

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



## A QUIET VICTORY

Reading Between the Lines of the  
ASEAN Statement

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



# DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

# JUNTA RATCHETS UP THEIR GAME

The Myanmar junta is playing a game. Their planned elections to be held in December 2025 and January 2026 is an exercise in optics – not a genuine democratic transition, as so many local and international critics point out. With the regime still reeling from its 2021 coup and locked in a protracted civil war in which it now controls only roughly half of the country's 330 townships, if that, the planned vote is being orchestrated as a way to thin the veneer of authoritarianism with a veneer of "legitimacy". Yet a new key to their strategy is the invitation to international media and foreign "observer" delegations - particularly from friendly authoritarian states - to bolster the storyline that Myanmar's ruling generals are embracing "multi-party democracy"- something they have done before in the brief window from 2010 to 2021.

In recent months the military leadership has secured public acknowledgment of support from China and Russia, with a Chinese envoy meeting senior military officials in Naypyidaw to discuss election preparations and Russia offering cooperation in electoral observance and institutional support. During a visit to Belarus the junta chief reiterated that 53 political parties have submitted applications to contest the forthcoming polls and formally invited Belarus' election observers to monitor the process. All of this is designed to project the semblance of normalcy, of process, and of legitimacy – at home and abroad.

Yet beneath the carefully choreographed framing are structural impediments that render the whole exercise a joke – if it wasn't so serious. Not only are the most popular parties - including the now-dissolved National League for Democracy (NLD) - barred from participating, but the military continues to hold thousands of political prisoners, including democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and former president Win Myint. Moreover, large swathes of the country remain outside the junta's control, making

any nationwide vote unrepresentative and fraught with legitimacy deficits. The "observers" the regime invites from Belarus and Russia bring minimal independent credibility - both countries are well known for elections that fail even minimal democratic standards.

The invitation to media outlets is likewise part of the regime's attempt to manufacture a narrative of reform: by letting in international journalists, broadcasting images of polling stations, registration desks, state-run commissions and smiling officials, the junta is hoping to demonstrate that the electoral timetable is underway and that they are "returning" to civilian rule – echoing the 2010-2021 period. But the substance underneath - ongoing conflict, brutal killings, restricted civic space, pervasive military oversight - suggests instead a façade. International sceptics have already warned that the polls will entrench military rule rather than open a genuine pathway for democratisation. At home the people, especially in opposition strongholds, are unlikely to view the vote as anything other than a legitimising cover for the generals rather than a meaningful transition.

In truth, the regime's push for elections, media invitations and external observer programmes all form part of a legitimacy play - one designed to ease sanctions, reduce international isolation, and enable a return to something approaching normal diplomatic and commercial relations.

The Myanmar junta seeks to tether its fate to the global architecture of elections, endorsement and "good governance" without surrendering genuine control, to allow the generals to maintain an iron grip on the Golden Land.

The junta hope international media and foreign observers will play their game.

## EDITORIAL

# mizzima

WEEKLY

**Managing Director and Editor In-Chief**  
Soe Myint

**Managing Editor**  
Thaw Zin Tun

**Network Engineer**  
Wai Min Han

**Video and Graphics Editor**  
Wai Yan Shein Zaw

**General Manager**  
No No Lin

**Mizzima Weekly is published by**  
**Mizzima s.r.o**

**Address:**  
Salvatorska 931/8,  
Stare Mesto, 11000,  
Praha 1, Czech Republic

**Contact email:**  
sm@mizzima.com

**Phone/Signal/WhatsApp**  
+420 608 616688

# CONTENTS **mizzima** WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

## 3 EDITORIAL

**6 A Quiet Victory: Reading Between the Lines of the ASEAN Statement - James Shwe**

**8 ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR**  
Analysis & Insight

**12 JUNTA ELECTIONS**  
Campaigning begins in Myanmar's junta-run election

**14 Myanmar invites foreign media coverage of junta-run election**

**15 Myanmar arrests three artists for 'disrupting election'**

**16 Myanmar junta threatens legal action against critics of election propaganda film**

**17 Over 30 junta-backed candidates set to win seats unopposed in upcoming Myanmar election**

**18 Protest in Pyin Oo Lwin denounces Myanmar junta's planned sham election**

**19 Myanmar UN representative urges world to reject junta's planned election**

**20 NLD denounces military-planned election in Myanmar as attempt to legitimize dictatorship**

**21 The Path to Election Cannot Be Paved with Blood and Crimes - Salai Za Uk Ling**

**23 CORE DEVELOPMENTS**  
ASEAN Summit reaffirms commitment to Five-Point Plan for Peace in Myanmar



- 25** Italy donates EUR 2.5 million to support Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh
- 26** China-backed rare earth and gold mining expands in Myanmar's eastern Shan State, threatening cross-border rivers
- 27** TNLA signs China-mediated ceasefire and agrees to withdraw from Mogok and Momeik
- 28** Myanmar junta regained only four towns lost in Operation 1027
- 29** China reopens eight Myanmar border gates controlled by KIA after year-long closure
- 30** Fighting resumes in Chin State as Myanmar junta launches new offensives in Tedim Township
- 31** Myanmar junta reshuffles Tanintharyi Region Security and Border Affairs Minister amid rising conflict
- 32** Myanmar junta's crackdown on civil society deepened earthquake crisis, report finds
- 33** Behind the Myanmar junta's raid on KK Park – Don Pathan
- 35** NUG expresses willingness to work with global partners against online scam networks in Myanmar
- 36** India to fly home 500 from Thailand after scam hub raid: Thai PM
- 37** EuroCham Myanmar welcomes release of detained trade union leaders
- 38** Myanmar citizens in Japan urge Trump to help free Aung San Suu Kyi and restore peace
- 39** Myanmar fireworks festival goers shun politics for tradition
- 40** 'Just War' in Myanmar - International humanitarian law and the rights and wrongs of conflict in Burma – Ashley South
- 42** Free 3D-printed prostheses put hope in arm's reach for Myanmar war amputees in Thai border town
- 46** **ASIAN & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**  
Philippines to take ASEAN chair with focus on South China Sea
- 47** Radio Free Asia suspends operations after Trump cuts and shutdown
- 49** Trump and Xi ease fight on trade tariffs and rare earths
- 51** China's Cyber Warfare Strategy: From Southeast Asia's Testing Ground to Global Threat
- 53** **COLUMNS**  
**INSIGHT MYANMAR – A**  
Movement Begins
- 54** **JUNTA WATCH**
- 55** **SOCIAL WATCH**

Cover photo of ASEAN sign in Kuala Lumpur by AFP





# A QUIET VICTORY

READING BETWEEN

THE LINES OF THE

ASEAN STATEMENT

*JAMES SHWE*

**A**t first glance, the official statement from the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur might seem like another round of diplomatic handwringing. But a closer reading of the document, titled the "ASEAN Leaders' Review and Decision on the Implementation of the Five-Point Consensus," reveals a quiet, strategic victory for Myanmar's pro-democracy movement. While it avoids forceful demands, the October 26th decision builds a diplomatic wall around the military junta's planned elections, effectively declaring them illegitimate before they even happen.

The most powerful weapon in this declaration is a single, crucial condition. In paragraph 26, the ASEAN leaders "emphasize that the cessation of violence and inclusive political dialogue must precede elections".

This is not mere suggestion; it is a clear benchmark for legitimacy that the junta, which continues its brutal campaign of violence against civilians, cannot possibly meet. By establishing this official precondition in their formal decision, ASEAN has given the international community a clear and undeniable reason to reject the junta's sham electoral process.

The message is simple: no peace, no dialogue, no legitimate election.

This is not the only punitive measure outlined in the document. The leaders reaffirmed that the junta will remain excluded from all high-level ASEAN meetings—a significant diplomatic isolation that denies the regime the legitimacy it craves. Furthermore, in a historic move

detailed in paragraph 24, ASEAN has decided to skip Myanmar in its rotating chairmanship, sending an unmistakable signal of unified disapproval.

For the pro-democracy resistance, this is a call to action. We must now leverage ASEAN's own words. Every diplomatic engagement and public statement must hammer home the point that the junta's election fails the test set by ASEAN itself in its October 26th decision.

We can now officially call on international partners to align their policies with this decision and refuse to recognize any outcome from a process held amid violence and exclusion.

Critically, the document also provides a lifeline by endorsing the delivery of humanitarian aid through "cross-border efforts where necessary," a direct move to bypass the junta's restrictions and get aid to those who need it most in conflict zones.

Of course, the risks remain. The junta will likely defy the statement, and as many critics note, ASEAN lacks strong enforcement mechanisms. But the bloc has provided the diplomatic ammunition in its official decision. It is now up to the pro-democracy movement and its international allies to use it, turning ASEAN's principled stance into a unified global rejection of military rule. This is how a quiet diplomatic victory, written into an official document, becomes a real-world win for the people of Myanmar.



## ANALYSIS &amp; INSIGHT



Photo: AFP

## ASEAN WILL NOT SEND OBSERVERS TO MYANMAR JUNTA'S ELECTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has decided not to send an election monitoring team to Myanmar's upcoming polls, widely regarded as a sham by the international community. The decision came after the bloc failed to reach a common agreement during its 47th ASEAN Summit, held in Jakarta from October 26 to 28.

ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn announced the decision during a post-summit press conference, explaining that the bloc could not achieve consensus on whether to send observers to the junta-organized election. "However, that decision depends on individual members," he added, leaving the door open for any member state to send representatives independently.

The junta had formally invited ASEAN to dispatch a monitoring mission, but the regional bloc merely "took note" of the request without endorsement. ASEAN reiterated its call for the election to be "all-inclusive, free, and fair," and emphasized the need for stability and political reconciliation in Myanmar. The summit also expressed concern over the junta's lack

of progress in implementing the Five-Point Consensus agreed upon in April 2021, which calls for an end to violence and inclusive dialogue.

ASEAN leaders reaffirmed their earlier decision to bar Myanmar's political representatives from high-level meetings, including summits and foreign minister gatherings, allowing only non-political envoys to attend.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who will assume ASEAN's chairmanship in 2026, acknowledged ongoing divisions within the bloc regarding how to handle Myanmar's crisis. He said the Philippines would consult each member state to seek common ground but would proceed independently if consensus remains elusive, respecting the "freedom to disagree" within ASEAN.

During the Foreign Ministers' Meeting held ahead of the summit, Malaysia's foreign minister—whose country currently chairs the bloc—stated that while

ASEAN cannot prevent the junta from holding an election, member states insist that any polls must be inclusive and credible. Analysts say the bloc's refusal to send observers further undermines the junta's efforts to gain international legitimacy.

Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres urged Myanmar's military authorities to focus on humanitarian assistance rather than pushing ahead with an election amid ongoing conflict. He said he did not believe the planned polls would be free or fair, stressing that ending the civil war should take priority over political maneuvers.

### **Arakan Army in potential gamechanger battle**

Heavy clashes have intensified in Kyaukphyu Township, Rakhine State, since October 23, as Myanmar's junta resumed a major offensive against the Arakan Army (AA) using combined air, naval, and



The Arakan Army is tightening the noose on Sittwe. Photo: AFP

ground assaults.

According to local sources, the junta managed to retake a village previously captured by the AA on October 26 but suffered heavy losses, with more than 50 soldiers reportedly killed in the fighting. The troops attempted to advance further into AA-held territory but were met with fierce resistance. Another column that departed from the No. (32) Police Battalion also faced a strong counterattack and was forced to retreat.

A Kyaukphyu-based source told local media that the junta had reinforced its manpower after the AA temporarily halted its operations and moved toward its previously captured outposts. “The junta strengthened its forces when the AA slowed its attacks, but they had to retreat after facing aggressive counteroffensives,” the source said.

Military analysts say the junta is employing all available resources—including ground, marine, and air forces—along with modernized weaponry to regain lost positions. “They are using drones, missiles, and airstrikes to break AA defenses, but the AA has successfully maintained control over its strongholds,” a military observer told Narinjara News.

Amid mounting battlefield losses, the junta has intensified airstrikes targeting civilian areas. On October 26, two 500-pound bombs were dropped on Zinchaung Konebwe village in Kyaukphyu Township, killing eight civilians, including four women, and seriously injuring 18 others. Residents said several of the wounded remain in critical condition, raising fears that the death toll could rise further.

The renewed fighting has raised concerns about



BGF fighters in Karen State. Photo: AFP

civilian safety in Kyaukphyu, a key strategic area in western Myanmar where both sides continue to fight for territorial control. If the AA manage to wrestle control of this important sea port, it will have significant repercussions on the balance of power in Myanmar – and China’s stance.

## Junta actions in Karen State intensify

Myanmar’s junta has claimed victory in Karen State after announcing the capture of Lay Kay Kaw town and KK Park — a notorious hub for online scam operations in Myawaddy Township. The claim was made in the junta-controlled Myanma Alinn newspaper on October 20, portraying the operation as part of a nationwide crackdown on cybercrime.

According to the junta, its forces raided Lay Kay Kaw and then moved to KK Park on October 5, describing the mission as an effort to eliminate transnational scam networks allegedly linked to Chinese nationals. However, local sources and independent analysts say the raids are primarily for propaganda purposes, intended to impress international observers amid growing pressure from China and regional governments to take action against human trafficking and cybercrime in the border areas.

Residents said junta troops have been systematically demolishing smaller buildings inside the KK Park compound with explosives — blowing up one or several structures each day, apparently according to a coordinated plan with the Border Guard Force (BGF), which controls the surrounding area. The BGF, which controls the surrounding area and maintains close ties with the junta, has permitted the demolitions to proceed. Sources said the BGF had already reached a deal with the Chinese businessmen who own the properties, agreeing to compensate them by offering new plots of land or replacement structures elsewhere.

“The explosions are just for show — only small buildings were targeted,” a local analyst said, adding that large concrete structures remain intact. “They want to show the world that they are cracking down on online scamming, while in reality, they are protecting the business network.”

Several local observers believe the staged destruction also aims to erase evidence of criminal activities and potential human rights abuses linked to the online scam operations, which have reportedly involved human trafficking, forced labour, and torture.

The junta has accused the Karen National Union (KNU) of being complicit in the KK Park business, alleging that the compound sits within KNU-controlled territory. The KNU has strongly denied the accusation, explaining that while some of its former leaders had signed earlier land lease agreements as landlords, the group withdrew from the arrangement years ago. “We have no involvement in these illegal operations,” KNU officials stated, emphasizing that the BGF, not the KNU, currently provides security for the area.

While the junta promotes its “law enforcement” efforts in KK Park, its military columns continue to engage in fierce clashes with resistance forces led by the KNU in Lay Kay Kaw and nearby villages. Local military sources told Hkit Thit Media that the junta suffered significant casualties in landmine attacks near Yategu Mountain. Thirteen wounded soldiers were reportedly transported by the BGF to Taungkalay Hospital, while the bodies of those killed were cremated near Maewarkhee village. The junta later responded with aerial bombardments, including strikes by a Y-12 aircraft targeting Yategu and Maewarkhee.

On the western side of the Dawna mountain range, daily clashes have been ongoing since mid-October as the junta attempts to secure control of the old Myawaddy–Kawkareik road. Despite holding the Asia Highway route, the military has been unable to reopen it for use due to continuous attacks from resistance forces, prompting it to launch fresh operations to seize the older road as an alternative supply line.



USDP billboard in Yangon. Photo: AFP

## CAMPAIGNING BEGINS IN MYANMAR'S JUNTA-RUN ELECTION

Parties approved to participate in Myanmar's junta-organised elections started campaigning on Tuesday, two months ahead of a poll being shunned at home and abroad as a ploy to legitimise military rule.

Myanmar has been consumed by civil war since the military snatched power in a 2021 coup, deposing and jailing democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi after her party won the last election by wide margins.

The junta has lost swathes of the country to pro-democracy guerrillas and powerful ethnic-minority armed factions, but has touted elections as a path to reconciliation.

Rebels have pledged to boycott the vote in huge enclaves they control, while human rights groups and a UN expert have denounced the poll's restrictive conditions in junta-held zones.

"This election means nothing to me," said one 60-year-old man in Sittwe city, the capital of western Rakhine state. "It is not a genuine election and I see no one supporting it."

"People are struggling with their own problems," he added, speaking on condition of anonymity for security concerns in a region where fighting has triggered a humanitarian crisis.

"I see more and more beggars in town as people are starving. People have no jobs and so the election seems like a distant prospect. They have no time to be interested in it."

There will be 57 parties on the ballot when polls take place in phases beginning on December 28.

State media said on Tuesday that the second round was set for January 11, but subsequent rounds and a result date have not been announced.

Suu Kyi's vastly popular National League for Democracy -- which won 82 percent of elected seats in the last poll in 2020 -- will not run because the junta dissolved the party after jailing her and making unsubstantiated allegations of voter fraud.

The gate was locked at the deserted party headquarters in Yangon on Tuesday, an AFP journalist said.

## 'Just want to go home'

The pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) began its campaign by unveiling election billboards in the capital Naypyidaw, where voting will be held in most constituencies in the first phase of the election.

Several thousand USDP members and supporters attended a kick-off event in the city, including candidates Mya Tun Oo and Tin Aung San, both former generals and current ministers under US sanctions.

Campaigning is expected to be generally low-key with high security amid the civil war.

"It is unlikely I will go for voting and I have no idea if I am on the voter list," said one civilian displaced by fighting to the central city of Mandalay, speaking anonymously for security reasons.

"We are not very interested," he added. "We just want to go home."

In Yangon, about 300 supporters of the pro-military party, dressed in green and white, gathered at its office, an AFP journalist saw.

Red and green party flags lined the street, with around a dozen armed soldiers and police patrolling the area.

Khin Maung Soe, Yangon regional chairman of the USDP, said his party planned to campaign in townships the Union Election Commission had designated and where security could be ensured, like Yangon.

"There won't be any parading on the street," he said.

The junta has conceded elections will not take place in one in seven national parliament constituencies, many of them active war zones, while martial law remains in place in one in five townships.

The military government has introduced laws punishing those who protest against the election with up to a decade in prison, and new cybercrime laws police the internet for communications that "disrupt unity".

Diplomatic sources told AFP on Monday that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will not send election observers to Myanmar.

Numerous rights groups lobbied the 11-nation bloc to hold back monitors, lest they lend legitimacy to a vote which they say will be neither free nor fair.

AFP

Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.  
Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR INVITES FOREIGN MEDIA COVERAGE OF JUNTA-RUN ELECTION

International media will be allowed to cover Myanmar's upcoming junta-run polls, election authorities said Wednesday, an apparent invitation for foreign press to scrutinise the deeply disputed vote.

Myanmar's junta has "shattered the media landscape" with censorship and intimidation since staging a 2021 coup that sparked a civil war, Reporters Without Borders says.

Local journalists bore the brunt of the crackdown while foreign media quit the country en masse, with AFP the only international news agency maintaining a full in-country bureau.

The junta has touted polls starting December 28 as a path to peace, but the vote will be blocked from rebel-held enclaves and monitors are dismissing it as a ploy to disguise continuing military rule.

The junta-stacked Union Election Commission said in a statement "both local and international news media will be allowed to cover" the election, due to unfold in phases over a matter of weeks.

The junta-run information ministry "will scrutinize and endorse eligible international media organizations", said the notice in state newspaper The Global New Light of Myanmar.

It is not clear what that process will entail and which media outlets will be approved for access to a country which has been largely cut-off by the military coup.

One senior journalist working for an independent Myanmar outlet told AFP "the invitation is just a part of

the process of their claim that they are holding a free and fair election".

"We won't take any risk dealing with them," he added. "It is not possible to cover independently."

Myanmar's media landscape blossomed during its decade-long democratic thaw, with new domestic outlets springing up and foreign journalists rushing in.

Since the military took back power many of those outlets have shut, moved to rebel-held areas or operate secretly or from exile in neighbouring Thailand.

Myanmar ranked third among the world's leading jailers of journalists in 2024, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Rights groups have said the election cannot be legitimate with democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi deposed and jailed in the coup, and her vastly popular National League for Democracy party dissolved.

Protesting against the poll has been made punishable by up to a decade in prison.

Diplomatic sources have told AFP the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) will not send election observers for the vote.

Numerous rights groups lobbied the 11-nation bloc to hold back monitors, lest they lend legitimacy to a vote which they say will be neither free nor fair.

AFP

## MYANMAR ARRESTS THREE ARTISTS FOR 'DISRUPTING ELECTION'

**M**yanmar authorities announced Thursday the arrest of three artists for undermining the upcoming junta-organised election, wielding new speech laws that rights monitors say oppress dissent.

Myanmar's military snatched power in a 2021 coup sparking a civil war, but is trumpeting elections scheduled to start in December as an opportunity for reconciliation.

Rebel groups have pledged to block the polls from their enclaves and numerous rights monitors have said voting cannot be free and fair under restrictions imposed in junta-controlled territory.

Three artists were arrested at their homes on Monday under legislation introduced this year punishing speech deemed damaging to the election with up to a decade in prison, state media said.

The Global New Light of Myanmar said the men -- a director, an actor and a comedian -- were detained "for making false and misleading criticism on social media" of other artists who produced a pro-election film.

The movie, aired on repeat on state TV, contains scenes with a village doctor urging opposition fighters to lay down their weapons and endorse the election --

due to start in phases on December 28.

The newspaper said the three arrested men "failed to contribute their artistic expertise towards the success of the upcoming election".

"Instead, they criticised and attacked other artists who were cooperating in the process," it added.

Legislation introduced in July forbids "any speech, organising, inciting, protesting or distributing leaflets in order to destroy a part of the electoral process".

Individuals convicted face between three and seven years behind bars, while offences committed by groups can result in sentences of between five and 10 years.

"The military junta has weaponised restrictive laws to crack down on dissent and curtail fundamental freedoms," said a report last month by the Asian Network for Free Elections.

Analysts have described the elections as a fig leaf designed to conceal continuing military rule, while deposed democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi remains jailed and her party has been dissolved.

AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA THREATENS LEGAL ACTION AGAINST CRITICS OF ELECTION PROPAGANDA FILM

The Military Commission has warned that it will take strict action against anyone who criticizes its election propaganda film, *Those Who Drive History Forward*, according to spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Htun.

Speaking on 29 October via the junta-controlled Myawaddy TV, Zaw Min Htun praised the artists involved and issued a stern warning to critics.

"First of all, I would like to thank all the artists who participated in the film and those who supported it. In addition, we will take effective and strict action against those who threaten or criticize it," he said.

Director Maik Tee, supporting actor Kyaw Win Htut, and comedian Ohn Daing have already been arrested and charged under the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction for allegedly criticizing the film.

The propaganda film reportedly portrays the ongoing revolution in a negative light while promoting the junta's planned election. The production features

several well-known actors, including Nay Toe, Myint Myat, Nay Win, Aye Chan Maung, Chuu Lay, May Myint Mo, Aung Khaing, Hngat Pyaw Kyaw, Aung Toe, Naing Lin, Thwet Lat, Super Lin, Min Nyo, Okkar Pyanyi, Ye Yint, Yaw Phaw, and Aung Zin Phyo.

The Sanchaung Main Strike Group released a statement condemning the participating artists, accusing them of "aiding and abetting the junta's war crimes." The group said the film glorifies the junta, which continues to carry out airstrikes, burn villages, and kill civilians, while mocking the suffering of the people.

Activists both inside Myanmar and abroad have called for a boycott of the artists involved and the products they endorse. Meanwhile, several urban guerrilla groups in Yangon Region announced on 28 October that they would take punitive action against the artists featured in the propaganda film.

Since seizing power in 2021, the junta has continued to arrest and imprison not only those who oppose its rule or support the resistance, but also individuals who criticize its election campaign on social media.



**OVER 30 JUNTA-BACKED CANDIDATES SET TO WIN SEATS UNOPPOSED IN UPCOMING MYANMAR ELECTION**

**M**ore than 30 candidates are set to automatically become Members of Parliament (MPs) in the junta-organized election, as no opponents are contesting against them, according to a candidate list released by the Union Election Commission (UEC) on 25 October.

A total of 31 constituencies nationwide have only one candidate. Of these, 28 are from the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), while the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party, the Wa National Party, and the Akha National Development Party each have one uncontested seat.

Under the junta’s election law, if only one candidate stands for election in a constituency, no polling will take place, and that candidate will automatically be declared the winner. As a result, more than 30 candidates will secure parliamentary seats without a single vote being cast.

Unopposed constituencies in the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) include Nogmung, Mansi, and Shwegu in Kachin State; Mingin, Wuntho, Mawlaik, Kani, Salingyi, and Ye-U in Sagaing Region; Yebyu and Launglon in Tanintharyi Region; and Matman, Pekhon, and Mongnai in Shan State.

In the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House), Shan State Constituency No. 1 is uncontested under the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system. For Region and State Hluttaws, the unopposed constituencies include Shwegu in Kachin State; Kawlin, Wuntho, Tamu, Butalin, Mawlaik, Kani, Salingyi, and Ye-U in Sagaing

Region; Yebyu and Thayetchaung in Tanintharyi Region; Gangaw in Magway Region; and Kyaukme in Shan State.

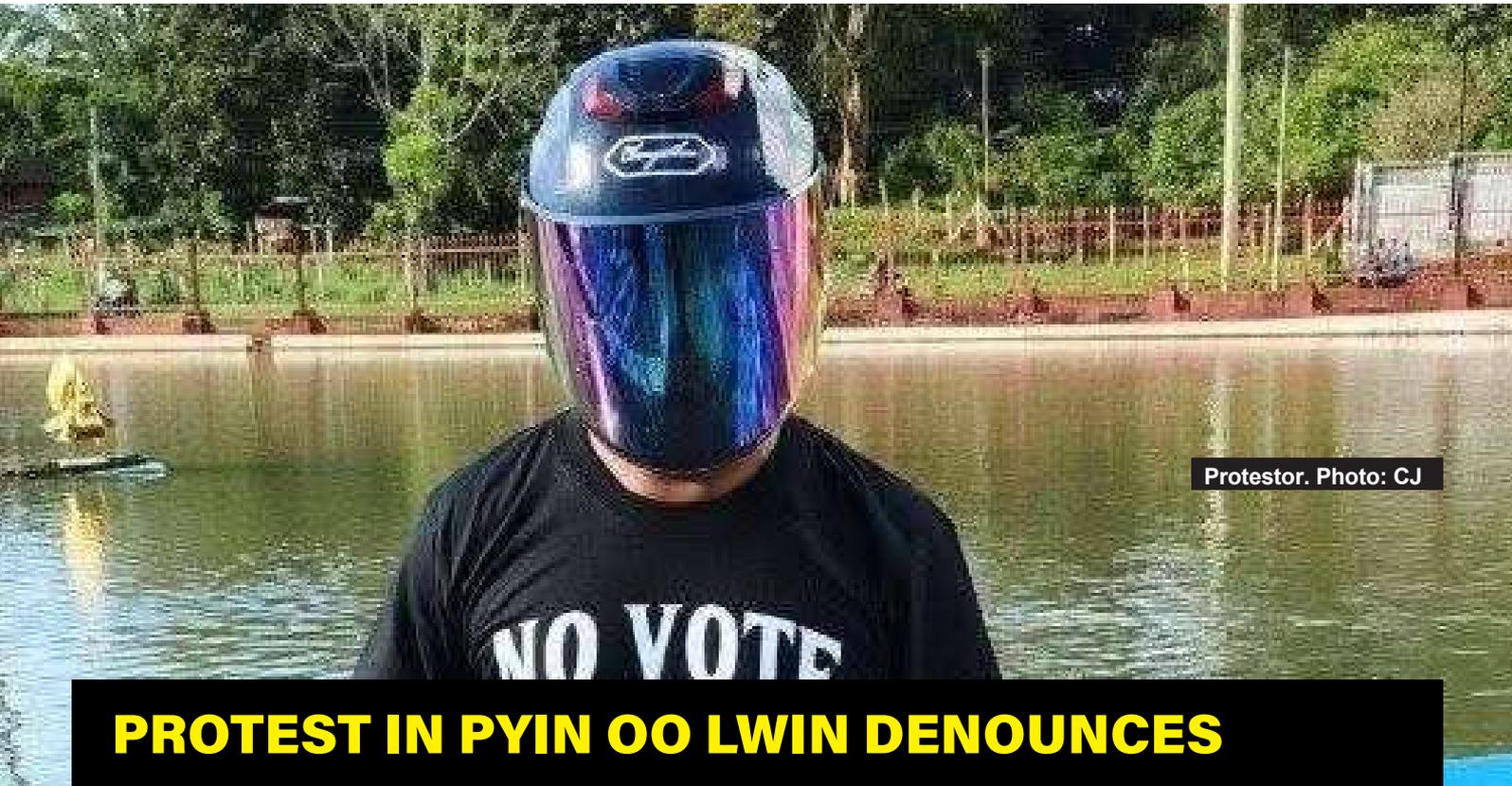
Additionally, uncontested ethnic affairs constituencies include the Kachin, Akha, and Kayah (Padaung) ethnic constituencies.

Among those running unopposed, U Sai Tun Lin of the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party will represent Mongnai constituency, U Em Zaw Lat of the Wa National Party will represent Shan State Constituency No. 1, and U Tun Aung of the Akha National Development Party will represent the Akha Ethnic Affairs constituency. All remaining uncontested candidates are from the USDP.

Following the 2021 military coup, the junta claimed widespread voter list irregularities to justify its seizure of power. Most uncontested constituencies are in conflict-affected regions where fierce fighting continues between junta troops and resistance forces.

According to the UEC, the election will be held in phases beginning on 28 December in 102 townships. A total of 57 political parties will participate, including six with nationwide reach. The USDP has fielded the highest number of candidates, with over 1,000 nominees.

Revolutionary groups, civil society organizations, and political analysts have dismissed the junta’s planned election as a sham, warning that it will lack legitimacy and could escalate violence across the country.



Protestor. Photo: CJ

# PROTEST IN PYIN OO LWIN DENOUNCES MYANMAR JUNTA'S PLANNED SHAM ELECTION

Protesters took to the streets in Pyin Oo Lwin, Mandalay Region, on 27 October to denounce the junta's planned "sham election," according to the MayMyo General Strike Force. The protest took place in one of Myanmar's key military towns, home to several defence academies.

Participants wearing shirts bearing the slogan "No Vote, Just Trap" staged demonstrations at multiple symbolic sites across the town, including the city entrance signboard, the downtown clock tower, the train station, and the night market. The protesters voiced strong opposition to the military junta's election, which is scheduled to begin on 28 December.

"The main purpose of our action is to show that we, the people of Maymyo, firmly oppose the fake election organised by the junta," a representative of the MayMyo General Strike Force told Mizzima.

The spokesperson added that the ongoing revolution is people-driven and that as long as public participation continues, the resistance movement will not waver. "The people must respond to the junta without submission, through every possible means of resistance," he said.

Despite heavy military presence in Pyin Oo Lwin – where junta troops are stationed throughout the town – protesters were able to carry out their demonstrations.

"Our town has become a military base, so people can't protest freely," another member of the committee said. "That's why we're calling for public support for our movement. We also urge citizens not to participate in or recognise the election organised by the junta."

The junta has announced plans to hold a general election on 28 December, but resistance forces and pro-democracy groups have condemned it as a ploy to legitimise military rule. They have urged the public to boycott the vote and continue opposing the regime.

Meanwhile, during the 47th ASEAN Summit held in Malaysia, a statement issued on 26 October reviewed Myanmar's deteriorating situation under the bloc's Five-Point Consensus. The statement called on the junta to implement a ceasefire and engage in inclusive political dialogue before proceeding with any election.



**MYANMAR UN REPRESENTATIVE URGES WORLD TO REJECT JUNTA'S PLANNED ELECTION**

The NUG representative at the UN warned that Myanmar’s military junta has created a “digital dictatorship” using surveillance and censorship against dissidents and enabling cyber scams.

The text of the statement given by Myanmar’s UN Ambassador is as follows

Evolving cyber threats, their growing complexity and agility as well as the malicious use of information and communications technologies (ICT) pose significant threats to international peace and security. Against this backdrop, Myanmar underscores the urgency for international cooperation in addressing these challenges to maintain a secure and peaceful cyber space.

At the same time, we emphasize the need to tailor ICT security capacity-building to the needs of developing countries.

Myanmar welcomes the adoption by consensus of the Final Report of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on security of and in the use of ICT (2021-2025), under the Chairmanship of Ambassador Burhan of Singapore.

Mr. Chair,

Myanmar remains committed to fostering an open, safe, secure and peaceful cyberspace that benefits the well-being of the people around the globe. Unfortunately, in my country, Myanmar, malicious ICT activities have been perpetrated by the military junta, and its affiliated militia, the Border Guard Forces (BGF), especially after the illegal military coup.

Consequently, two alarming scenarios have emerged in Myanmar:

First, establishment of a digital dictatorship– the military junta has forcefully taken control of the digital

and telecommunications infrastructure, suspended internet and mobile services, blocked social media and coerced ICT providers to hand over personal data of individual dissenters.

The junta recently deploys the Personal Scrutinization and Monitoring System, as part of their invasive digital surveillance tools, to track and arrest members of the Civil Disobedience Movement and human rights defenders.

The cyber space in Myanmar is transformed into a mass surveillance aggregation by the military junta.

Second, proliferation of cyber scam centers– this transnational cyber-scam industry involves scammers using texts, messaging apps, generative artificial intelligence and deepfake technology to lure victims and commit cyberfraud.

I wish to stress that the military junta, along with its affiliated BGF, are creating safe havens for criminal syndicates in the first place by facilitating their operations and providing security for them.

Victims of this online scam across the world are subjected to torture, sometime even to death, forced labor and human trafficking.

Up to 100,000 young men and women have been trafficked to the scam compounds and forced to commit online scams, generating nearly US \$40 billion annually, often utilizing advanced AI tools for fraud.

The online scam originated in Myanmar sadly has big impacts on the regional and international peace and security.

Failures to address the root causes of these highly adaptive cyber-scam operations and the lack of inclusive cooperation with relevant stakeholders have only resulted in short-term respite, after which scam centers from the northeast border of Myanmar shifted to its southeast border.

It is crystal clear that the military junta is not part of any sustainable solution to the branching of these cyber scam centers that are rooted in the junta itself.

Against this backdrop, the National Unity Government and allied federal democratic forces, in their statement in January this year, expressed their readiness to cooperate with international efforts, and work towards the restoration of justice and democratic governance while combatting the escalating crisis of cybercrimes and human exploitation.

Mr. Chair,

In light of these circumstances, the planned sham election by the military junta will further prolong violence, exacerbate cybercriminal activities and instability in the region and beyond, from the continued malicious use of ICT by the same actors.



Photo: AFP

## NLD DENOUNCES MILITARY-PLANNED ELECTION IN MYANMAR AS ATTEMPT TO LEGITIMIZE DICTATORSHIP

The National League for Democracy (NLD) has identified five major weaknesses in the election planned by the Myanmar junta, according to a statement issued on 28 October.

The NLD said the planned election completely lacks freedom of expression, association, and political activity. It is being organized amid widespread conflict across the country and can only take place in about one-third of Myanmar's territory.

The party states that the voting process will not occur simultaneously nationwide but will instead take place at different times and locations.

It added that the parliament formed from the first phase of the election would not be representative of the people, as more than half of its members would be unelected military representatives.

The NLD described the planned election as an attempt to disguise military rule as a civilian government, warning that accepting such a process would only legitimize the junta's dictatorship.

Citing Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), United Nations treaty, the NLD emphasized that the election clearly violates international principles guaranteeing freedom

of assembly, movement, and political participation without fear or punishment.

The party also pointed out that the military has enacted the "Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction," allowing it to arrest and prosecute anyone opposing the planned election.

The NLD urged the international community not to recognize or cooperate with the junta's election, warning that doing so would amount to rejecting the will of the Myanmar people. It called on foreign governments not to send election observers, to issue a joint statement of non-recognition, and to refuse acknowledgment of the election results.

Additionally, the party urged other nations to avoid engaging with any new political entity that may emerge from the military's election and to maintain existing sanctions without providing any form of support.

In conclusion, the NLD reaffirmed its commitment to working with local forces to draft and implement interim constitutions and federal unit plans grounded in equality, democracy, and the people's will, with the ultimate goal of establishing a genuine federal union based on democratic principles.



Salai Sak Uk Ling with the UN Special Rapporteur

# THE PATH TO ELECTION CANNOT BE PAVED WITH BLOOD AND CRIMES

## SALAI ZA UK LING

***Myanmar’s planned election cannot legitimize a regime waging war on its own people—peace, accountability, and inclusive dialogue must come first.***

As Myanmar’s military junta prepares to stage a national election in December, it does so not in the spirit of democratic renewal but amid a campaign of terror that has displaced millions and devastated entire regions. Villages have been burned to the ground, churches and hospitals bombed, and civilians executed in cold blood. The same generals responsible for these crimes now seek to drape a veneer of legitimacy over their rule through the ballot box.

The path to election cannot be paved with blood and crimes.

Since the coup of February 2021, the military—formally known as the State Administration Council (SAC)—has waged a systematic war against its own citizens. Airstrikes and artillery barrages have destroyed civilian infrastructure across the country, particularly in the western Chin hills and the Sagaing Region. Ground forces have carried out mass killings, arbitrary arrests, and sexual violence. The United Nations and independent human rights mechanisms have documented patterns of atrocities amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Instead of facing justice, the generals now seek legitimacy through a tightly controlled electoral process designed to entrench their power and fragment the

nationwide resistance. But no election can be free or fair under martial law, where opposition voices are silenced and millions of displaced people are unable even to vote.

## War Disguised as a Political Process

In recent weeks, the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) has verified the mobilization of major combat units—including Light Infantry Divisions 77 and 99—along the Chin–Sagaing frontier. Senior commanders from several regional operations commands have converged to oversee renewed offensives aimed at clearing territory ahead of the junta’s so-called “election.” Troop movements, air raids, and scorched-earth operations have intensified in tandem with the regime’s narrative of “stability” and “reconciliation.”

This is not preparation for an election; it is a campaign of military conquest designed to subdue resistance strongholds and fabricate an illusion of control. In practice, the junta is once again turning its weapons against civilians.

At the United Nations Human Rights Council’s 60th Session in September, I warned that the junta’s election preparations are inseparable from its ongoing campaign of terror. Speaking live on UN WebTV, I urged member states not to confuse coercion with consent or mistake the junta’s electoral charade for political progress. Any attempt to normalize relations with the regime risks legitimizing its crimes and undermining the sacrifices of millions who continue to resist military rule.

Following that session, CHRO carried these messages directly to governments and international institutions across Europe. In London, Dublin, Geneva, and Brussels, we met with senior officials, parliamentarians, and diplomats to urge stronger action against the junta’s crimes and greater support for Myanmar’s democratic movement. In Geneva, I held a private meeting with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to raise concerns about escalating military offensives in western Myanmar and the junta’s use of elections as a tool of repression. In Brussels, our team engaged with the European External Action Service, the European Commission, and the European Parliament to emphasize the urgent need for coordinated humanitarian and political responses.

These efforts reflect CHRO’s conviction that advocacy must not end with documentation—it must translate into diplomacy, solidarity, and concrete action to prevent further atrocities and uphold international human rights norms.

## **The Human Cost of the Junta's War**

For the people of Chin State, the suffering is staggering. More than half of the population—some 280,000 people—have been forcibly displaced since the coup. Entire towns—among them my birthplace and hometown, Thantlang—have been reduced to ashes after repeated air and artillery attacks. Once a peaceful town nestled in the hills near the Indian border, Thantlang now stands deserted, its homes and churches destroyed, its residents scattered across forests and refugee camps.

Tens of thousands of Chin people have fled into India, while others survive in makeshift shelters with little access to food, medicine, or education. Humanitarian access remains severely restricted. The junta blocks aid convoys and targets local relief networks. As a result, communities depend almost entirely on cross-border assistance and church-based humanitarian systems sustained by diaspora contributions. Yet international funding for Myanmar's western frontier remains woefully inadequate, leaving millions vulnerable to starvation and disease.

## **A Sham Election and the Risk of Legitimization**

The junta's planned "election" is not a step toward peace but an instrument of control. It seeks to impose a political structure that excludes the democratic opposition and ethnic resistance organizations while presenting a false image of national unity. Recognizing or tolerating such a process would not advance stability—it would reward atrocity and deepen the conflict.

Equally troubling are the junta's civilian collaborators and political opportunists now preparing to contest these elections under its shadow. Their participation serves only to validate the regime's crimes and prolong the suffering of millions. They must know that complicity will not grant them immunity—those who enable tyranny will one day be held to account alongside its architects.

The international community must adopt a consistent and principled stance. The EU, ASEAN, and democratic partners should reject the junta's planned elections unless there is a complete cessation of violence and the start of an inclusive political dialogue. ASEAN's recent statement rightly makes any credible, free, and fair election conditional on these steps. ASEAN and its members must avoid any action that lends legitimacy to the junta's sham process, while the EU should extend strong political and diplomatic

support to reinforce this principled position.

At the same time, greater support should be directed to the democratic movement and local governance structures that have emerged in resistance-held areas. These initiatives—rooted in popular consent and accountability—represent the true foundations of a future federal democracy.

## **Accountability as the Path to Peace**

Justice and accountability must be central to any international strategy on Myanmar. The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) has already collected extensive evidence of atrocity crimes, while universal jurisdiction cases in the Philippines and Indonesia show the potential for domestic courts to act where international mechanisms remain blocked.

Targeted sanctions against the junta's military-linked businesses, aviation fuel suppliers, and arms networks remain vital. Equally important is sustained diplomatic engagement with neighboring countries—particularly India and Thailand—to ensure humanitarian corridors remain open and refugees are protected from forced returns.

## **A Moral Test for the International Community**

The crisis in Myanmar is not merely a domestic political struggle; it is a test of the world's commitment to justice, human rights, and democracy. Every airstrike, every civilian death, and every village burned in Chin State or Sagaing is a reminder that democracy cannot be born from terror.

The international community must draw a clear line: legitimacy cannot be conferred on perpetrators of mass atrocities. Silence or complacency will only embolden the generals to continue their crimes with impunity.

The people of Myanmar have already chosen democracy with their lives and their resistance. It is time for the international community to choose moral clarity over convenience.

The path to a genuine election must begin with accountability, not impunity—with peace, not blood. Until then, any ballot cast under the junta's rule will be stained with the crimes of its creators.

Salai Za Uk Ling is the Executive Director of the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), a Myanmar-based organization with UN ECOSOC Special Consultative Status that works to promote human rights, religious freedom, and justice for the Chin people and all communities in Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

## ASEAN SUMMIT REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO FIVE-POINT PLAN FOR PEACE IN MYANMAR

On 26 October, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia issued a statement reaffirmed their commitment to the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) as the primary framework for resolving Myanmar’s ongoing political and humanitarian crisis.

The statement is as follows.

We reviewed the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) and took note of the recommendation of the 37th ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC) Meeting and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meetings on 9 July and 25 October 2025.

We discussed the developments in Myanmar and expressed deep concern over the conflicts and dire humanitarian situation in the country as well as the lack of substantive progress in the implementation of the 5PC. We denounced the continued acts of violence in Myanmar against civilians, public facilities, and civilian infrastructure and urged all parties involved to take concrete action to immediately halt indiscriminate violence, denounce any escalation, exercise utmost restraint, ensure the protection and safety of all civilians and create a conducive environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and inclusive national political dialogue.

We reaffirmed ASEAN's continuous commitment to assisting Myanmar in finding a peaceful and durable solution to the ongoing crisis, as Myanmar remains an integral part of ASEAN.

We appreciated the ASEAN Chair's efforts to ensure progress on the implementation of the 5PC in its entirety, with the sole objective of restoring peace,

stability, democracy, through a Myanmar-owned and -led comprehensive political resolution.

We noted the Comprehensive Assessment on the Implementation of the 5PC (2021-2025) prepared by the ASEAN Secretariat.

We welcomed the joint humanitarian visit by the Foreign Ministers of Malaysia and Thailand on 5 April 2025 which reaffirmed the spirit of close ASEAN cooperation in humanitarian response.

We welcomed the Working Visit by the Foreign Minister of Malaysia to Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 9 October 2025, in his capacity as Chair of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, as part of efforts towards resolving the crisis in Myanmar.

We commended the work of the ASEAN Chair, through its Special Envoy, in establishing inclusive engagements with all relevant stakeholders in Myanmar by promoting national inclusive dialogue, reaching out to parties concerned, including regional and international organisations, in a sustainable manner, towards reaching a Myanmar-owned and -led resolution to the situation in Myanmar.

We further recognised that a sustainable, objective and inclusive ASEAN approach is a crucial step to building trust and bridging differences among different stakeholders, facilitating the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people in need in Myanmar without discrimination, and promoting cessation of violence and establishing inclusive national dialogue.

We appreciated the contributions by ASEAN Member States, external partners, the United Nations

(UN), the private sector and the continued support from all stakeholders in Myanmar that have enabled the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) to ensure an effective response and continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar in an inclusive manner to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in several areas in Myanmar, according to the Joint Needs Assessment (JNA), as well as to assist in the recovery and rehabilitation of communities affected by the earthquake on 28 March 2025.

We welcomed the progress of the provision of ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance under Phase 1 (Life-Saving/COVID-19 response) and Phase 2 (Life-Sustaining) by the AHA Centre in coordination with Myanmar to implement Point 4 of the ASEAN Leaders' 5PC.

We noted with appreciation the continued support from the international community, particularly the UN for ASEAN's efforts in the implementation of the 5PC, as it remains critical in helping the people of Myanmar to achieve a Myanmar-owned and -led peaceful and durable solutions through inclusive national dialogue.

We took note of the briefing from Myanmar on the recent developments in Myanmar including its preparation for general elections.

We took note of the discussions from the Informal Consultation consisting of the current, previous and incoming Chairs of ASEAN on the implementation of the 5PC and the decisions made during the 58th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in July 2025 to organise a meeting among Special Envoys on Myanmar and an extended informal consultation with participation of interested ASEAN Member States. We acknowledged the convening of the meeting of the Special Envoys on Myanmar in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in July 2025.

We acknowledged the Chair's comprehensive report on the 5PC implementation during the Extended Informal Consultation on 24 October 2025 and, in line with the assessment of the report, we reiterated our deep concerns over the lack of substantial progress in the implementation of the 5PC by Myanmar authorities. Therefore, we agreed on the following:

Reaffirm the 5P C as the main reference for addressing the political crisis in Myanmar and urge for its full implementation to help the people of Myanmar to achieve an inclusive and durable peaceful resolution that is Myanmar-owned and -led, towards the betterment of the people of Myanmar hence contributing to peace, security and stability in the region.

Urge all parties and stakeholders concerned in Myanmar, in particular the armed forces and security forces concerned, to deescalate violence and stop targeted attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure and enhance trust- building efforts. We also call for the full implementation of an expanded and extended ceasefire throughout Myanmar as reaffirmed by the ASEAN Leaders' Statement on an Extended and Expanded Ceasefire in Myanmar issued on 26 May 2025.

Encourage our regional and external partners and other international partners to scale-up their financial support towards ensuring the continuation of efforts undertaken by the AHA Centre in extending delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar. We also call for the delivery of humanitarian assistance through the AHA Centre as well as other mechanisms, to ensure the safe, timely, effective and transparent delivery of humanitarian assistance without discrimination.

Continue engagements with all relevant stakeholders in Myanmar by the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair, with the support of ASEAN Member States and Myanmar's neighbouring countries as relevant and appropriate in line with the 5PC, to build trust toward convening an inclusive national dialogue, with the aim of achieving a durable peaceful resolution to the crisis that is Myanmar- owned and-led.

Expedite ASEAN's on-going efforts and other relevant approaches led by the ASEAN Chair, including through the informal consultation consisting of current, previous, and incoming Chairs of ASEAN, and an extended informal consultation with the participation of other interested ASEAN Member States. We reaffirm the value of the consultations and remain committed to coordinating closely under such consultations to support consistent follow-through on the 5PC to ensure sustainability of ASEAN's collective efforts.

Encourage the continued meetings between the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair and other Special Envoys on Myanmar to share experiences, exchange views and suggestions, and discuss the way forward in support for the implementation of the 5PC. We underlined the importance of close coordination between the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair and the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General on Myanmar. We further underlined the importance of ASEAN Member States being informed and engaged in such processes. Any effort by ASEAN Member States in coordination with the ASEAN Chair, to address the crisis in Myanmar, shall remain in line with the 5PC.



Rohingya refugees flee.  
Photo: AFP

## ITALY DONATES EUR 2.5 MILLION TO SUPPORT ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN BANGLADESH

On 28 October, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) issued a statement welcoming a EUR 2.5 million contribution from the Government of Italy to support essential assistance and protection for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

The text of the statement is as follows.

The Government of Italy renewed today its commitment to Rohingya refugees with a EUR 2.5 million contribution to UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, bolstering life-saving assistance and protection in Bangladesh.

The fresh funding was granted by Farnesina, Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and its Directorate General for Migration Policies. It will help sustain critical community-based protection programmes and initiatives to prevent gender-based violence and strengthen child protection and uphold refugee rights through continued registration and documentation.

"Italy remains a steadfast supporter of the Rohingya refugee response," said Ivo Freijsen, UNHCR Representative in Bangladesh. "This generous contribution from the Italian people will help meet Rohingya refugees' most urgent needs and provide vital protection against the challenges and threats of life in the world's largest refugee camp. At a time of growing humanitarian strain, community-based protection services are essential to preserving dignity

and self-reliance in a fragile setting."

"Since the beginning of this dire humanitarian emergency, Italy has supported the efforts of the international community within the framework of the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis, to help ensure dignity for Rohingya refugees, as well as hope for the future. In this respect, we welcome Bangladesh's commitment to engaging with relevant stakeholders and seeking a solution to this protracted crisis," said H.E. Antonio Alessandro, Ambassador of Italy to Bangladesh.

Now entering its eighth year, the Rohingya crisis remains one of the world's most protracted refugee situations. Some 1.16 million refugees continue to live in the densely populated camps of Cox's Bazar and on the island of Bhasan Char, where they are almost entirely reliant on humanitarian assistance for food, shelter, clean water, healthcare, and other basic needs. Among them, an estimated 150,000 Rohingya found safety in the camps since early 2024, after having been forced to flee continuous violence and human rights violations in Myanmar's Rakhine State, deepening humanitarian needs in Bangladesh.

Italy's renewed commitment comes as global humanitarian funding continues to fall, forcing aid agencies to make increasingly difficult choices on which needs to meet – and potentially losing hard-won gains in refugee health, well-being and self-reliance.



Photo: Supplied

## CHINA-BACKED RARE EARTH AND GOLD MINING EXPANDS IN MYANMAR'S EASTERN SHAN STATE, THREATENING CROSS-BORDER RIVERS

The Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) reported on 28 October that rare earth and gold mining operations have rapidly expanded along the Nam Kok River in the Mong Yun area, south of Mong Hsat Township in eastern Shan State.

The projects are being operated by the China Investment Mining Company, which is backed by the Chinese government.

According to SHRF, inside sources confirmed that the rare earth mines along the Nam Kok River and the main gold mining site are under the control of the China Investment Mining Company, which also runs similar extraction projects in northern Laos.

The company is 90 percent owned by Shanghai Chijin Xiwu Metal Resources Co., Ltd., a joint venture formed in September 2022 between the state-backed Xiamen Tungsten Corporation (XTC) and China's largest private gold producer, Chifeng Gold. The venture was established to expand rare earth mining in Laos. XTC is one of China's leading rare earth companies, according to SHRF.

The frights group stated that the Mong Yun area, located in eastern Mong Hsat Township, is jointly controlled by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the Myanmar junta, meaning mining operations there

require approval from both authorities.

Satellite images taken on 14 October show major changes in the area, including widespread deforestation of upstream hillsides near the gold mining zone about 30 kilometres from the Thai border. The images also reveal rapid expansion of roads and mining sites.

SHRF noted new development on both sides of the Nam Kok River, where operators are using the environmentally harmful "in-situ leaching" technique, which involves injecting large quantities of chemicals into the hillsides to extract rare earth minerals.

"The expansion of these three mining sites, despite the existing severe pollution of the Nam Kok River, is deeply concerning as it affects communities on both sides of the border," SHRF said in its statement.

"This affects more than one million people in Thailand living along the Kok River in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces. The Nam Kok River is a tributary of the Mekong River, putting tens of millions of people along the Mekong at risk," it added.

Thai authorities have been conducting water tests along the Kok River every two weeks since April, with results showing arsenic and lead levels exceeding safety standards.



Photo: AFP

## TNLA FIGHTERS AGREE CHINA-BROKERED PULLOUT FROM MYANMAR RUBY TOWN

One of Myanmar's most powerful ethnic armed opposition factions has agreed to a China-brokered withdrawal from a lucrative ruby mining hub, the group said on 29 October.

Myanmar has been mired in a civil war since the military grabbed power in a 2021 coup, with the junta fighting an array of pro-democracy guerrillas and powerful ethnic minority armed groups.

The ragtag opposition initially struggled to make headway before organising a combined offensive in late 2023 that seized huge swaths of territory.

The northern ruby-mining town of Mogok was captured by rebels last summer, but the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) -- the most powerful group driving that offensive -- said it will now pull out.

The TNLA said in a statement on Telegram it had made a deal with the junta after two days of talks that ended on Tuesday, overseen by a Chinese special envoy in the city of Kunming in southern China.

According to the deal, the group will pull out of the townships of Mogok and neighbouring Momeik.

The statement did not specify a timeframe but said the military had agreed to call off air strikes, while "troops from both sides will stop advancing" from midnight on Wednesday.

A Myanmar junta spokesman could not be reached for comment.

China is a key power broker in Myanmar's civil war, analysts say, supporting both opposition groups and the junta on a sliding scale according to its economic and security interests.

Some conflict monitors say the offensive during which Mogok was captured had at least Beijing's tacit backing, as China grew weary of the junta's inaction over internet scam centres that seed chaos along their border.

However, China has more openly backed the junta this year as it battles to regain ground ahead of an election scheduled to start in December, which it is touting as a path to stability.

The polls are set to be blocked from vast rebel-held enclaves, and numerous international monitors have dismissed them as a ploy to disguise continuing military rule.

However, Beijing has given its backing in diplomatic rhetoric and on the ground.

The northern city of Lashio -- the junta's most significant territorial loss since the start of the civil war -- was handed back to the military in April after Chinese mediation.

AFP



## MYANMAR JUNTA REGAINED ONLY FOUR TOWNS LOST IN OPERATION 1027

The Myanmar junta has so far regained control of only four out of the 43 towns captured by the Three Brotherhood Alliance during Operation 1027, which began nearly a year ago.

The joint offensive, launched on 27 October 2023 by the Arakan Army (AA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), has entered its second year.

"Looking back on the arduous journey that began on 10/27, the military gains we see today are the result of the blood, sweat, and lives of countless soldiers," MNDAA Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Peng De Ren said at a graduation ceremony on 25 October, according to The Kokang News.

During the operation, the MNDAA seized 10 towns, including Chinshwehaw, Laukkaing, Konkyan, Mawhtike, Hpawnghseng, Monekoe, Kyugok, Kunlong, Tamoenye, and Lashio. The TNLA captured 12 towns – Manton, Moemaik, Monglon, Mongngawt, Nawngkhio, Kyaukme, Namhsan, Namtu, Namkhan, Kutkai, Moegok, and Hsipaw.

The AA launched its own offensive on 13 November, taking 21 towns across Rakhine and southern Chin

State, including Paletwa, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Minbya, Myebon, Ponnagyun, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, Ann, and Gwa.

Of the 43 towns seized, only Nawngkhio, Kyaukme, Hsipaw, and Lashio have been retaken by the junta as of 2025, reportedly with Chinese government mediation. This still leaves 39 towns under alliance control.

The MNDAA also captured Hopang and Pan Lon but later handed them over to the United Wa State Army (UWSA).

A resident of Kutkai, now under TNLA control, told Mizzima, "It's more comfortable living here than under the junta. It's still calm for now, but we can't say what will happen after December."

Operation 1027 was temporarily paused on 12 January 2024 following the Haigeng Agreement brokered by China. However, the junta continued airstrikes on alliance-held areas, prompting the alliance to resume attacks on 25 June 2024 under "Operation 1027 (Part 2)."

China later mediated a ceasefire in March 2025 between the junta and the MNDAA, leading to the latter's withdrawal from Lashio. Talks between the TNLA and the junta were held in April and August 2025, but no deal was reached.

Despite the ceasefire, Lieutenant General Peng De Ren told troops that "the current truce is not a genuine or final peace," urging continued vigilance as "the road to real peace is still a long one."

The People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) also joined the operation, expanding fighting in Sagaing and Karenni Regions.

According to Mizzima Research, PDFs and allied forces captured 10 towns in Sagaing Region, while Operation 1111 in Karenni State saw the capture of Moby, Shadaw, Nanmekhon, Demoso, Ywathit, Mawchi, and Mese.

The junta has since regained several of these areas, including Kawlin, Tabayin, and Thabeikkyin in Sagaing, and Moby, Demoso, and Nanmekhon in Karenni State.

In Kachin State, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) also made significant gains, capturing towns such as Sumprabum, N Jang Yang, Tsawlaw, Chipwi, Pangwar, Sadon, Sinbo, Dawthponeyan, Loije, Momauk, Mansi, Kan Paik Ti, Phipaw, Myohla, and Mabein.

## CHINA REOPENS EIGHT MYANMAR BORDER GATES CONTROLLED BY KIA AFTER YEAR-LONG CLOSURE

Photo: Supplied

The Chinese authorities have reopened eight border gates located in areas controlled by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), KIA spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu confirmed to Mizzima.

The Myanmar-China border gates; Man Wein Gyi, Kanpaikti, Mai Ja Yang, Laiza, Lweje, Pangwa, Mansi, and Phimaw were reopened by China on 26 October.

"They are all open now, though not around the clock," Colonel Naw Bu said. "The reopening mainly allows for consumer goods needed by local residents. Construction materials like cement and iron are also permitted. However, fuel and electrical appliances remain restricted."

The crossings were closed by the Chinese side for over a year. Despite the closure, a source close to the KIA said China had selectively allowed goods such as rare earth minerals to pass through. The source added that the latest reopening might be linked to rare earth trade.

"For items they needed, like tissue banana plants and rare earths, the gates were never fully closed," the source said. "We heard that General Gun Maw secretly travelled to India about four months ago, and China might have learned about it. This could be a conciliatory gesture, or simply about rare earths."

Colonel Naw Bu said the KIA had reached no formal agreement with China regarding the reopening. Among the eight crossings, Pangwa, Phimaw, and Mai

Ja Yang are key routes for rare earth mineral exports, according to KIA sources.

Local residents are expected to see some relief from high commodity prices following the reopening, and cross-border movement of people is also reportedly being permitted.

"People from this side can enter China, and Chinese nationals are also crossing over," the source added. "In Laiza, residents with household registrations can now freely cross the border. Those from other areas require a local endorsement letter"

The KIA and its allied forces captured several towns hosting these gates, including Lweje, Mansi, Pangwa, Phimaw, and Kanpaikti, during their offensives in April, May, October, and November 2024. Mai Ja Yang and Laiza were already under KIA control.

China had earlier closed the border crossings in late 2024, reportedly to pressure the KIA, which caused severe shortages and soaring prices in Kachin State.

At present, the KIA controls a number of towns including Sumprabum, Injangyang, Tsawlaw, Chipwi, Pangwa, Sadung, Hsinbo, Dawthphoneyan, Lweje, Momauk, Mansi, Kanpaikti, Phimaw, Myohla, and Mabein. Fighting continues between the KIA and junta forces in Mohnyin, Bhamo, and Kawnglangphu townships.



## **FIGHTING RESUMES IN CHIN STATE AS MYANMAR JUNTA LAUNCHES NEW OFFENSIVES IN TEDIM TOWNSHIP**

**C**lashes have resumed in Tedim Township, Chin State, after the Myanmar junta launched new offensives against Chin resistance forces, according to the CDF–Civic Defence Militia (Siyin), a local defence force.

Fighting broke out around 2:30 pm on 29 October when two columns of junta troops of about 200 soldiers from Tedim town and another 200 from Mwarl Pi village advanced toward Thine Ngin village.

“Two columns of junta forces launched coordinated offensives, moving toward Thine Ngin village. The clashes began near Mwarl Pi village and continued into the evening,” a spokesperson for CDF–CDM Siyin told Mizzima.

One Chin resistance fighter was killed, while casualties on the junta’s side remain unconfirmed, according to the group.

Earlier this year, on 18 May, hundreds of junta troops under the Kalay Regional Operations Command (ROC) clashed with Chin resistance forces near Mwarl Pi village along the Kalay–Tedim road. The junta’s forces reportedly suffered heavy losses and were forced to retreat by mid-June, with some soldiers surrendering.

However, instead of withdrawing to Kalay, the junta regrouped near the nine-mile border between Khaikam

and Kalay township and has since launched renewed offensive operations.

According to CDF–CDM Siyin, the junta has conducted at least ten aerial supply operations over Tedim Township in the past week, dropping off troops, weapons, and ammunition. Around 11:30 pm on 28 October, two 500-pound bombs were dropped on Thine Ngin village, injuring a local woman and damaging several homes.

Chin revolutionary groups said the renewed attacks are part of the junta’s efforts to intimidate civilians ahead of its planned first-phase election, which is expected to include Hakha and Tedim townships.

Mizzima has also confirmed that the junta aircraft carried out airstrikes on Kanpetlet Township on 24 and 25 October, on Mindat town on 26 and 27 October, and on Thine Ngin village on 28 October, causing civilian casualties and property destruction.

Chin resistance forces have urged civilians not to participate in or cooperate with the junta’s planned election and have warned that action will be taken against any collaborators.



## MYANMAR JUNTA RESHUFFLES TANINTHARYI REGION SECURITY AND BORDER AFFAIRS MINISTER AMID RISING CONFLICT

The Myanmar junta has replaced the Security and Border Affairs Minister for Tanintharyi Region, appointing Colonel Thein Zaw Myint to the position, according to junta-controlled newspapers published on 30 October.

He succeeds Colonel Min Min Latt, marking the fourth change to the post since the junta seized power in February 2021. Previous holders of the position include Colonel Thein Lin and Colonel Thet Soe.

Analysts said the reshuffle reflects the increasingly volatile situation in Tanintharyi Region, where clashes between junta forces and resistance groups have intensified this year.

“This year, in 2025, the junta has been significantly increasing its troop deployments in Tanintharyi. Previously, they believed the revolutionary forces there were weak. But the resistance forces are now operating more strategically, conducting guerrilla attacks and tactical manoeuvres,” said Saw Dar Ko, Operation Commander from Tactics 33.

He added that junta troops are now facing counterattacks in unexpected areas.

“The Maung Ma Kan police station is very close to Launglon town, where the resistance has become active. The junta fears the town may soon come under attack,” he said.

Reports indicate that the outgoing minister, Colonel Min Min Latt, has transitioned into a civilian role and plans to contest the upcoming election to

being organized by the junta as a candidate for the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) under the proportional representation system in Tanintharyi Region Constituency No. 1.

“To prepare for the election, they’re appointing trusted individuals to political positions. Hundreds of officers perhaps as many as 500, have already left the army, changed into civilian dress, and are being nominated as candidates across the country. This seems to be part of the junta’s two-faced tactic to maintain power,” Saw Dar Ko added.

Fighting between junta troops and resistance forces has intensified in Tanintharyi, Thayetchaung, Launglon, Yebyu, and Palaw townships in recent weeks. The junta has launched ground operations and stepped up aerial bombardments, drone strikes, and artillery shelling to regain control ahead of its planned election.

According to the Karen National Union (KNU) Brigade 4 in its Myeik-Dawei District, the junta carried out artillery and aerial attacks between 26 and 29 October on Ma Zaw, Lay Mile, and Maw Tone villages in Myeik Township, and Kwuan Inn and Thein Khun villages in Tanintharyi Township.

Local research group FE5 Tanintharyi reported that the number of displaced civilians in the region had reached 80,800 by the end of September, amid escalating conflict between junta forces and allied revolutionary groups.



Quake clean-up in Mandalay.  
Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA'S CRACKDOWN ON CIVIL SOCIETY DEEPENED EARTHQUAKE CRISIS, REPORT FINDS

Myanmar's military junta systematically obstructed civil society and independent humanitarian response following the devastating March 28 earthquake, according to a new report by the International Centre For-Not-Profit Law (ICNL). The report, "Civic Aftershock: How Restricting Civil Society Obstructed Myanmar's Earthquake Response," accuses the junta of weaponizing the disaster to entrench its control and suppress civic freedoms.

The 2025 quake, which left tens of thousands displaced, was "a profound human tragedy compounded by harmful State response," the report said.

Citing the junta's use of the 2022 Organization Registration Law - which criminalizes unregistered associations - the group found that authorities imposed arbitrary permissions on aid operations and created a hostile legal environment that "systematically obstructed and co-opted" relief efforts.

Aid workers faced a web of travel bans, checkpoints, and curfews that blocked access to affected areas. Independent media were silenced, while the regime enforced an information blackout through censorship and propaganda. Civil society volunteers were reportedly subjected to arbitrary arrests, violence, and politically motivated prosecutions.

Despite the repression, the report highlights that informal and unregistered local network operated clandestinely to deliver life-saving aid, reflecting "profound resilience" among Myanmar's grassroots organizations.

ICNL urged the international community to recognize these informal networks and channel direct funding to them, bypassing military-controlled mechanisms. It also called for sustained diplomatic pressure on the junta to repeal restrictive laws and restore civic space, warning that the military remains "the primary obstacle to a rights-respecting civil society response to natural disasters."

Photo: Supplied

## BEHIND THE MYANMAR JUNTA'S RAID ON KK PARK

### DON PATHAN

The Myanmar military junta attempted to score a public relations victory during the recent ASEAN summit in Kuala Lumpur by demonstrating its willingness to crack down on scam centers operating in Karen State, adjacent to Thailand's Mae Sot district in Tak province.

After attacking positions held by the Karen National Union's (KNU) 6th Brigade, Myanmar troops entered portions of the notorious KK Park, a major scam hub linked to Chinese crime syndicates. They confiscated 30 Starlink devices that scammers had been using in recent years after Thailand, under pressure from both the United States and China, disrupted internet connections to these call centers by redirecting relay boxes on utility poles and ordering power lines running from Thailand to cease operations.

A turning point came in January 2025, when China intensified pressure on Thailand to take drastic action, including cutting off power supplies, fuel, and imposing stricter controls on internet connectivity. Chinese Assistant Minister of Public Security Liu Zhongyi visited Mae Sot and Myawaddy twice in early 2025 to witness the crackdown firsthand.

More than 7,000 operators, mostly Chinese nationals, were released from these centers and sent across the border into Thailand for processing and repatriation. Chinese charter planes stood ready to transport their nationals back home to either face charges or, if fortunate, be treated as human trafficking

victims, depending on interrogation outcomes.

The scam centers adapted to Thailand's obstruction by acquiring massive generators capable of powering the 30 or so compounds dotting the Myanmar side of the Moei River, which serves as the natural border with Thailand. Starlink satellite systems replaced Thai internet service providers, while fuel became significantly more expensive—though nothing is truly unobtainable in this rugged corner of Southeast Asia, where warlords, drug barons, ethnic rebel militias, resistance forces, and Myanmar government troops compete for control.

Until February 2025, two commercial flights filled with Chinese tourists would arrive daily in Mae Sot from Bangkok. This border town, known primarily as a major cross-border trading hub between Thailand and Myanmar, served as the gateway to an open secret: these "tourists" were actually headed to casinos, brothels, entertainment complexes, karaoke bars, and unregulated online gambling operations on the Myanmar side. "They just have to remember to return before their Thai visas expire," said a Thai police officer in Mae Sot.

The two flights is a thing of the past as Thai officials, in line with measures imposed on foreign nationals after Liu's visit to the region.

The US Institute of Peace estimated that by the end of 2023, the annual value of funds stolen worldwide

by Chinese syndicates operating from Myanmar and other locations in mainland Southeast Asia reached approximately \$64 billion.

In response to Chinese and Thailand's pressure, the DKBA and KNA/BGF quickly abandoned their profitable landlord arrangements and began rounding up scam operators. This started in February 2025 and continued for several months.

The strict measures following Liu's two visits may have disrupted operations temporarily, but in reality they created a balloon effect: squeeze one area and activity pops up elsewhere. Phayathonezu, an area controlled by the rebels near the Three Pagodas Pass opposite Thailand's Kanchanaburi province, exemplifies how these illicit businesses are relocating from the Myawaddy area. Other syndicates maintained low profiles temporarily, planning to reemerge once attention subsided, while others moved deeper into the country.

The deportation of approximately 7,000 individuals since March 2025 damaged the illicit operations but didn't eliminate them. While the two daily planeloads of Chinese nationals arriving in Mae Sot may have ended, these syndicates still operate cyber scam centers generating substantial income.

"Chinese businesses rent these complexes and convert them into entertainment and gambling outlets that operate in a gray area—not exactly illegal but certainly unregulated. However, portions of these complexes are designated specifically for online scamming operations," explained a plainclothes Thai police officer in Mae Sot who has a front-row view of these illicit activities.

"The Karen militias controlling the area—whether they have ceasefire agreements with the Myanmar government, like the Karen National Army (KNA) and the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), or the Karen National Union (KNU), which is still fighting the government—none of them want scrutiny of what these Chinese businesses are actually doing," said the officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"They collect substantial rent money, and villagers in areas under their control gain employment. Thai people also benefit from their presence." He pointed to the heightening of real estate prices around Mae Sot, saying being a merely stop-over has its benefits.

Last week's attack on a portion of KK Park failed to convince observers, despite generating some international headlines when roughly 1,000 foreign nationals fled the park into Myawaddy and across

to the Thai side of the border. Unfortunately for the Myanmar government, the incident generated little interest among ASEAN leaders, who were preoccupied with hosting US President Donald Trump, who had come to Malaysia to witness the signing of a peace deal between Thailand and Cambodia.

More significantly, according to a member of the DKBA militia group, the Myanmar military's advance into KK Park disrupted the existing arrangements between Chinese crime syndicates and their respective landlords—namely the KNA, DKBA, and KNU.

"The offensive against KK Park created considerable anxiety among these Chinese syndicates, who never move around this part of Myanmar without security details," said a DKBA officer who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"While the Karen groups receive rent and certain benefits from these Chinese syndicates in exchange for broad protection guarantees, it's the armed bodyguards and security personnel who provide the immediate defensive line for these Chinese bosses and managers. Not all these guards are ethnically Chinese, but they are fluent in Chinese," he added.

Myanmar was able to advance on KNU positions in recent months and weeks because the BGF/KNA assisted them, according to the Thai officer.

The KNA is a 7,000-strong force led by Col. Chit Thu, a Karen warlord with extensive business interests and connections throughout Myanmar and Thailand.

One observer of the situation along the Thailand-Myanmar border suggested that Chit Thu is no longer satisfied with merely collecting rent—he wants a direct share of profits from these scam centers, according to a source with direct dealings with ethnic armed organizations in Myanmar.

The DKBA, a much smaller outfit with just over 1,000 troops, might outlive its usefulness as a member of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement if the Myanmar government sees no reason to maintain the relationship. Fortunately for the DKBA, the recent attack on the KNU's 6th Brigade and incursion into KK Park did little to change international perception of Myanmar's military government.

"If the world viewed the Myanmar junta as the good guys, they wouldn't have stopped at the KNU 6th Brigade—they would have targeted a low-hanging fruit like the DKBA," said the Thai police officer in Mae Sot.

*Don Pathan is a Thailand-based development professional and security analyst.*



## **NUG EXPRESSES WILLINGNESS TO WORK WITH GLOBAL PARTNERS AGAINST ONLINE SCAM NETWORKS IN MYANMAR**

**T**he National Unity Government (NUG) has voiced its support for international efforts to combat cross-border crimes, including online scam syndicates, and expressed its readiness to cooperate in these initiatives.

U Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson for the Prime Minister's Office of the NUG, made the remarks during a "Public and International Briefing" held on 28 October.

"The National Unity Government is establishing a task force to combat transnational organized crime and to ensure the effective implementation of its anti-transnational crime program," U Nay Phone Latt said.

He cautioned against falling into the trap set by the junta, which has been using certain online scam operations as a pretext for its actions.

He added that the Border Guard Force operates under the control of the junta, making the military leadership deeply complicit in the online scam business.

Following the junta's raid on the KK Park scam complex on 19 October, reports of a possible second operation have triggered a mass escape of scam workers across the border into Thailand. At least four explosions were also reported inside the compound.

According to Thai media, fragments from the explosions flew across the border into Thai territory.

Meanwhile, the Karen National Union (KNU) has denied the junta's allegations that it profits from the KK Park online scam operation in Myawaddy Township, Karen State, by renting land and providing security for the complex.

Recently, Justice for Myanmar (JFM) reported that the Border Guard Force (BGF) is directly involved in the security and management of the KK Park scam compound.



Bangkok. Photo: AFP

## INDIA TO FLY HOME 500 FROM THAILAND AFTER SCAM HUB RAID: THAI PM

India was to repatriate 500 of its citizens from Thailand after a crackdown on a Myanmar scam hub led to workers fleeing over the border, the Thai prime minister said 29 October.

Sprawling compounds where internet tricksters target people with romance and business cons have thrived along Myanmar's loosely governed border during its civil war, sparked by a 2021 coup.

Since last week one of the most notorious hubs -- KK Park -- has been roiled by apparent raids, with hundreds fleeing over the frontier river to the Thai town of Mae Sot.

The upheaval followed an AFP investigation which this month revealed rapid construction at border scam centres, despite a much-publicised crackdown in February.

More than 1,500 people from 28 countries had crossed into Thailand between the start of the crackdown on KK Park and Tuesday evening, according to the administration of the border province of Tak.

"Nearly 500 Indians are at Mae Sot," Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters. "The Indian government will send a plane to take them back

directly."

Many people staffing the fraud factories say they were trafficked into the hubs, although analysts say workers also go willingly to secure attractive salary offers.

Anutin did not say whether the Indian nationals were being treated as criminals or victims, and the Indian embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Experts say Myanmar's military has long turned a blind eye to scam centres which profit its militia allies who are crucial collaborators in their fight against rebels.

But the junta has also faced pressure to shut down scam operations from its military backer China, irked at its citizens both participating in and being targeted by the scams.

The February crackdown saw around 7,000 workers repatriated and Thailand enforce a cross-border internet blockade in a bid to throttle off the fraud factories.

AFP



Garment workers in a factory in Yangon.  
Photo: AFP

## EUROCHAM MYANMAR WELCOMES RELEASE OF DETAINED TRADE UNION LEADERS

On 26 October, the European Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar welcomed the release of three labour rights advocates and emphasized the need for strong trade unions to uphold fair labour standards in Myanmar, and aligning with the due diligence of European companies.

The statement is as follows.

EuroCham Myanmar recognizes the vital role of effective trade unions in safeguarding responsible business operations and fair labour standards in

Myanmar. The unimpeded work of Myanmar's trade unions is essential in supporting and ensuring an environment that complies with the heightened due diligence efforts of European brands and businesses operating in or sourcing from Myanmar. EuroCham Myanmar remains committed to working with key stakeholders - including trade unions, business chambers and associations to improve industrial relations and help uphold international labour rights and standards in Myanmar, such as the Conventions on Freedom of Association and Forced Labour.



Signing the petition.  
Photo: Supplied

## MYANMAR CITIZENS IN JAPAN URGE TRUMP TO HELP FREE AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND RESTORE PEACE

**M**yanmar citizens in Japan have sent an open letter to U.S. President Donald Trump, currently visiting Tokyo, urging him to help secure the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and to support efforts toward restoring peace and democracy in Myanmar.

The letter, addressed directly to Trump, was accompanied by signatures collected through a campaign organized by Myanmar communities in Japan calling for international action to pressure the military junta. The campaign was initiated by the Hands of Peace group, which said the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi remains their foremost priority.

"The priority is the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the restoration of peace in Myanmar," a member of Hands of Peace told Mizzima. "We believe global leaders, especially the United States, can play a decisive role in ending the suffering of Myanmar's people."

According to the organizers, the open letter highlights the worsening human rights situation under military rule, the ongoing armed conflict across the country, and the imprisonment of political leaders and activists. The appeal calls for stronger U.S. engagement and coordinated international efforts to secure Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's release and end the junta's violent suppression of civilians.

In addition to the letter, several Myanmar

organizations in Japan have begun forming a joint committee dedicated to advocating for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's release. The Hands of Peace group is participating in the initiative and has already started its activities, including outreach to Japanese lawmakers and civil society groups.

U.S. President Donald Trump departed Malaysia for Japan on the morning of 27 October after attending the ASEAN Summit and related meetings. His visit to Tokyo has drawn attention from Myanmar communities abroad, who hope to gain U.S. support for democratic restoration in their homeland.

The Myanmar military seized power in a coup in February 2021, overthrowing the elected government led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. She has since been charged with 19 offenses and sentenced to a total of 27 years in prison. Her exact place of detention remains undisclosed.

Similarly, President U Win Myint was charged with eight offenses and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Both remain in military custody.

Myanmar citizens in Japan say their campaign will continue until international pressure compels the junta to release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners, and until peace and civilian governance are restored in the country.



The festival in Taunggyi.  
Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR FIREWORKS FESTIVAL GOERS SHUN POLITICS FOR TRADITION

**G**oat, hippo and duck-shaped hot air balloons floated in clear blue skies over war-ravaged Myanmar this week in a rare opportunity for escapism.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed since the military grabbed power in a 2021 coup, sparking a civil war between the junta and allied pro-democracy rebels and ethnic minority armed groups.

But there was a muted celebratory air as teams loaded candles and fireworks onto the homemade airships, part of the annual Tazaungdaing hot air balloon festival in northern Shan state's Taunggyi city.

Crowds hoot and cheer as the contraptions float into the darkening sky, while referees judge the magnificence of their aerial explosions.

"Frankly speaking, we felt happier in the past," said local resident Myo Ko, who has attended the festival in years past. "There was no politics. That kind of feeling is the best."

Despite the usual crowds of thousands, the feeling of self-restraint was more evident this year, the 30-year-old told AFP.

"All our ethnic brothers used to take part freely and happily. I want to get those times back."

Shan state has been rocked by fighting since June 2024 when an alliance of ethnic armed groups renewed

an offensive against the military along a trade highway to China.

The junta is trumpeting elections scheduled to start in December as an opportunity for reconciliation.

Taunggyi resident Di Lone, 50, said politics was the last thing on his mind at the cultural heritage event he has cherished since childhood.

"Politics is politics. Festival is festival. We keep them separate. It's not related," he said.

But while the conflict may have dented spirits, it has not dented numbers.

"It was very crowded since my childhood," Di Lone said. "It will be crowded even after I die."

There is no official death toll for Myanmar's civil war and estimates vary widely.

However more than 85,000 people have been killed on all sides since the 2021 coup according to non-profit monitoring group Armed Conflict Location & Data (ACLED).

Myo Ko noted more corporate sponsorship at the festival in recent years and lamented the loss of past camaraderie.

"We want to be happy like before," he said. "That's it."

AFP



IDPs living in a forest, taking shelter from Myanmar junta forces. Photo: AFP

# 'JUST WAR' IN MYANMAR - INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF CONFLICT IN BURMA

ASHLEY SOUTH

*The war in Myanmar is a case of good versus evil - or at least of war criminals versus freedom fighters.*

Since seizing power in February 2021, the military junta has committed systematic and widespread human rights abuses, including air-strikes and other massacres of civilians. Against this injustice, anti-junta forces are struggling for human rights, self-determination and democracy. Their cause - which receives very little international support - is just, and is mostly fought in compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

Just War theory and IHL contain two (in principle, separate) 'regimes of law': jus ad bellum (just cause of war) and jus in bello (just conduct of conflict). Anti-junta forces in Myanmar have justice on their side, both in terms of the cause of war (jus ad bellum), and the conduct of hostilities (jus in bello). While diverse anti-junta forces endeavor (mostly successfully) to fight in accordance with basic principles of humanity, ethics and religion, the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC) demonstrates a pattern of deliberate targeting of civilians, in contravention of international law.

## JUST CAUSE OF CONFLICT

The Charter of the United Nations regulates whether a state may lawfully resort to armed force against another state (jus ad bellum). The Charter prohibits such use of force with two exceptions: cases of self-defence against an armed attack, and when the use of armed force is authorized by the UN Security

Council.

It can be argued that Ethnic Armed Organisations, and related state-based bodies, constitute autonomous and legitimate political authorities - de facto (if not de jure) states. These groups are fighting anti-colonial wars of defense against an invasive, alien, violent and predatory militarized state. Myanmar is an as-yet unresolved case of post-colonial conflict, caused by an unjust transfer of power by the British colonial regime to the then Burmese independence movement.

The junta frames conflict around the Myanmar Army's historic self-appointed role, defending and holding together a militarised, centralised and intrinsically Bama majority-dominated nation, through a combination of repression, violence and criminality, and military occupation of ethnic homelands. This has been a moderately successful strategy - but an illegitimate political project and racist, assimilationist fascist ideology, with roots in the colonial era, and the Burma Independence Army's origins in the Japanese Imperial Army.

Crucially however in Myanmar, the 'government' does not have a monopoly on use of force, and in fact presently controls less than half of the country's territory. Long-standing Ethnic Resistance Organisations, and Peoples Defence Forces established by a new generation of insurgents since the coup, control about a

third of the country. They are deeply opposed to rigged elections planned for later in the year by the junta, and are broadly committed to the values and practice of human rights, self-determination and democracy. These are just and admirable war aims, which enjoy widespread support across different ethnic and other stakeholder groups. Anti-junta forces can justifiably be said to defend Myanmar from the SSPC, while Ethnic Resistance Organisations are defending their ethnolinguistic communities and homelands from violent attack and invasion by the militarised state.

Diverse anti-junta forces, many of which only took up arms after the military stole power in the February 2021 coup, aim to establish federalism as a democratic political framework; they are fighting for human rights in Myanmar. The common anti-junta war aim is to achieve peace through justice.

### JUST CONDUCT IN CONFLICT

Based on the principle of humanity, and recognition of the unique value of every person, IHL seeks to protect civilians and other non-combatants (e.g. prisoners of war), by limiting the extent and impacts of hostilities on civilians and non-combatants. This 'law of war' is based on a number of treaties, in particular the Geneva Conventions (I-IV) of 1949, and Additional Protocols of 1977 (APs I and II) and 2005 (AP III). Usually applied to interstate conflicts, the Geneva Conventions can also be applied to internal conflicts or civil wars, through Common Article III which addresses military conflict within a state and which explicitly seeks to prohibit violence towards non-combatants.

The Myanmar Army and its proxies commit well-documented, widespread and systematic violations of IHL, including regular massacres (often but not only through air-strikes on civilians), rape and murder, destruction of schools, hospitals and religious structures and civilian housing, extortion and looting, and environmental crimes. In a recent egregious example, on 6 October the military launched explosive-laden para-gliders against a civilian Buddhist festival in Sagaing killing at least 30 people. The junta's disproportionate use of force, and targeting of civilians constitute prima facie war crimes.

It must be acknowledged that anti-junta forces sometimes violate IHL, including perpetrating rape and murder. However, such incidents are much less prevalent than in junta-controlled areas, and show no signs of being systematic. Indeed, while SSPC violations are characterised by strategic intent and impunity, Ethnic Resistance Organisations, People's

Defence Forces and the National Unity Government are making significant efforts to hold perpetrators to account in terms of domestic and international law, norms and standards.

Anti-junta forces do more than just protecting civilian communities. A handful of Ethnic Resistance Organisations and emergent state-based bodies also provide governance and services to some of the most vulnerable populations in Southeast Asia, including local language education for more than a million marginalised ethnic nationality children in the war zones. As International aid agencies have little or access to the conflict zones of Myanmar, local armed and civil society actors are the only ones on the ground helping communities traumatised by repeated attacks and forced displacement. These local initiatives demonstrate deep compassion and solidarity with the victims of injustice and violence.

International humanitarian agencies have over the past several decades developed a set of principles for humanitarian action. Discussion of the 'humanitarian imperative', and Principles of impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and independence are beyond the scope of this brief essay. Among these operational principles of the International Red Cross movement, neutrality is often contested - particularly in situations where there is clear justice or injustice on one side of a conflict. In such contexts, positions of 'humanitarian solidarity' - or even Humanitarian Resistance - may be more appropriate. Indeed, In the context of Myanmar's intersectional Spring Revolution, resistance to the military is deeply connected to the struggles of resilient communities and long-standing ethnic nations.

The humanitarian imperative demands basic aid for the victims of armed conflict in Myanmar - who can only be reached in partnership with anti junta-forces and related civil society actors. Furthermore, Myanmar represents a rare opportunity to 'do the right thing', with useful geopolitical benefits: in supporting the struggle for human rights, self-determination and democracy in Burma, well-wishes can balance against the influences of China and Russia, which have rushed in to fill the gap left by the withdrawal of US support in 2025.

Dr Ashley South is a Senior Research Fellow at Chiang Mai University. Most of his publications (and films) are available on: [www.AshleySouth.co.uk](http://www.AshleySouth.co.uk). You can follow Ashley on Substack: <https://frogmortpress.substack.com/>



## FREE 3D-PRINTED PROSTHESES PUT HOPE IN ARM'S REACH FOR MYANMAR WAR AMPUTEES IN THAI BORDER TOWN

**ANIS NABILAH AZLEE AND TARYN NG**

*As Myanmar's civil war leaves more survivors with limb loss, a lab in Thailand's Mae Sot is turning to 3D printing to cut costs and streamline prosthetic production.*

**M**AE SOT, Thailand — The morning he was shot in January last year, rebel soldier Pan Pan, 31, was on his way to collect a meal pack from the administrative members of his resistance group, the White Tiger Battalion.

It was seven in the morning; early and quiet — too early, the Burmese frontline soldier thought, to bother putting on his helmet as he walked along the Asian Highway in Kawkareik township, Myanmar.

That was when the bullet from a sniper, ricocheting off a nearby brick, tore through the rebel soldier's right ear and came straight out his nose.

He does not remember much after that.

To save him, doctors removed a large part of his skull and brain on the right side, leaving him blind in one eye and with a deep, soft indent in his head. He became extremely vulnerable — any accidental impact could prove fatal.

For the past year and a half, Mr Pan lived cautiously. He slept only on his left side, constantly protecting his head from harm.

But now, a free custom 3D-printed skull cover, provided by non-profit organisation Burma Children Medical Fund (BCMF), offers Mr Pan an added layer of protection.

Beneath his unassuming black cap, the cover — fastened with Velcro — sits snugly atop his sunken skull.

"Now, I don't need to worry that I might fall down again," he said.

Myanmar's conflict is creating more survivors like Mr Pan, who are wounded and in need of long-term, specialised medical support.

### Rising casualties

Widespread resistance spread across the country after the military forcefully seized power in 2021, with civilians taking up arms to resist the regime's brutal campaign. The military retaliated with airstrikes and mass arrests, silencing opposing voices with deadly force.

At least 6,000 civilians have been killed by Myanmar's military in the past four years, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners,

a Thailand-based rights group founded by Burmese former political prisoners living in exile.

In 2023, the country recorded the world's highest number of new annual casualties, with more than 1,000 deaths caused by antipersonnel landmines and explosive remnants of war, the Landmine Monitor Report 2024 found.

Survivors face devastating long-term consequences: burns, amputation, and other life-altering injuries. The need for specialised care and prosthetics has soared.

### Printing out hope in plastic

To help satisfy this growing need for prostheses, BCMF is turning to unlikely solutions: plastic filaments and 3D printers.

Founded in 2006 to help children along the Thai-Myanmar border access complex surgeries, BCMF later expanded its services to support other vulnerable groups.

In 2019, founder Kanchana Thornton met a boy with a birth defect that disallowed him to walk on his own. He was too young to undergo the limb amputation needed to fit prosthetics.

Determined to help, research led Mrs Thornton to a documentary about a man who 3D prints prosthetic limbs in his garage.

Inspired, she contacted him, and he assured her 3D printing was easy — requiring just a printer and free software to start.

With A\$10,000 (S\$8,491) in seed funding from a donor, BCMF started its 3D printing lab with two printers.

It now has six machines and has produced free 3D-printed prostheses for 150 patients, some of whom have received multiple medical devices.

This year, lead technician and former clinical nurse Aung Tin Tun, helped produce 40 unique assistive devices for patients.

These range from “simple” designs, which can be produced in four to six hours, like cosmetic hand prostheses, to functional limbs, which can comprise over 100 parts and take a full day to print.

Most recently, Mr Tun produced an above-elbow arm prosthesis fitted with springs and silicone grip pads so patient Thar Ki, 28 can clutch the handlebar of his motorcycle.

Three years ago, the former rebel soldier was testing handbombs when a grenade went off unexpectedly in his right hand.

“After the accident, I felt like I couldn't do anything anymore,” Mr Ki said.

Now, with his 3D-printed arm, he can ride his motorcycle again.

At a typical hospital, Mr Ki would have had to fork out upwards of 40,000 baht (S\$1,605) for the prosthesis he received — a hefty price for migrants like him who are usually unemployed or paid under Thailand's official minimum wage of 337-400 baht (approx. S\$14.13).



Injured men try on their prostheses.

While the manufacturing cost of 3D printing a typical prosthetic arm averages around US\$100 (S\$129.36), BCMF covers the cost fully for migrants and refugees.

Mrs Thornton said that BCMF spends some US\$30,000 (S\$38,800) to keep the 3D printing lab operational every year.

### Quality at no cost to patients

Despite being free, the prostheses undergo rigorous testing before being handed to patients.

Using open-source designs found online, Mr Tun's team "remixes" and customises each part to a patient's scanned measurements on a 3D printing software.

Strings and springs are then tested for tension, to tailor the grip to natural hand movement.

"If the design is not good, we won't give it to the recipients," said Mr Tun.

While an artificial limb can be printed within 24 hours, the process is not always smooth. Occasionally, printer nozzles jam, sudden power cuts halt production, and prototypes fail. Each error means wasted time, materials, and money.

Still, he says it is worth it.

"For me, it's just a very small amount of contribution. But for the patients, it's very impactful in their daily lives," he said.

### Learning on the job

Due to the niche nature of the work, most of the team at BCMF lack formal expertise in biomedical engineering or 3D printing.

Mr Tun, for instance, had just three weeks of hands-on experience in a Thai hospital to learn about 3D printing. Traditional prosthetists typically train for years.

"Sometimes we'll have an idea for a specific design but we cannot fully utilise the software," he said. "I'm still learning every day."

To bridge this gap, BCMF brings in external experts and student interns from Canada's Queen's University, who assist with software and production.

### The weight plastic limbs can't bear

Dr Trevor Binedell, principal prosthetist at Singapore's Tan Tock Seng Hospital, said that despite its promise, 3D-printed devices are generally less robust and adjustable than traditional options.

Materials used, like thermoplastic polyurethane — commonly used in the production of shoe soles and

hoses — are not durable enough to bear human weight, leaving BCMF currently unable to make prosthetic legs.

Patients with lower limb amputations have to find their footing at a traditional prosthetic production unit in the famous Mae Tao Clinic (MTC) instead.

Located just a short walk apart within MTC's compound, the two departments frequently collaborate to better serve patients. Occasionally, BCMF will 3D print prosthetic parts at the other's request.

The traditional cast-and-mould methods take technicians up to five days to make a leg, but the casting process provides patients with better fit and control, Dr Binedell said.

"While (3D printing) technology is promising, it still needs time to mature before it can consistently meet the demands of lower-limb applications," he added.

### Room for improvement

Although free prostheses have helped patients become more confident in daily life, comfort and weight remain a challenge.

Mr Pan jokes that if he wears his skull cover for too long, he might start leaning to one side.

As for Mr Ki, he only uses his prosthetic arm when riding his motorcycle as he feels it is too heavy for daily wear — he estimates it weighs about a kilogram.

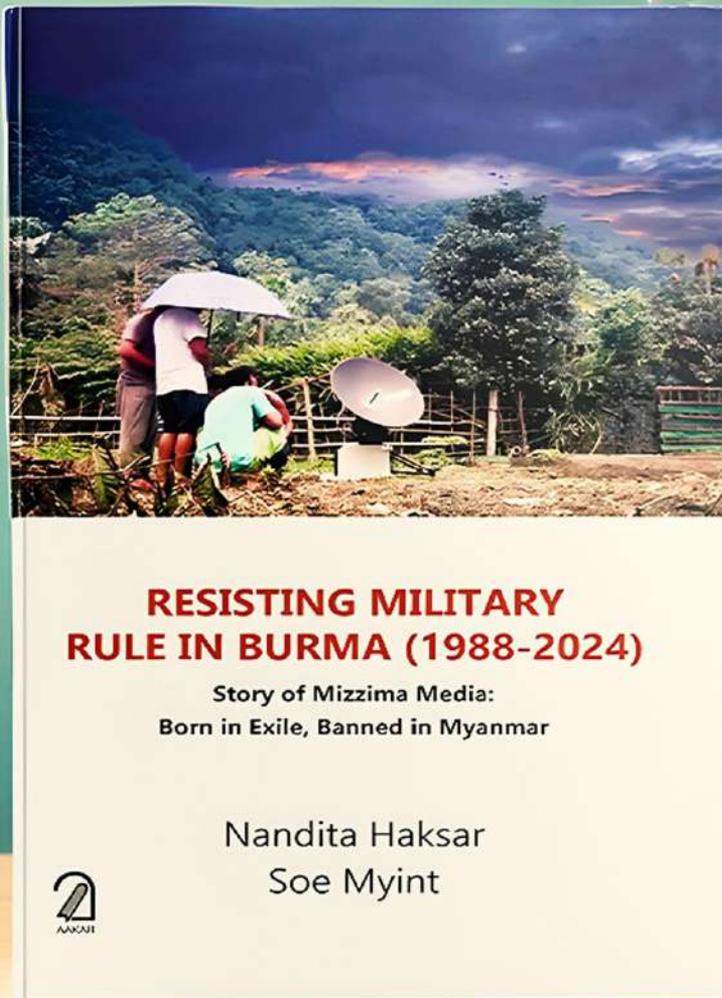
"I can't really complain because it's free and I appreciate the help," he said. "But if they make a lighter one, I might use it more often."

3D printing technology may not be perfect — but for survivors in Mae Sot like Mr Ki and Mr Pan, it makes all the difference.



RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)  
**STORY OF MIZZIMA MEDIA:  
BORN IN EXILE, BANNED IN  
MYANMAR**

*by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint*



Published by  
**AAKAR BOOKS**

**TO PURCHASE THE BOOK ON AMAZON, CLICK HERE:**

<https://amzn.in/d/5n9Lkhd>

**TO DONATE AND HELP MIZZIMA'S WORK:**

<https://donate.mizzima.com/>



## PHILIPPINES TO TAKE ASEAN CHAIR WITH FOCUS ON SOUTH CHINA SEA

Malaysia handed over the chairmanship of Southeast Asia's regional bloc to the Philippines on Tuesday, with territorial disputes in the South China Sea set to dominate its agenda when Manila takes charge in 2026.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who will remain chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) until the end of the year, symbolically passed the gavel to Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos at the close of a summit in Kuala Lumpur.

"On the first day of 2026, ASEAN will begin a new chapter," Anwar said.

The Philippines is one of four ASEAN member states, along with Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam, that have contesting claims in the South China Sea linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

This has put them at odds with China, which has its own sweeping assertions of sovereignty over the strategic waterway despite an international ruling in 2016 concluding this has no legal basis.

Tensions between Beijing and Manila have been particularly fraught, with maritime confrontations occurring regularly.

"The South China Sea only becomes an area of focus when incidents on the ground heat up... and they have been heating up," a Southeast Asian diplomat told AFP at the ASEAN summit, speaking on condition of anonymity.

ASEAN and China have been negotiating a code of conduct to regulate behaviour in the contested maritime area, aiming to secure an agreement by next year -- more than two decades since the idea was first proposed.

Marcos told the Kuala Lumpur summit that "there are positive outcomes to be gained if we commit to cooperation and meaningful engagement, especially in the South China Sea."

But Manila-based geopolitical analyst Don McLain Gill told AFP that while the Philippines is expected to stress maritime security, any pact China would agree to would likely lack teeth.

Diplomats and analysts say Manila will push to prevent further escalation and to promote cooperation with Beijing.

Areas of potential cooperation include ocean meteorology, which is crucial for maritime safety, as well as mechanisms to ensure access to fishing grounds.

As ASEAN chair, the Philippines will also shoulder the bloc's role in Myanmar, mired in civil war since a 2021 military coup.

"It is important for the Philippine government not to let the South China Sea issue eclipse the other priorities of ASEAN," said Mustafa Izzuddin, an international analyst at Solaris Strategies Singapore.

With Myanmar preparing for elections on December 28, diplomatic sources told AFP that ASEAN would not send observers -- a setback to the junta's push for international legitimacy -- although individual member states may do so.

Manila will face the task of forging a collective ASEAN stance, including on whether to invite junta leaders back to regional meetings which they have been barred from since the coup.

It will also oversee talks to appoint a permanent envoy for Myanmar.

AFP



## RADIO FREE ASIA SUSPENDS OPERATIONS AFTER TRUMP CUTS AND SHUTDOWN

**R**adio Free Asia, founded nearly three decades ago to report on China and other Asian countries without independent media, said Wednesday it will halt production after the US government ceased funding.

The broadcaster had already laid off or furloughed more than 90 percent of staff and drastically scaled back production since President Donald Trump's administration in March axed most money to US government-funded media.

Long a thorn in Beijing's side, RFA's closure comes just as Trump meets Chinese President Xi Jinping on an Asia trip and looks for better relations.

Some of Trump's cuts were successfully challenged before courts, but Radio Free Asia faced a new halt to funding due to the shutdown of the federal government, which has lasted nearly a month.

RFA said it would have no choice but to halt all news production effective Friday, the first time it has done so since it went on air in 1996.

Bay Fang, the president and CEO of RFA, said the decision means that remaining money can go to severance packages for staff who will now be formally let go.

"Our strategy all along has been to protect our people for as long as possible," she told AFP.

She said that Radio Free Asia was open to receiving new revenue streams so it could resume.

"We're trying to preserve what we would need to start back up," Fang said.

"I do feel like it's a fight against the clock. We have to get this funding as quickly as possible," she said.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which was founded during the Cold War to broadcast inside the Soviet bloc and was a loose inspiration for RFA, has survived in part due to pledges of support by European governments led by the Czech Republic.

Voice of America, which unlike the others was directly part of the US government, ground to a halt immediately after the Trump cuts, with its English-language website still featuring a top story on US lawmakers averting a government shutdown -- in March.

### 'Gift' to Beijing?

Radio Free Asia has long infuriated Beijing, which accuses it of "false news." Hu Xijin, former editor-in-chief of the state-run Global Times, in March called action against RFA "truly gratifying."

Trump has long railed against media and questions why the government should fund coverage that may be unfavorable.

Shutting the broadcaster, which produced news in multiple Asian languages, "is a gift to dictators like Xi Jinping" especially "at a time when Beijing has worked quite assiduously to control what stories can and can't get told the country," said Sophie Richardson, co-executive director of the Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders.

Richardson, a veteran scholar of rights in China, noted that Trump has also terminated funding for non-governmental groups that documented developments in the country.

"I think in the not too distant future we'll see more clearly whether there are topics that become much harder to write about -- or aren't written about anymore -- because we aren't able to verify or confirm things or research trends," she said.

Nicholas Burns, the US ambassador to China under former president Joe Biden, wrote on X that shuttering RFA was a "major mistake" that "will prevent us from telling the truth to the Chinese people and countering Beijing's propaganda."

RFA said that China has already taken transmission signals vacated by the outlet and has increased its own broadcasting in Uyghur and Tibetan.

Radio Free Asia was a rare outlet with a Uyghur-language service not linked to Beijing and was at the forefront of reporting on mass detention camps set up for members of the mostly Muslim ethnic group in China's Xinjiang region.

RFA also recently won two Edward R. Murrow Awards, a US prize for broadcasting, for a series on young people in Myanmar coping with the aftermath of the 2021 coup.

RFA laid off its stringers in Myanmar a day before a devastating March earthquake.

Nonetheless, during the earthquake "we saw our numbers really skyrocket in terms of social media engagement, because we were that last man standing, so to speak," RFA spokesman Rohit Mahajan said.

"We're able to be that voice, that news, in that language, reporting on things like the weather and not just political insurrection or political dealings," he said.

AFP



Photo: AFP

## TRUMP AND XI EASE FIGHT ON TRADE TARIFFS AND RARE EARTHS

**D**onald Trump and Xi Jinping agreed on 30 October to calm the trade war between China and the United States that has roiled global markets, with Washington cutting some tariffs and Beijing committing to keep supplies of critical rare earths flowing.

Trump called his first meeting with Xi in six years a "great success", while the Chinese leader said the two reached an "important consensus" towards solving the fight between the world's two top economies.

"I thought it was an amazing meeting," Trump said after the talks in Busan, South Korea, praising Xi as a "tremendous leader of a very powerful country" and saying he would visit China in April.

Trump added that the deal included China immediately buying "tremendous amounts of soybeans

and other farm products", a key issue for Trump's support in farm country and a point of leverage for Beijing.

The US leader said the talks yielded an extendable one-year deal on China's supply of crucial rare earths, materials that are essential for sophisticated electronic components across a range of industries.

Beijing's commerce ministry also confirmed it would suspend for one year certain export restrictions, including on rare earth materials, a sector where China is hugely dominant.

"All the rare earths has been settled, and that's for the world," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One.

Xi said a "consensus" had been reached and urged "follow-up work as soon as possible".

Trump added that the Chinese leader had also agreed to "work very hard to stop the flow" of deadly opioid fentanyl, a trade in which Washington has accused Beijing of being complicit.

"I put a 20-percent tariff on China because of the fentanyl coming in... and based on his statements today I am going to reduce that by 10 percent," Trump said.

And in social media post after leaving South Korea, Trump declared "Our Farmers will be very happy!" with the outcomes of the talks.

The former reality TV star went on to say in the post that Beijing would "begin the process of purchasing American Energy", potentially involving oil and gas from Alaska.

Officials from the United States and China would meet to hash out that "energy deal", he added.

### 'Partners and friends'

Neither leader made any public comments immediately after the talks, which lasted around an hour and 40 minutes.

Trump headed straight to Air Force One, waving and pumping his fist as he boarded the plane. The jet took off minutes later.

Xi was seen getting into his limousine outside the closed-door meeting.

Xi acknowledged before the meeting began in earnest that both sides did not always see eye to eye, but should strive to be "partners and friends".

"China and the US can jointly shoulder our responsibility as major countries and work together to accomplish more great and concrete things for the good of our two countries and the whole world," said Xi.

Sitting opposite each other, each leader was flanked by senior officials including Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Treasury chief Scott Bessent and Commerce

Secretary Howard Lutnick.

Xi's team, which arrived from Beijing shortly before -- the US side was already in South Korea -- included Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and Vice Premier He Lifeng.

### Crowning achievement

The meeting took place on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit of 21 countries in Gyeongju including the leaders of Japan, Australia and Canada.

It was the final stop on an Asia tour that saw Trump, 79, showered with praise and gifts, including a replica of an ancient Korean golden crown.

In Japan, new Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said she would nominate Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize and gave him a putter and a gold-plated golf ball.

However, Trump's hopes of a re-run of his 2019 meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at the Demilitarized Zone frontier were dashed.

Trump said though that they would meet in the "not too distant future" and that he would like to "straighten out" tensions between North and South Korea.

One surprise in the talks could have been if Xi had brought up Taiwan, with speculation that Beijing might press Trump to water down US backing for the self-ruled island.

But Trump said that Taiwan "never came up. That was not discussed actually."

AFP

# CHINA'S CYBER WARFARE STRATEGY: FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA'S TESTING GROUND TO GLOBAL THREAT

**SUN LEE**

On October 19, 2025, the China-linked hacking group “Salt Typhoon” attempted to breach a European telecommunications provider using advanced techniques and Citrix NetScaler Gateway vulnerabilities. This marked yet another escalation in a campaign that has compromised telecom infrastructure in over 80 countries. The attack wasn’t an isolated incident, it was the latest iteration of a strategy Beijing has honed for decades, using Southeast Asia as a digital proving ground.

For the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Southeast Asia offers a low-risk, high-reward environment to refine cyber intrusion tactics. Governments in the region, wary of jeopardizing economic ties with China, often avoid public attribution. This reluctance has allowed Chinese state-backed actors to exploit hybrid

technology ecosystems across Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines, testing router exploits, VPN vulnerabilities, and lawful intercept bypasses.

These early campaigns like Operation Soft Cell (2018–2020) and APT40’s maritime targeting were not random. They were calculated rehearsals for broader operations. Techniques first deployed in ASEAN nations later reappeared in Western infrastructure attacks, with minimal adjustments. Yet Western intelligence agencies largely ignored these incidents, failing to recognize them as precursors to more devastating campaigns.

Western intelligence assessments often classify Chinese advanced persistent threat (APT) groups according to their targeted sectors—assigning distinct labels to those focused on military systems,

telecommunications, or operational technology. However, this compartmentalized view overlooks a deeper strategic reality. These entities are not isolated actors operating independently; rather, they function as integrated components of a broader, centrally coordinated national campaign. The cyber threat posed by China is significantly amplified by its seamless integration of digital operations across various arms of governance, enabling a unified and persistent approach to espionage, disruption, and strategic positioning.

This strategy enables seamless handoff between espionage and disruption units. An access point gained by one group can be repurposed for surveillance, sabotage, or strategic leverage. The CCP's cyber doctrine prioritizes stealth, persistence, and long-term positioning aimed not just at intelligence gathering but at enabling "Day One" disruption during geopolitical crises.

Salt Typhoon's high-profile breaches in the U.S. and Europe were preceded by years of reconnaissance in Southeast Asia. Public reporting links the group to espionage campaigns dating back to 2019, targeting government services and telecoms. Vietnam's Prime Minister warned in 2018 of alarming rates of malicious code transmission, a signal that went largely unheeded in the West.

Edge device exploitation targeting routers, firewalls, and VPNs was refined in ASEAN before being deployed against Western targets. APT40's maritime operations in Malaysia foreshadowed Volt Typhoon's later focus on U.S. ports and logistics. These patterns reveal a deliberate testing cycle: Southeast Asia is the lab; the West is the final target.

When Salt Typhoon breaches became public, affected companies faced regulatory scrutiny rather than support. This punitive response discouraged disclosure, allowing attackers to deepen their foothold.

The CCP's goal isn't just espionage its strategic leverage. By embedding disruptive capabilities across all 16 critical infrastructure sectors, Beijing can paralyze adversaries during a crisis.

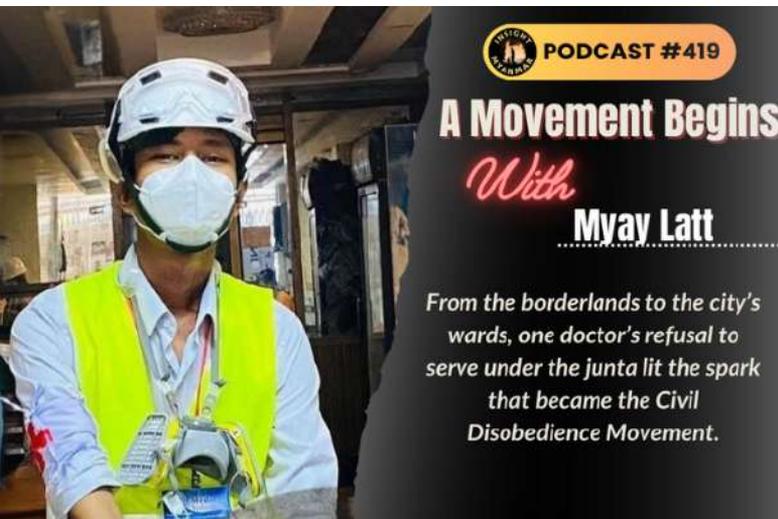
A Taiwan contingency, for example, could trigger coordinated cyber strikes: telecom networks disabled, traffic control systems failing, hospital databases inaccessible. These disruptions would degrade military readiness and enable mass surveillance, giving China a decisive edge.

Washington's response has long been reactive and fragmented. Salt Typhoon alone caused over \$15 billion in long-term damages. But recent developments offer hope. The 2024 CISA-Vietnam MOU and Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the Philippines present an opportunity to transform U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) into a proactive deterrence hub.

By linking cyber intrusions to tangible consequences like expedited radar transfers or accelerated cyber defence center timelines INDOPACOM can turn Beijing's espionage into a liability. Each intrusion would strengthen regional defences, forcing the CCP to reconsider the cost-benefit calculus of its cyber operations.

China's cyber campaigns are not isolated incidents they are the product of a long-term, state-directed strategy. Southeast Asia has provided the CCP with a critical intelligence advantage. The West must stop treating the region as peripheral and start leveraging its early warning signals. The question is no longer if Beijing will activate its pre-positioned access, but whether Washington will act before the next campaign moves from rehearsal to reality.

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



# A MOVEMENT BEGINS

“I’m just doing what is right, what is wrong, what’s the matter? What should I do as a human being?”

When Dr. Myay Latt graduated from medical school in Myanmar, he could have chosen a comfortable city posting, working in sterile rooms and predictable schedules. Instead, he took a motorbike to the edge of the map. His first assignment was in the Naga Self-Administered Zone — a place so remote it seemed to exist in another century. There were no roads, no electricity, no phone lines, and no money economy. In some villages, he was the first doctor anyone had ever met.

He set up clinics in bamboo huts, trained volunteer medics, and fought malaria, tuberculosis, and other diseases in conditions that tested every human limit. In those steep, misty hills, he fell right off its cliffs five times — and somehow lived through all of them. The villagers practiced barter instead of currency, settled disputes through elders instead of courts, and danced around bonfires for 24 hours straight to bless their harvests. There, he saw what the rest of Myanmar rarely did: the country’s immense, unacknowledged diversity.

“[The Naga] think I’m a strange person, they even stated so many times,” he says, laughing.

From Naga, he traveled to Chin State and Rakhine, serving communities scarred by conflict and neglect. In Chin, he once got lost in the jungle for a full day while trekking to remote villages, narrowly escaping landmines and armed patrols. In Rakhine, amid the ashes of the Rohingya crisis, he walked through areas where wooden signs warned, No Entry for Rohingya. The local medical officer told him bluntly, “If you go there and they decapitate you, it’s your problem\*.”\* He went anyway.

“I just want to heal people,” he says. “Not take sides. Just heal.”

Later, in Putao — Myanmar’s northernmost frontier — he lived among the Kachin mountains, organizing medical outreach missions to snow-capped villages that could only be reached by boat and on foot. He climbed the 12,000-foot Phonyin Razi, turning back just short of the summit when a snowstorm hit. In those mountains, he often slept in huts infested with leeches, waking up to find them fat with his blood. He laughs it off — part of the life of a doctor in Myanmar’s wild north.

Even then, as he rode his motorbike along the edges of cliffs, he was becoming something more than a doctor. He was learning to see the country through the eyes of its many peoples — Nagas, Chins, Rohingya, Kachins — all of them Myanmar, all abandoned by the same state. He began to realize that medicine was not only about treating wounds. It was about healing the fractures of a nation.

## CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/10/21/episode-419-a-movement-begins>



## ARNC STATEMENT CONDEMNS MYANMAR JUNTA'S INDISCRIMINATE BOMBING OF CIVILIANS

A statement released by the Arakan Rohingya National Council (ARNC) on 1 November strongly condemned the ongoing and indiscriminate bombing of civilian populations three townships of western Myanmar.

The text of the statement is as follows.

The Arakan Rohingya National Council (ARNC) expresses its strongest condemnation of the brutal airstrike carried out by the Myanmar military junta on October 30 and 31, 2025, in Ponnagyun, Kyauk Phyu and Rathedaung Townships, which resulted in numerous deaths and injuries.

This barbaric act, targeting innocent villagers with aerial bombs, is yet another manifestation of the junta's systematic campaign of terror against civilians across Myanmar. Such deliberate and indiscriminate attacks constitute clear violations of international humanitarian law and amount to war crimes.

As a people who have endured decades of state-sponsored violence, genocide, displacement, and now facing forced expulsion and erasure under Arakan Army, the Rohingya community is no stranger to these types of barbarity and we deeply understand the pain, fear, and sufferings that victims' relatives and their people are experiencing. We share their grief and stand in solidarity with the victims and their families.

The ARNC condemns the killing of innocent people in all its forms and manifestations, irrespective of who

commits these crimes. The targeting of women, children, and non-combatants is an assault on humanity itself.

We are morally obliged to denounce such atrocities and will continue to advocate for the protection of all civilians in Arakan State and across Myanmar. The ARNC calls on the international community, the United Nations, US, UK, OIC and ASEAN to:

1. Immediately investigate this heinous attack and hold the perpetrators accountable under international law;
2. Impose sanctions on the Myanmar military's aviation sector and its suppliers;
3. Ensure humanitarian access to affected communities across Rakhine; and
4. Support the International Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) and efforts toward referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The repeated airstrikes on civilians, including the recent Pan Nila massacre in Ponnagyun Township, demonstrate the junta's utter disregard for human life and international norms. Such crimes cannot go unanswered. The ARNC will continue to work with all democratic and ethnic forces striving to end the sufferings of the people of Arakan and Myanmar and to ensure that every community, Rakhine, Rohingya, and others, can live in peace, dignity, and justice in Arakan and elsewhere in Myanmar.



TNLA fighters.  
Photo: AFP

# SOCIAL MEDIA USERS CAUTIOUS OVER TNLA-JUNTA CEASEFIRE DEAL

**M**yanmar social media users have expressed caution over an important ceasefire deal.

In a surprising development, the TNLA announced on October 27-28 that it had reached a cease-fire agreement with the Myanmar junta following China-mediated talks in Kunming.

Under the terms of the deal, the TNLA will withdraw from key towns, including Mogok in the Mandalay Region and Mongmit in northern Shan State. In return, the junta has pledged to halt both air and ground attacks on the group's remaining territories.

Observers suggest that this cease-fire carries strategic significance. The junta seems to be securing its position ahead of the upcoming December elections, where territorial control and stability are crucial. Additionally, analysts point out that China's involvement in brokering the deal highlights its interest in maintaining border stability and trade routes.

This cease-fire is described as a pause rather than a peace agreement, with voices on social media cautioning, "Don't call it peace until people can return home safely."

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



# DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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