmar due to concerns about the sustainability of development progress following the coup. Evidence suggests that the progress achieved in the years prior to the military coup has been reversed and that socioeconomic conditions are likely to continue to deteriorate.

The recent UNDP report showed that one in four youth of Myanmar is not employed and three in four youth, aged 18-24, are out of school or training due to economic necessity, access barriers and instability.

In addition, nearly half of the population is living below the national poverty line.

3.6 million people are internally displaced, and almost 22 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Chair,

The situation in Myanmar is not just a humanitarian and human rights crisis; it is a crisis of wasted potential of a generation and their future, which will threaten our long-term development and graduation prospects.

The military junta's planned sham, scam election will plunge the country into more violence, poverty and instability and thereby prolong our current development setbacks.

Therefore, it is critical that the some Member States should reassess their actions over this deceitful process for sake of the future of the Myanmar people.

The people of Myanmar are determined to stop it by any means necessary.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, Myanmar reaffirms our commitment to LDC graduation despite our current challenges.

I appeal to the international community to support the people of Myanmar and our resolution to end the military dictatorship and build a federal democratic union for peace and prosperity.



MYANMAR'S NUG CALLS FOR ASEAN STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND REJECTION OF JUNTA'S SHAM ELECTIONS

The National Unity Government (NUG) together with NGOs has called on Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) stakeholders to address the current crisis in Myanmar and the approaching junta elections.

The following is their 11 October press statement:

ASEAN Stakeholder Engagement on Myanmar: Addressing the Five-Point Consensus, Upholding Democracy and Rejecting the Military's Sham Elections

Throughout Malaysia's 2025 ASEAN Chairmanship, a series of Stakeholder Engagement Meetings on Myanmar (SEMs) were convened by the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar, bringing together key stakeholders - including representatives from the National Unity Government (NUG), the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), Ethnic Resistance Organisations (EROs), Consultative Councils, Federal Units and various other representative bodies.

These engagements have served as an inclusive platform to discuss the ongoing crisis in Myanmar, develop strategies and recommendations on the effective implementation of ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus including on cessation of violence, humanitarian assistance, and inclusive political dialogue, and to address the junta's planned sham elections.

Stakeholders at the SEMs reiterated grave concern

over the deteriorating situation in Myanmar since the military coup of February 2021 and reaffirmed their shared commitment to restoring democracy and upholding human rights. While acknowledging ASEAN's adoption of the Five-Point Consensus, stakeholders expressed alarm over its limited implementation amid the military's continued violence against civilians and blatant disregard for democratic norms including the principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter.

Key outcomes of the meeting included:

Rejection of the Military's Sham Elections - Stakeholders unanimously condemned the junta's planned elections as a façade designed to entrench military rule under the guise of democratic reform. These elections are also in direct defiance of ASEAN Five-Point Consensus, which prioritizes cessation of violence, inclusive political dialogue, and unhindered humanitarian assistance to all in need. Proceeding with unilateral elections amid ongoing violence, denial of aid, and exclusion of key stakeholders is illegitimate and a direct assault on ASEAN's mandate and credibility. Stakeholders stand united in rejecting the junta's attempts to manipulate ASEAN to legitimize its own authority and road-map even while remaining in blatant non-compliance with the Five-Point Consensus.

Unity Among the Revolutionary Forces - The meeting underscored the importance of solidarity among all forces in advancing a shared vision for a federal democratic Myanmar.

Call for Decisive ASEAN Action - Stakeholders urged ASEAN to translate the Five-Point Consensus into tangible, time-bound measures that can meaningfully end violence, protect civilians, advance inclusive political dialogue and bring peace and stability to Myanmar.

Humanitarian Imperative - Stakeholders called for immediate and sustained humanitarian support, emphasizing the importance of cross-border delivery mechanisms and partnerships with local and community-based organizations to ensure aid reaches those most in need - particularly in conflict zones.

Inclusive Political Dialogue - The meetings reaffirmed that durable peace can only emerge from an inclusive political process involving all legitimate stakeholders - including the NUG, NUCC, EROs, and various representatives entities committed to six political objectives of federal democracy and system change. ASEAN's engagement efforts must reflect this inclusivity to achieve sustainable peace through a meaningful and participatory approach.

Regional Stability - Stakeholders highlighted that

the military junta's attempted coup and indiscriminate attacks on civilians have caused Myanmar's crisis with deep regional implications, threatening cross-border security, migration stability, and economic integrity. A strong and unified ASEAN response is essential to prevent further deterioration of Southeast Asia's collective peace and credibility.

In closing, stakeholders expressed deep appreciation to Malaysia for its leadership as ASEAN Chair and to the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar, HE Tan Sri Othman Hashim, for advancing an inclusive, principled approach to resolving the Myanmar crisis.

The meeting concluded with a clear message: There is no path forward that legitimizes military rule. Any political or humanitarian framework must be rooted in the will and aspirations of the Myanmar people for peace, justice, democracy, and a federal union that guarantees equality for all.

We call upon the ASEAN Chair and all ASEAN Member States to uphold the integrity of the Five-Point Consensus and to reject any process that violates its core principles. ASEAN's leadership and credibility depend on standing firmly with the people of Myanmar — not with those who have defied international norms, committed atrocities, and obstructed humanitarian aid.

We reaffirm our commitment to work constructively with ASEAN, the United Nations, and international partners to advance a genuine political transition rooted in justice, inclusion, and federal democracy. Only through a process that ends violence, ensures humanitarian access, and includes all communities in a genuine political dialogue can Myanmar move towards lasting peace and stability and become a responsible member of the ASEAN family.

Call for action

Reject and refuse recognition of any elections organized by the military junta, as such elections have no legitimacy under the Five-Point Consensus or international norms.

Take immediate measures to protect civilians from violence, including by halting aerial and artillery attacks, strengthening monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and supporting local and cross-border humanitarian protection networks.

End the silence on the junta's ongoing atrocities, including systematic airstrikes, mass killings, and attacks on civilian populations and humanitarian workers, which constitute serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Demand the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, including President Win Myint, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, journalists, activists, and community leaders unlawfully detained.

Hold the junta accountable for its continued non-compliance and defiance of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus, through diplomatic measures, suspension from ASEAN meetings, and coordinated international actions that reinforce compliance and accountability.

We hope that Malaysia, as ASEAN Chair in 2025, will continue to lead decisively in reaffirming ASEAN's principles and ensuring that the region's commitment to peace, justice, and the rule of law is not compromised. Only through principled and collective action can ASEAN and the international community help end the violence against Myanmar's civilians and open the path toward a peaceful, inclusive, and federal democratic future.

For further inquiries; please contact HE Zin Mar Aung (zinmaraung@mofa.nugmyanmar.org)

Signatories:

All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF)

Anti-Junta Forces Coordination Committee - Mandalay

Chin National Front (CNF)

Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH)

Critical Movement

Federation of Sagaing Forum

Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team (KPICT)

Karen National Union (KNU)

Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)/The Interim Executive Council of Karenni State (IEC)

Magway Region Revolutionary Groups' Network

Mandalay Region Hluttaw

Mon State Federal Council (MSFC)

Muslim of Myanmar Multi-Ethnic Consultative Committee (MMMCC)

National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC)

National Unity Government (NUG)

New Mon State Party (Anti-military Dictatorship) NMSP(AD)

Pa-O National Federal Council (PNFC)

Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO)

Rohingya Consultative Council - Interim (RCC)



SAGAING CHIEF MINISTER DR. MYINT NAING TRANSFERRED TO OBO PRISON AMID HEALTH CONCERNS

Dr. Myint Naing, the detained Chief Minister of Sagaing Region and a senior member of the National League for Democracy (NLD) Central Executive Committee, was transferred to Mandalay's Obo Prison on the afternoon of 3 October, a source confirmed to Mizzima.

The transfer was revealed on 7 October, following inquiries made while Dr. Myint Naing was undergoing treatment at Mandalay General Hospital for a gastrointestinal illness. He had been hospitalized since 25 September.

"Dr. Myint Naing was moved to Mandalay's Obo Prison on the afternoon of 3 October. I learned that he is now in the prison hospital, but I cannot confirm details for certain," said a source familiar with the matter.

Concerns over the 71-year-old's health continue to grow. He has lived with a pacemaker for over 11 years, and those close to him say his heart condition remains fragile, leaving him easily fatigued.

"I am a bit worried because he had a heart attack," another source said, suggesting his condition may have worsened. Family members fear for his life, citing the serious risks posed by his long-standing heart condition and the stress of detention.

Dr. Myint Naing was previously transferred from Monywa Prison to Myingyan Prison on 2 August 2022. He is currently serving a 25-year prison sentence handed down by the military junta. The charges include 10 counts, among them seven for corruption.

According to figures released by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) on 7 October, since the military coup on 1 February 2021, a total of 29,788 individuals have been arrested. Of these, 22,488 remain in detention, and 11,158 have been sentenced to prison.

Dr. Myint Naing is among several high-profile NLD leaders facing long prison terms following the military's seizure of power.



POLITICAL PRISONER DIES IN DAWEI PRISON DUE TO LACK OF MEDICAL CARE

Ko Aung Ko Oo, a political prisoner held in Dawei Prison, Tanintharyi Region, died on 3 October from health complications, according to a statement by the Political Prisoners Network–Myanmar (PPNM).

The 48-year-old activist, who played a leading role in peaceful anti-coup protests in early 2021, was serving an eight-year sentence under Section 505-A of the Penal Code at the time of his death.

He was arrested by military police at his home in Shinmokeetee village on 14 May 2021, charged shortly afterward, and later transferred to Dawei Prison.

PPNM stated that Ko Aung Ko Oo had been suffering from chronic health problems, including heart

disease, diabetes, and kidney disease, and had been receiving regular medical treatment while in detention.

“He had been receiving frequent medical care since his imprisonment in Dawei Prison due to a pre-existing condition, but died as a result of inadequate medical treatment,” the network said.

PPNM expressed condolences to his family and said Ko Aung Ko Oo’s death highlighted the dire conditions and lack of medical access faced by political prisoners across the country. The group renewed its call for the immediate release of all unjustly detained individuals and an end to the military dictatorship.

Photo: Mizzima

PPP CHAIRPERSON THET THET KHINE SAYS AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND PRESIDENT WIN MYINT ARE NOT POLITICAL PRISONERS

Chairperson of the People's Pioneer Party (PPP), Thet Thet Khine, said during a press conference in Yangon on 8 October that State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint, both detained since the 2021 military coup, should not be regarded as political prisoners.

When asked whether her party would call for the release of political prisoners such as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Win Myint, and U Win Htein if it came to power, Thet Thet Khine replied, "The international community calls them political prisoners, but they are not. They were charged under corruption laws and, after investigation, found guilty and sentenced accordingly."

She alleged that during the National League for Democracy (NLD) administration, funds intended for natural disaster relief were misused, and expenditures did not align with approved purposes. She also accused Daw Aung San Suu Kyi of purchasing a helicopter for personal use under the guise of disaster management.

"During the NLD government, the country received a significant amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA), along with technical support," she said. "But when those funds arrived, the amounts were so large that proper management became difficult. Later, we found that some were used in ways that violated financial regulations, and those responsible had to face consequences."

Thet Thet Khine, who previously served as an NLD lawmaker representing Dagon Township after the 2015 election, was suspended from party duties in 2018 for allegedly violating party rules and policies. She resigned from the NLD in 2019 and founded the People's Pioneer Party (PPP).

Ahead of the 2020 general election, she was among 34 political party leaders who met with Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, reportedly offering to mediate in the event of an election dispute. Although the PPP contested the 2020 election, it failed to win any seats.

Following the 2021 military takeover, Thet Thet Khine was appointed Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and later served concurrently as Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism until January 2025.

Her party is now preparing to contest the upcoming election to be held by the Military Commission's election, with plans to field more than 670 candidates across the country.

Since the coup, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been convicted on 19 charges and sentenced to a total of 27 years in prison. She remains in detention without access to the public or her family. President U Win Myint has also been convicted on eight charges and sentenced to 10 years in prison.



TWO MURDER CASES IN YANGON SPARK PUBLIC ALARM AS TEENAGE SUSPECTS ARRESTED

The Myanmar junta's police force announced on 8 October that several teenage suspects have been arrested in connection with two gruesome murder cases that occurred in Yangon earlier this month.

The incidents include the killing of a taxi driver in Thanlyin Township and the murder and dismemberment of a woman in a hotel room in Pabedan Township. According to the police, the suspects are two 17-year-old males, one 18-year-old male, and one 18-year-old female.

Murder of taxi driver in Thanlyin Township

On the evening of 5 October, a taxi driver was stabbed to death in Thanlyin Township. Police arrested two 17-year-old youths suspected of the crime.

According to the police report, the suspects admitted to killing the driver following an argument over the fare after returning from the Kyaikkhauk Pagoda festival. The victim was found with 31 stab wounds; his body dumped at a roadside garbage site.

Murder and dismemberment in Pabedan Township

In a separate incident, a 23-year-old woman was murdered and dismembered in Room 502 of the 32nd Beauty Land Hotel in Pabedan Township in the early hours of 6 October. Police arrested an 18-year-old man as the main suspect and an 18-year-old woman as an

accomplice who helped clean the crime scene and dispose of the remains.

According to police statements, the male suspect had contacted the victim through a Telegram channel offering pay-for-sex services. He allegedly confessed to killing the woman using two steel knives and mutilating her body in a manner resembling scenes from violent foreign dramas he had frequently watched.

After killing in this manner, the perpetrator called his girlfriend to the hotel, cleaned up the bloodstains in the room, and disposed of the body, as described in the police records.

"What I heard is that the organs were found in a garbage dump on Maung Htaw Lay Street. The girl's flesh was filleted from the neck to lower body like slicing a fish with a knife, opening the chest and, cutting the waist, then folding the body and packing it like luggage. It was done intentionally and meticulously, it's terrifying," said a resident of Pabedan.

The female victim was only 23 years old and had come from Nat Ta Lin Township in Bago Region to work in Yangon.

Both cases have been filed under Section 302 of the Penal Code for culpable homicide. Police said further legal action will be taken.

Local concern

Local residents expressed alarm over the involvement of teenagers in such violent crimes. "It's worrying that children are committing acts even adults would hesitate to do. These are signs of a dangerous social trend," said a man from Sanchaung Township.

Some young people of school age are no longer attending school after the COVID period and due to the events of the coup. They are living their lives outside of the classroom. This could lead to more frequent incidents like this due to economic hardships and the negative impacts of social media.

"It's sadly not unexpected that young people raised in such a troubled time and flawed system are turning to crime. The real responsibility lies with the adults who created these conditions. These youths are victims of a broken era, driven to this point by the failures of the very adults who should have protected them," said a young resident of Pabedan.

Since the military coup, incidents of robbery, stabbings, and murders have reportedly increased across the country, leaving Yangon residents fearful for their safety.



Photo: AFP

UN CONFERENCE CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION TO PROTECT ROHINGYA AND MINORITIES IN MYANMAR

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P) released its latest Atrocity Alert on 9 October, highlighting urgent global crises, including the worsening situation in Myanmar.

The text of the alert is as follows.

On 30 September the UN General Assembly held a High-Level Conference on the Situation of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar. During the conference, member states and representatives of the UN and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations pressed for immediate measures to end the commission of atrocities against the Rohingya in Myanmar and guarantee accountability. In his address, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, warned that for Rohingya still remaining in Myanmar following the genocide in 2017, the situation has only worsened. "Discrimination, the burning of their villages, the exclusion from work and services, the continuous denial of their very identity. The Rohingyas live with the threat of arbitrary arrest and detention, with restricted access to healthcare and education. They cannot move freely. They are subjected to forced labor and forced recruitment. Their lives are defined everyday by racism and fear."

While the conference refocused international attention, it also exposed persistent inertia that has defined international engagement on Myanmar. Wai Wai Nu, Founder and Executive Director of the Women's Peace Network, said to the conference participants, "You already have the evidence. You already have the power. What is missing is the political will. The people of Myanmar demand accountability, an end to impunity, and an end to oppression. Let this conference be a historic turning point- the end of missed opportunities, and the beginning of lasting solutions."

Despite several states making new financial

pledges to the over 900,000 Rohingya in refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh, gaps remain in the provision of lifesaving aid. Voluntary repatriation remains a central focus of discussions on Rohingya refugees, yet the current situation in Rakhine State, and across Myanmar, fails to provide the necessary security guarantees. The absence of accountability and lack of willingness to allow the Rohingya equal participation and protection under the law also inhibits the repatriation process, as the military leaders in charge of orchestrating the genocide in 2017, namely General Min Aung Hlaing, remain in control of the country today.

The 2021 military coup in Myanmar has compounded this violence and deepened fragmentation across the country, entrenching the junta's control over key institutions. Since the coup, at least 7,328 people have been killed while 3.3 million are internally displaced and 21 million remain in need of aid. The junta has announced plans for elections to be held beginning in December despite its lack of control over a majority of the country. The junta has already ruled out voting in 121 constituencies due to security concerns, excluding many members of minority populations from the vote.

While last week's conference is a welcome step, timely action is necessary to utilize momentum and make real progress for the Rohingya and other minority populations. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect Myanmar expert, Sarah Hunter, said, "Member states must commit to fully funding response plans for Rohingya refugees, including through providing opportunities to regain livelihoods, access to education and other opportunities. Member states must also continue isolating the junta, especially ahead of elections, to ensure the legitimacy sought by the junta is not won."



ARE WE INTERPRETING THE ARAKAN CIVIL SOCIETY OPEN LETTER TO THE UN RIGHT?

JAMES SHWE

The recent open letter from Arakanese civil society to the United Nations has generated a significant response across the region and beyond. While some analysis has characterized the letter as a demand for outright independence, a close and careful review of its content and the public statements of General Tun Myat Naing (ULA/AA) provide strong evidence to the contrary.

Clarifying the Intent of the Open Letter

Evidence from the letter indicates that the primary request is for the United Nations and international partners to recognize the ULA/AA as the responsible authority for humanitarian logistics and civil administration within Arakan State. The core motivation expressed is to increase the efficacy and reach of humanitarian aid and to protect civilians by working through local accountable channels. Nowhere in the letter is there an explicit call for secession or a declaration of independence. The language used is consistent with a pragmatic approach to immediate governance needs, emphasizing practical partnership rather than fundamental separation from Myanmar.

Alignment with ULA/AA Leadership

Public pronouncements from General Tun Myat Naing corroborate this approach. He and the ULA/AA leadership have repeatedly affirmed

their openness to negotiated models for federal or confederal arrangements in a future Myanmar. Their messaging has consistently highlighted the need for local empowerment and inclusive administration, in parallel with the goal of a united, democratic country. The policies advanced by the leadership are focused on effective, rights-based local governance rather than unilateral moves toward statehood.

Addressing Misinterpretation

Describing the civil society letter as a bid for independence is not supported by the clear evidence in its text or in the subsequent communication from Arakanese leaders. It is important for analysts and the international community to distinguish between the documented appeals for local humanitarian partnership and unsupported assumptions of political breakaway. Misinterpretations may arise if references to “recognition” or “de facto authority” are improperly conflated with aspirations for sovereignty, but the documented context is one of practical response to crisis.

Constructive Path Forward

By clearly communicating the documented intent of the letter, the resistance movement can reinforce its credibility and foster more effective relationships with both local stakeholders and international allies. Evidence-based joint statements that reaffirm commitment to federal negotiation and inclusive governance, alongside support for urgent humanitarian recognition, will help align public understanding with documented goals. This approach enables international partners to address real needs on the ground while remaining assured of the movement’s commitment to unity and democratic transition.

Conclusion

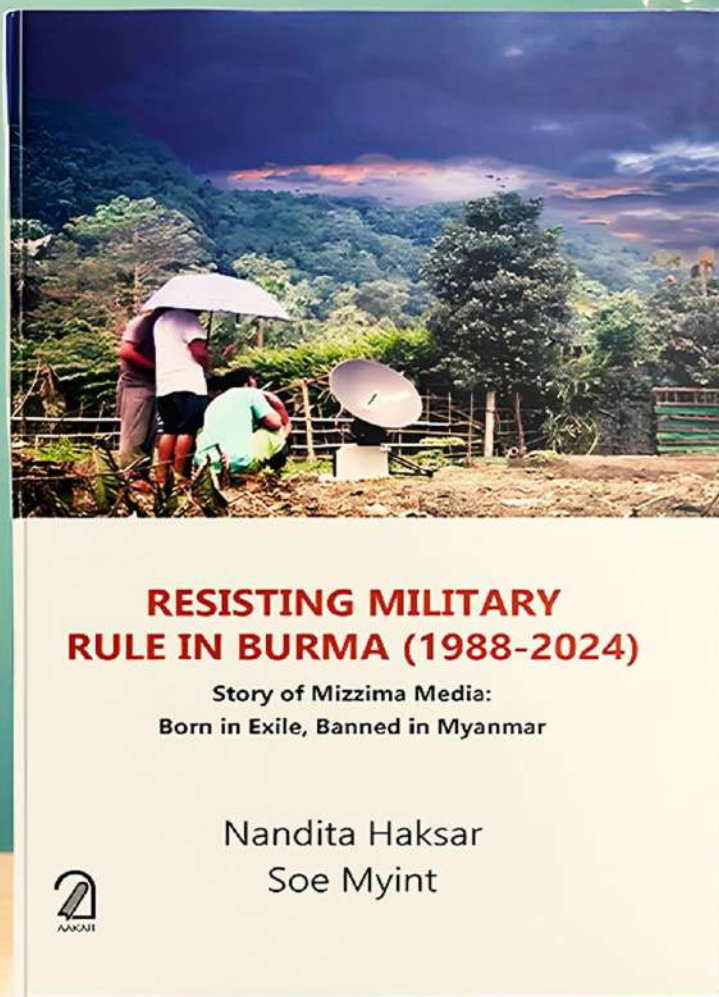
A careful, evidence-based reading of both the Arakanese open letter and the leadership’s statements reveals a pragmatic approach directed at humanitarian access and local administration—not a unilateral declaration of independence. Centering the debate on the documented facts builds mutual understanding, supports more effective aid delivery, and strengthens the collective pursuit of a federal, democratic country.

The views expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of Mizzima Media.

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint



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A flash protest in Dhaka.
Photo: AFP

BANNED BANGLADESH PARTY TURNS TO FLASH PROTESTS AHEAD OF POLLS

Once Bangladesh's largest political party, the Awami League has been outlawed since its leader Sheikh Hasina was overthrown in a mass uprising last year.

Now, its supporters -- encouraged by Hasina's social media calls to "resist" -- are staging flash mob protests defying the ban as the country prepares for elections from which the party is barred.

In the capital Dhaka, 45-year-old cleaner Mohammad Kashem described witnessing around 25 Awami League loyalists being chased, beaten and detained by police at one such rally.

"It's happening all over Dhaka," Kashem told AFP, saying videos of such spontaneous demonstrations appear constantly on social media.

"We see it every day on Facebook."

The elections, expected in February 2026, will be the first since Hasina fled into exile in India as crowds stormed her palace, ending her 15-year rule.

She has since defied court orders to attend her ongoing trial on charges amounting to crimes against humanity for allegedly ordering a deadly crackdown during the revolt.

Her party and its supporters have since been pushed underground.

More than 800 have been arrested in connection with the flash mobs, officials say, which have rattled the interim government of Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus as he oversees the South Asian nation of 170 million until the polls.

'Abandoned'

Still, they protest.

Some rallies consist of only a handful of young men. Others draw more than 100, chanting slogans.

"Sheikh Hasina is coming!" they shout, waving small placards or unfurling banners. "Bangladesh is smiling!"

They gather for a few minutes before vanishing into the crowds.

Sometimes, multiple flash protests erupt simultaneously in different parts of Dhaka. On one day, police arrested 244 people, authorities said.

The risks are high. In the rally Kashem witnessed, several protesters were badly beaten.

"Stupid boys," Kashem said. "The heavyweight leaders abandoned them... yet they're risking their lives."

The protests have unnerved Yunus's government.

"The fascists have turned reckless, as they can see that the country is heading towards an election and the trial process (of Hasina) is progressing fast," Yunus's press secretary Shafiquel Alam told reporters last month.

"The government has decided to strengthen the monitoring of flash processions and other illegal gatherings."

Hasina remains vocal on social media, issuing broadsides against Yunus and urging loyalists to "resist".

Bangladeshi newspapers, quoting a senior party leader in hiding, reported at least 20 flash processions in the past month.

Dhaka police spokesman Md Talebur Rahman could not confirm the number of protests, but said "more than 800 people" had been arrested in connection with them.

Political analyst Zahed Ur Rahman, a member of the government's electoral reform commission, said Hasina was risking protesters' safety to maintain relevance.

"She is trying to earn sympathy by widely sharing the beatings, chases, dispersals and arrests of her party members," Zahed told AFP.

'Proper action'

Human Rights Watch has condemned the "draconian" ban on the Awami League.

"The interim government should not be engaging in the same partisan behaviour that Bangladeshis had to endure under Sheikh Hasina, whether it is stuffing the prisons with political opponents or shutting down peaceful dissent," HRW's Meenakshi Ganguly said.

But analysts say the protests could complicate election preparations.

Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam said "different interest groups" were trying to derail the election, including the "defeated axis".

Tajul Islam, chief prosecutor in Hasina's trial in absentia, said that a judicial probe was underway into the Awami League.

"Once the investigation report is ready, proper action will be taken," Islam said.

The Awami League remains defiant.

Senior leader Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, whose current whereabouts are unclear, insists that protesters were taking to the streets out of "love" for Hasina.

He told AFP that he revelled in the trouble they have caused.

"Have you noticed how these activities have robbed the government of sleep?"

AFP



US President Donald Trump.
Photo: AFP

MAJOR WIN FOR TRUMP ON GAZA, BUT WILL IT STAND TEST OF TIME?

US President Donald Trump has undeniably scored a diplomatic victory by helping to broker a truce for Gaza, but the path to the lasting peace he says he wants for the Middle East is littered with obstacles.

And it remains to be seen whether the 79-year-old Trump -- who is not exactly known for his attention to the fine print -- will devote the same level of energy to the conflict over the long term, once his victory lap in the region is over next week.

"Any agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, but especially one indirectly brokered between Israel and Hamas is an extraordinary achievement," Aaron David Miller, who worked for multiple US administrations of both parties, told AFP.

"Trump decided to do something that no American president... of either party has ever done, which is to pressure and squeeze an Israeli prime minister on an issue that that prime minister considered vital to his politics," said Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

But Miller, who has participated in Middle East peace talks over the years, warned of the "universe of complexity and detail" that remains to be hashed out with respect to the implementation of phase two of the deal.

The Israeli army said its troops had ceased fire at 0900 GMT Friday in the Gaza Strip, in anticipation of the release of all Israeli hostages, dead and alive, in the subsequent 72 hours, in compliance with the deal it reached with Palestinian armed group Hamas.

Trump has said he expects to head to the Middle East on Sunday, with stops in Egypt, where the talks took place, and Israel.

Art of the deal?

Given that every US president over the past 20 years has been unsuccessful in resolving crises between Israel and the Palestinians, Trump's accomplishment is already remarkable.

But the Republican billionaire president has

broader aspirations -- to revive the Abraham Accords reached during his first White House term, under which the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco offered Israel diplomatic recognition.

Trump has brought his son-in-law Jared Kushner, one of the architects of those accords, back into the administration to work with special envoy Steve Witkoff on the Gaza negotiations.

Officials and foreign policy observers agree that Trump deftly used a mix of carrot and stick -- publicly and privately, and especially with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu -- to get the deal done.

He also leveraged his strong ties with Arab and Muslim leaders including Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

For Miller, Trump clearly played a "decisive" role.

But while the agreement's first phase appears to be on track, much remains undefined, including how -- and if -- Hamas will agree to disarm after two years of devastating conflict in the Palestinian territory, following its October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

"A ceasefire is not yet a lasting peace," French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said Thursday, after meeting with European and Arab ministers on how to help the Palestinians in the post-conflict period.

Steven Cook, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote: "Whether this leads to an end to the war remains an open question."

Huge challenges

Cook says the challenge now is to fully implement Trump's 20-point plan, which calls for Hamas to

surrender its weapons, the creation of an international stabilization force and new governing structures for Gaza that will not include the Palestinian militant group.

Trump insisted Thursday that "there will be disarming" by Hamas and "pullbacks" by Israeli forces.

Then on Friday, he added: "I think there is consensus on most of it, and some of the details, like anything else, will be worked out."

But his administration will need to work hard to finalize the deal, and ensure that Arab countries in the region are invested in helping rebuild a devastated Gaza.

A team of 200 US military personnel will "oversee" the Gaza truce, senior US officials said Thursday.

Miller said there are "operational" holes in the plan as it stands, including "no detailed planning for either how to decommission and/or demilitarize Gaza, even if you had Hamas's assent, which you don't."

The plan also calls for the creation of a so-called "Board of Peace," a transitional body to be chaired by Trump himself -- a proposal Hamas rejected on Thursday.

"Despite coming to office eager to shed America's Middle East commitments, Trump just took on a huge one: responsibility for a peace plan that will forever bear his name," wrote Robert Satloff, executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

AFP



DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR

During his military indoctrination, Kyaw Kyaw recalls, an officer told his class how to avoid a court martial while operating against ethnic armed groups in conflict zones. He advised the recruits to always carry batteries in case they killed a civilian, so they could slip them into the victim's pockets and claim he or she was planting landmines.

"And then you can just get off the hook from charges of murder and killing of a civilian," Kyaw Kyaw says. "They are teaching that kind of thing, like it's a smart or right thing to do! Really that is just one small example, like their ideologies are so wrong, against their religion, against the ethnic groups, and everything."

It would be years later, one month after the coup, when Captain Kyaw Kyaw defected from the military in protest at the seizure of power from the elected democratic government. He took with him critical insights into an organization that is dysfunctional, and in some ways delusional, yet maintains key levers of power in a society shattered by conflict.

His personal journey from enlistee, to officer and military doctor, and then to defector has traversed nearly 20 years, juxtaposed to an institution that in some ways

seems stuck in time. After graduating high school, Kyaw Kyaw joined the military in 2006 for a mix of reasons. "Back then, military propaganda was a bit strong across the country for young people like us. I partly believed that I could do good for the people while serving," he says. Another reason was to further his education, given the expense of civilian medical school. Eventually he made the rank of captain as a military pediatrician serving the families of soldiers.

Disillusionment with the public service promise came long before the coup, in the first or second year of his enrolment in the military medical academy. There was not much information available on the military's tactics, neither about the history of the 1988 uprising of protests and nationwide strikes, nor the bloody crackdown that followed. During the 2007 Saffron Revolution, however, Kyaw Kyaw was already enrolled at the medical academy and in Yangon, witnessing first-hand the brutality against monks and civilians by an institution that was supposed to be protecting them.

In his progressing career, he continued to think critically about what he was being taught. "When they were teaching some kind of military tactic, military indoctrination, and their ideology, the more I learned about their ways of doing things, I realized that they were in the wrong place all along the history." After he graduated, he attended a six-month training in Karen State. He remembers asking commanders about the danger of an attack, with the reply deepening his disgust. "They don't dare to attack us, because we have all the artillery aimed at their villages. It doesn't matter who attacked us, [the soldiers] would just blindly shoot artillery everywhere and there will be a lot of fatalities among the civilians."

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more or listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/9/30/episode-407-delusions-of-grandeur>



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR AND THAILAND DISCUSS EXPANSION OF OFFSHORE ENERGY COOPERATION

The Myanmar junta's Union Minister for Energy U Ko Ko Lwin met on 10 October with Mr. Montri Rawanchaikul, Chief Executive Officer of Thailand's PTTEP International Limited, to review ongoing joint offshore energy projects and explore new areas of cooperation, according to the junta-run Global New Light of Myanmar (GNLM).

During talks at the Ministry of Energy's guest hall in Naypyidaw, Mr. Rawanchaikul briefed the minister on PTTEP's plans to drill new wells in the Yadana and Zawtika gas fields to boost output. Output from both fields has reportedly declined after more than 20 years of operations at the Yadana and 11 years at Zawtika. The PTTEP CEO went on to outline efforts to accelerate agreements for new offshore developments.

Minister Ko Ko Lwin urged the company to begin gas production from new wells at the Zawtika Project in early 2026 and to target first gas from the planned Aung Thitsa Offshore Project by 2028. The Aung Thitsa

project is expected to supply natural gas for domestic electricity generation in Myanmar. The minister also reaffirmed the government's commitment to fast-tracking required agreements.

The GNLM reported that the junta minister further highlighted new investment opportunities in Myanmar's offshore sector, offering "robust guarantees", and invited PTTEP to participate in liquefied natural gas import, storage, and distribution projects through Kanpauk in Taninthayi Region, aimed at serving both Myanmar and Thai markets.

Senior officials from the Ministry of Energy and representatives from PTTEP also attended the meeting, which the junta's media outlet claims underscored the growing energy partnership between Myanmar and Thailand.



Photo: AFP

SOCIAL MEDIA EXPLODED LAST WEEK OVER THADINGYUT FESTIVAL ATTACK IN SAGAING

Social media reactions to a hideous attack by the Myanmar junta last week were immediate and intense.

Myanmar's military bombed a Buddhist festival gathering in Chaung-U township, Sagaing, killing at least 24 people, including children, and injuring over 50. The attack happened at night during a religious ceremony marking the end of Buddhist Lent, inside a primary school.

Myanmar's junta has since acknowledged the bombing, but blamed resistance forces, accusing them of using civilians as "human shields," a claim witnesses and local groups strongly reject.

Rights monitors and observers condemned the attack, calling the use of airborne munitions in civilian areas unacceptable.

Many social media users shared images and videos from the scene, with outrage over targeting worshippers, festival participants, and children.

The junta's use of low-cost paragliders for bomb drops indicates a troubling shift in tactics, targeting civilians under the cover of darkness. This raises concerns that no social or religious space is safe from the conflict.

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Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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