ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

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Analysis & Insight

ASIA'S BAD BOY

Min Aung Hlaing is set on brutally maintaining control of Myanmar through a 'sham election'

ELECTION UPDATE

Sham Election by the Myanmar Military Junta
A pre-election report by Mizzima

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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.

THE MYANMAR PARTY WAITING IN THE WINGS

It is not surprising and highly likely that Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) - the political proxy of the military regime - will "win" the upcoming December 2025 – January 2026 Myanmar general election, for all practical purposes.

With the popular opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) barred, many opposition and ethnic-minority parties dissolved or intimidated, and large swathes of the country under resistance control excluded from voting, the conditions are heavily skewed in favour of the military and its allied USDP party.

Technically, the election will occur in two main phases - starting 28 December 2025 and concluding in January 2026. Under the new rules, with reserved seats for the military and a shift to proportional representation, the USDP could control a majority of parliament even with a minority of popular votes. Given that many opposition-held or disputed regions will not see any polling at all, the result will likely provide a "civilian democratic façade" for continued miliary rule.

If USDP claims overwhelming victory, the immediate implication is that the military will - under the guise of electoral legitimacy - entrench its rule. Leadership under Min Aung Hlaing or another senior military figure will likely remain intact. The vote will function not as a genuine democratic transition, but as a vehicle to institutionalize the status quo: military dominance in government, a veneer of constitutional process, under the military-written 2008 Constitution, and a narrow band of controlled civilian politics.

On a deeper level, what this means for the condition of the country is bleak. The electoral process itself is occurring amidst civil war, with significant portions of the population displaced, under combat or controlled by rebel forces or ethnic militias. International and regional observers - including the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Human Rights Watch - have warned that the election will likely deepen repression, entrench fear and perpetuate violence.

Rather than resolve the crisis, the election is more likely to intensify divisions. Residents in rebel-held or contested regions will remain disenfranchised, while those in regime-controlled areas will be subjected to coercion, surveillance and intimidation. The politics of exclusion and repression might temporarily give the military the appearance of stability and legitimacy, but underlying grievances - ethnic tensions, demands for autonomy, opposition to military rule - will fester. The likely outcome is a further slide into a fractured state: nominal parliamentary governance under the military thumb, continuing armed conflict, humanitarian crises, and deepened mistrust between communities and the state.

The situation is dire. The military-aligned USDP is almost certain to "win"; but that win will not translate into peace, stability, or genuine representation. Instead, the election will serve to lock in authoritarian control under a façade of democracy, worsening the humanitarian and political crisis for many in Myanmar.

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Cover photo of Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing in Moscow by AFP

ASIA'S BAD BOY

MIN AUNG HLAING IS SET ON BRUTALLY MAINTAINING CONTROL OF MYANMAR THROUGH A 'SHAM ELECTION'

Andrew Landen

Bar North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing ranks easily as Asia's worst leader – yet China, Russia and Belarus back him as he proceeds to roll out an election designed to keep him snuggly in power.

December 28 will be the first day of a one-month-long election process engineered to keep Min Aung Hlaing and his generals pulling the strings. Despite the "civilian democratic" veneer, pundits predict the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) will sweep the polls, ushering in what is essentially a re-run of the 2010-20 period - only this time with the USDP, not Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy - leading the charge.

Asia's bad boy is betting on a military-engineered transition – with the backing of China and Russia – that will see the USDP lead the government but with the military securely controlling the process, due to the makeup of parliament under the military-written 2008 Constitution that gives the military enough seats to steer the direction of the new government.

CONTINUED CIVIL WAR

There is little doubt that Myanmar's military boot will continue to stomp on the country's civilians and the range of resistance forces, including People's Defence Forces (PDF) and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (ERO) who will be continuing to put up a fight in the wake of the poll. Min Aung Hlaing's ranking as Asia's bad boy owes much to the brutality he has exhibited since he illegally seized power in the February 2021 coup d'etat that promoted public demonstrations and the creation of the Spring Revolution – led largely by disgruntled Gen Z youth.

After the coup, the junta under Min Aung Hlaing's leadership cracked down harshly on dissent - protestors, activists, journalists and opposition figures were arrested, tortured or silenced - the takeover and re-

Myanmar junta leader has been cultivating ties with Russia and China. Photo: AFP

pression reversing many years of hopes for democratic reforms and the dream of a freer society after decades of military rule.

Critics say Min Aung Hlaing cannot be trusted. For example, in the wake of the devastating March 28 earthquakes, the junta leader publicly voiced support for the quake victims while continuing to bomb civilians. His claim that he is the "protector of the people" is trashed by the daily atrocities his forces are carrying out, including mass killings, indiscriminate air-strikes, arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual violence and other abuses against civilians across multiple states. The violence has triggered large-scale displacement and a humanitarian crisis. Independent human rights organizations argue that these acts amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity – a charge that hangs over the junta leader.

STIFLED MEDIA AND FREE SPEECH

The Myanmar junta leader may have recently made the offer to international media to report on his election but his behaviour shows no love for journalists or what should be the public's right to free speech. He has cracked down on independent media, controlling narratives, censoring dissent and spreading disinformation, especially regarding allegations of ethnic cleansing and the Rohingya crisis. In fact, social-media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter banned or suspended his accounts citing his use of hate speech, including dehumanizing language towards the Rohingya.

This manipulation of public discourse and silencing of dissent has helped maintain the military's grip on power and avoid accountability, which many view as a hallmark of authoritarian repression - yet another reason Min Aung Hlaing deserves the label "Asia's bad boy".

INTERNATIONAL ABHORRENCE

Because of the atrocities under Min Aung Hlaing's command, many countries, including the US and the UK, have imposed sanctions on him and his military associates. International bodies and courts are pursuing accountability. Notably, a prosecutor at International Criminal Court (ICC) sought an arrest warrant against him for alleged genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

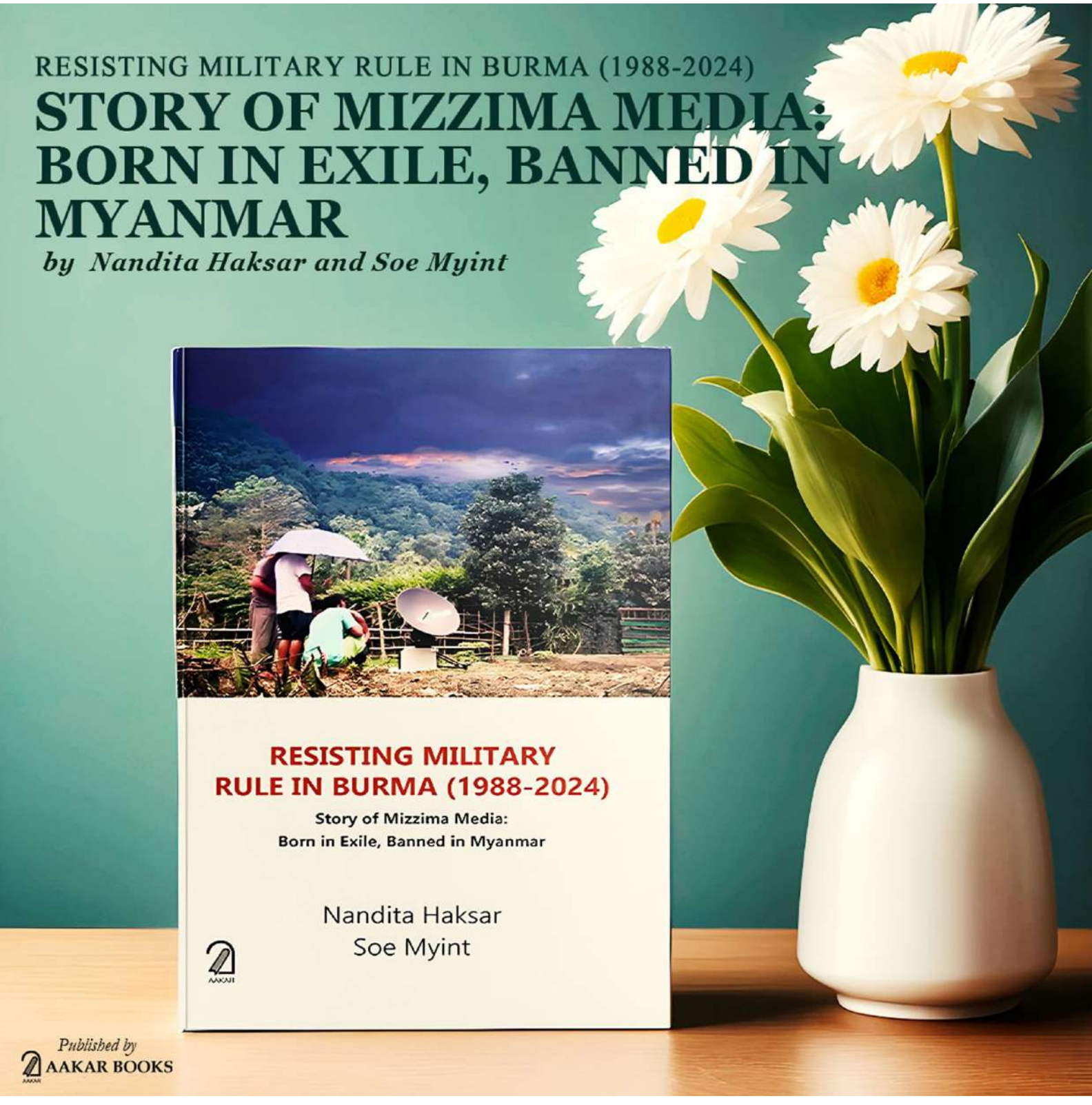
His leadership has contributed to massive instability inside Myanmar - mass displacement, civil war with ethnic armed groups, humanitarian crises - which also has ripple effects on regional security and international relations, with the regional Association of South East Asian Nations "pulling its hair out" over Myanmar junta intransigence – and the ditching of the agreed "Five-Point Consensus" that lies on the floor in tatters. The resistance pushback against the illegal junta has led to the military losing its grip on roughly half the country.

BRUTAL DICTATOR

Given the severity and scale of allegations - from genocide to repression of democracy, from suppression of free speech to mass violence - many people in Asia and worldwide view Min Aung Hlaing not just as a controversial leader, but as a symbol of authoritarian brutality – clearly encouraging his forces to murder, torture and kill both innocents and resistance fighters caught up in the conflict.

Min Aung Hlaing's combination of military power, systemic oppression and impunity stands out, especially in a region of the world where many strive for democratic governance, human rights, and justice.

The Myanmar dictator is trying to sell his election as a path to peace and civilian governance in order for him to "legally" retain power. This claim doesn't wash.



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KNU fighter in target practice. Photo: AFP

HOW SERIOUS IS THE KNU IN CRACKING DOWN ON SCAM CENTRES?

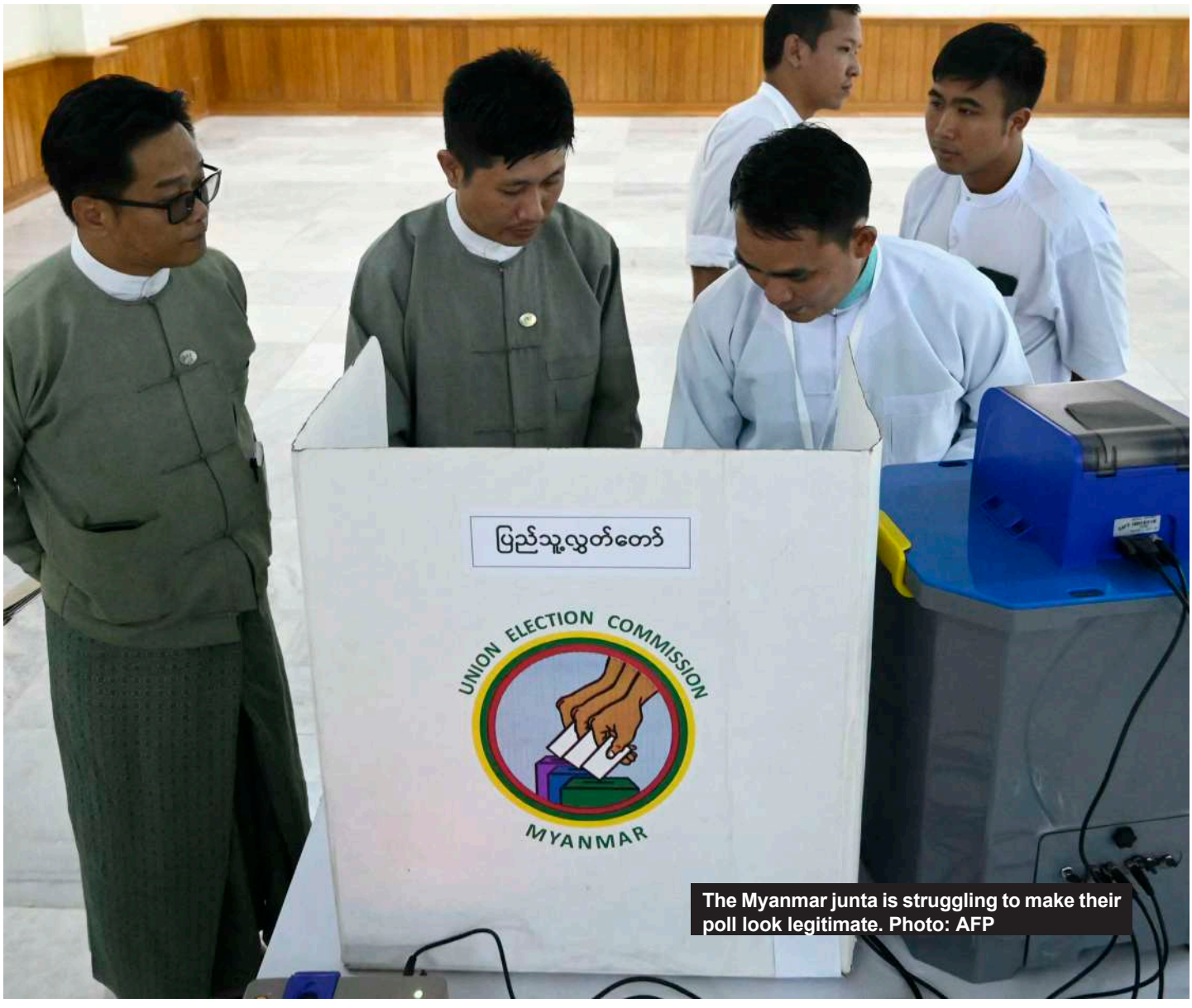
The Karen National Union (KNU) has transferred operational authority to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) to manage the escalating standoff with online scam workers refusing to leave the Shunda Park compound in Min Lat Pan village. The decision, made on 6 December, aims to prevent direct confrontation between KNU administrative bodies and the remaining workers who have resisted evacuation orders.

The crackdown began on 21 November, when KNU forces raided the Shunda Park scam complexes, which had been operating under the protection of the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA). During the operation, several DKBA soldiers were detained but later released following negotiations between senior officials of both groups. The KNU said the raid was part of its expanded effort to dismantle criminal networks in its territory.

A total of 3,582 scam workers were apprehended during the operation. Of these, 2,665 managed to leave the compound area, while 2,460 were transferred across the border into Thailand for repatriation to their respective countries. Another 202 remain awaiting entry into Thailand. The rest - more than 900 individuals - continue to refuse evacuation. According to the KNU, these include one Kazakh national, four Taiwanese, one Laotian, one Indonesian, and the rest Chinese. The remaining group has reportedly set fires inside the compound in an attempt to draw attention and delay removal.

KNU authorities said they have seized a significant cache of technological equipment from the scam centres, including computers, mobile phones, SIM cards, Starlink devices, as well as counterfeit U.S. dollars and Chinese yuan. The Karen National Police Force stated these items are being preserved as evidence. In contrast, the junta and its allied Border Guard Force/Karen National Army (BGF/KNA) have reportedly destroyed the devices they confiscated in Shwe Kokko online scam complex - an act that experts say is aimed at eliminating evidence linking them to the illicit operations.

Tensions escalated further as two junta columns advanced toward Min Lat Pan village, triggering clashes with KNU forces. Some mortar rounds reportedly landed on the Thai side of the border, prompting



The Myanmar junta is struggling to make their poll look legitimate. Photo: AFP

Thailand to respond with warning artillery fire.

The KNU has urged the international community to act swiftly, warning that the worsening security situation threatens the safe transfer and legal processing of the remaining scam workers.

Junta tries to look good ahead of sham election

Myanmar's military junta has granted amnesty to 724 prisoners convicted under Penal Code Section 505(a), alongside 2,361 others jailed under various laws, according to its latest announcement. In addition, the regime dropped charges against 5,580 individuals who had been sued under 505(a) but were evading trial. The junta's statement emphasized that the released individuals are expected to participate in its planned election - an election widely criticized as illegitimate.

The timing of the amnesty has drawn scrutiny. It came one day before Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's visit to Myanmar and one day after the United States ended Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Myanmar nationals, raising concerns over the regime's political calculations and attempts to generate international optics rather than political will.

On the information front, the junta-appointed Union Election Commission (UEC) has stated it will allow media coverage in all three phases of the electoral process. The UEC chairperson made the remarks during a February meeting with the pro-junta Myanmar Media Council, assuring "systematic collaboration" and inviting inquiries regarding staff responsibilities and electoral procedures.

A number of young women have taken up arms against the illegal rule of the military junta. Photo: AFP

However, press freedom groups warn that these assurances contradict the junta's escalating repression of independent media in the lead-up to the vote. On 10 November, the Assistance Association for Myanmar-based Independent Journalists (AAMIJ) - an organization reporting on the ground situation from outside the country - was charged under Election Law 24(a). The charge followed AAMIJ's reporting that one junta-aligned election candidate was implicated in drug trafficking.

In parallel with its media controls, the regime has increased scrutiny of foreign arrivals. The immigration minister has instructed airport officials to closely monitor foreigners arriving during the election period and to report any "suspicious" cases to military intelligence. Notably, Russia and China - key allies of the junta - were excluded from the watchlist.

The developments underscore the junta's tightening grip over public information, legal mechanisms, and voter management as it pushes ahead with what observers widely describe as a sham election.

Women take up arms to fight the junta

Women have also taken up roles across Myanmar's resistance forces, though most remain assigned to administrative, support, and controlled-area security duties. They come from diverse backgrounds - including doctors, nurses, teachers, housewives, salespeople, civil servants, and students - and many now serve as frontline medics.

A woman soldier from Pakokku-Generation Z told DVB that she joined the resistance after witnessing atrocities in rural areas. "Women from villages were raped and killed, premature children died ridiculously. And there is no medical support in villages, that's why we (women) join revolutionary forces," she said. Another woman fighter told Mizzima, "We need to wipe out the thought that revolution is only related to men. Women also need to serve in whatever role they can."

Women fighters are now involved in mine production, drone units, women commando teams, and support brigades. Some have taken on high-risk roles as snipers and as trainers for new recruits, marking a significant shift from traditional gender expectations.

The Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) currently fields about 600 women fighters and formally established its women's force in May 2022. While not all serve on the frontlines, many are deployed at scouting posts and checkpoints, while others handle fundraising, logistics, and administrative tasks. Women in the KNDF also sew uniforms and perform production work to support the movement financially.

Despite their growing contributions, women revolutionaries face persistent challenges in daily life and within military structures. Although the KNDF policy allows women to be appointed up to the level of regiment commander, they remain excluded from the highest leadership ranks. Out of the entire KNDF command structure, only 27 positions are held by women - highlighting the continued gender gap even within the revolutionary context.

Photo: AFP

SHAM ELECTION BY THE MYANMAR MILITARY JUNTA

A PRE-ELECTION REPORT BY MIZZIMA

1. Background

Rejecting the results of the 2020 General Election over allegations of electoral fraud, the Myanmar military, also known as Tatmadaw, seized power on February 1, 2021. One day after the military coup, the State Administration Council (SAC) was created under the leadership of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. They claimed that, after implementing measures under the state of emergency, they would hold a free and fair general election per the 2008 Constitution and transfer power to the winning party.

After the coup, the junta filed numerous charges and handed down long-term prison sentences to several people who opposed them, including Union, State, and Regional government officials, civilian political leaders, and responsible personnel from various levels of the Election Commission. Although some were later released under amnesty, most remain in long-term imprisonment. Over nearly five years since the military coup, the junta has declared amnesty 18 times, releasing 112,926 prisoners. Of these, 15,444 were political prisoners, accounting for just 13.7% of all releases.

Despite nationwide resistance against the military junta during the coup period, they repeatedly promised to hold a new election. Only after extending the state of emergency six times did they announce that an election would take place in 2025. To limit the participation of political parties with strong public support, the junta introduced a new law, the "Political Parties Registration Law" on January 26, 2023. This law was subsequently amended multiple times.

The junta-appointed Union Election Commission (UEC) announced that the first phase of the election would be held in 102 townships on December 28, 2025. They further stated on October 28 that the second phase would take place in 100 townships on January 11, 2026. According to Major General Zaw Min Tun, the junta's spokesperson of the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC), the third phase is scheduled for January 25, 2026.

According to Article 421 of the 2008 Constitution on the state of emergency, it can normally be extended twice, each time for six months. However, citing various reasons, the junta extended it up to seven times. After the NDSC meeting on July 31, 2025, the SAC was

abolished and replaced by the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC). In that commission, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing took on joint responsibility as Acting President and Chair of the Commission. Some army generals were reclassified as civilians and appointed to lead the government.

From the perspective of the public and the international community, the junta's 2025 election appears to be an attempt to avoid accountability for the inhumane actions taken during the coup. According to the Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar (ISP-Myanmar), there have been at least 92 incidents of massacres, each killing at least 10 people, over the past four years. Overall, at least 1,800 civilians have been killed. Of these cases, 88 were carried out by the SSPC, and more than half reportedly involved aerial attacks.

Therefore, due to the lack of security in the areas where the election is scheduled to take place and the low public trust caused by the ongoing military and political crisis, the following points show that the junta's 2025 election is merely a sham.

2. Political prisoners after the 2020 election

In the 2020 election, voting occurred in 1,117 constituencies, covering 95.38% of the total 1,171. A total of 5,379 candidates from 91 political parties and 260 independents ran. The National League for Democracy (NLD) won 82.36% of the constituencies, electing 920 MPs. However, the military did not accept the election results, citing claims of election fraud. They then took control, detaining several party leaders and members. The junta also confiscated their property and handed down long-term prison sentences.

According to the Human Rights Documentation Team of the NLD (HRDT-NLD), the junta has unlawfully detained 19,167 political prisoners. Among them are 260 minors, 2,565 women, 140 NLD members of parliament, and 2,836 party members. The military junta has unlawfully seized the property of 459 party members, including 199 MPs elected in the 2020 election. They have also sealed the homes of 386 civilians, including government workers involved in

Ko Ko Gyi (centre), leader of the People's Party out on the streets campaigning. Photo: AFP

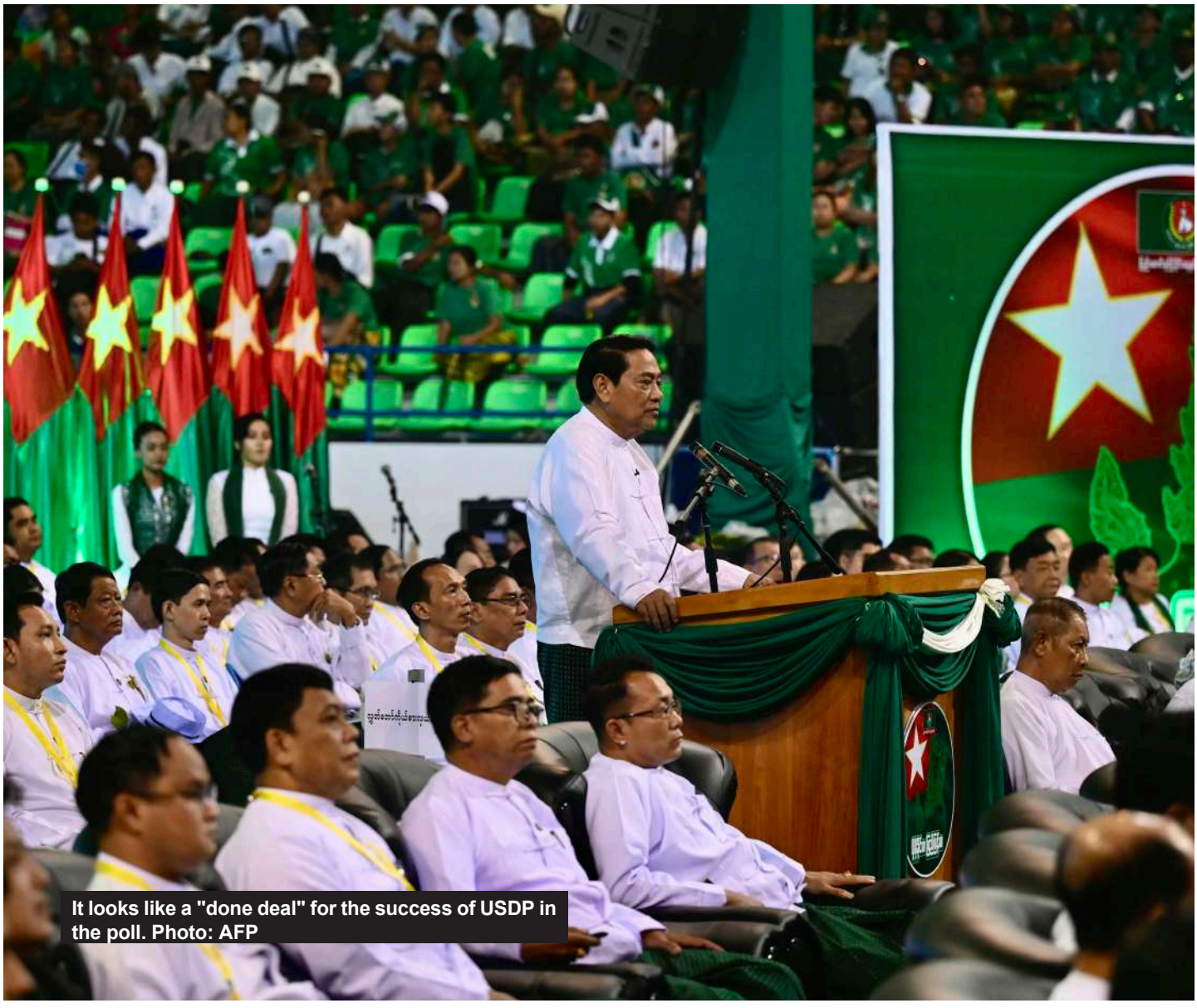
the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) against the military coup.

Since the coup on February 1, 2021, the State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained by the military regime. She has been sentenced to 33 years in prison on 19 charges, later reduced to 27 years. Likewise, President U Win Myint received a 12-year prison sentence on 8 charges.

From the coup on February 1, 2021, to November 27, 2025, 7,499 people, including democracy activists, have lost their lives due to the military junta and their associates. In connection with the coup, 30,039 people have been arrested, with 22,702 still in detention. Among those detained, 11,424 have been sentenced to imprisonment. According to confirmed sources, 86 people were arrested under the junta's election law, and the identities of 54 of them are still being verified, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP-Burma).

3. The adoption of a new law on the registration of political parties

In Myanmar's political scene, after the adoption of the 2008 Constitution, the Political Parties Registration Law was enacted on March 8, 2010. This law imposed strict restrictions on political parties. Notably, it created major hurdles for parties like the NLD, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Before the 2012 by-election, the Law Amending the Political Parties Registration Law was passed on November 4, 2011, to enable parties like the NLD to participate. The amended law changed three provisions in the original registration law. First, it removed the rule stating that "party members must not be prisoners." Second, it revised the requirement that "a political party must contest at least three seats in elections," clarifying that this rule does not apply to parties formed after an election. Third, it changed the wording "must preserve and protect the constitution" to "must respect and follow the constitution." Thanks



It looks like a "done deal" for the success of USDP in the poll. Photo: AFP

to these amendments, the NLD took part in the 2012 by-election and won 43 out of 44 parliamentary seats, allowing the party to enter parliament.

On January 26, 2023, the junta revoked the 2010 Political Parties Registration Law and introduced a new one. According to this law, political parties registering at the union level must gather at least 100,000 members within 90 days of approval. They must also establish party offices in half of the country's 330 townships within 180 days. Parties registering at the state or regional level must recruit at least 1,000 members within 90 days and open at least five party offices in their respective state or region. Union-level parties are required to deposit 1,000 lakh MMK at the state-owned Myanma Economic Bank, while state or regional parties must deposit 100 lakh MMK.

After the new law was passed, some parties chose not to re-register, while others were automatically canceled. According to Article (25), any political party that fails to register within 60 days of the law's enactment must be canceled. This acts as a legal restriction on the NLD, which had already been dissolved since the coup. Political observers also see this as shaping the election landscape without the NLD's participation. It can be viewed as an effort by the military junta to prevent a repeat of the situation under former President U Thein Sein, when the NLD was allowed to participate in the by-election.

In this way, the UEC eliminated many parties by claiming they failed to re-register or did not meet the required criteria. On March 28, 2023, they announced the removal of 40 parties, including the NLD. As a result, the junta's Political Parties Registration Law has greatly limited parties' ability to participate in future elections and has affected their existence. They amended it on January 30, 2024, again on July 28, 2025, and once more on September 21, 2025, totaling three amendments. However, none of these changes

Independent candidate Sandar Win, formerly a member of the National League for Democracy, out campaigning. Photo: AFP

supported national reconciliation. Instead, they only created more difficulties for political parties.

The first amendment required that if a party's registration is canceled, all party property must be transferred to the state. The second amendment stated that if the UEC finds a party guilty of electoral fraud or unlawful conduct, that party must be dissolved. These changes shape the future political landscape by preventing the NLD from participating in upcoming elections. Additionally, one day before candidate lists must be submitted, parties contesting nationwide in the 2025 Election are now required to compete in only one-quarter of all constituencies, instead of the previous requirement to contest in more than half, according to the amendment issued on September 25, 2025. Considering all this, these amendments only slightly relaxed the strict rules, mainly to avoid the impression that only the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) is allowed to participate in the election.

After the junta passed the Political Parties Registration Law, the NLD's decision not to re-register became a widely discussed issue among the public. However, some special cases had already occurred before the law was introduced. For example, the Union Betterment Party, led by ex-General Thura U Shwe Man, dissolved itself before the law took effect, helping them avoid the political crisis caused by the new law. Among the parties that chose not to re-register, some refused to acknowledge the military junta, others opposed the law itself, and a few dissolved to merge or cooperate with other parties to create new ones.

Overall, the strategic goal behind implementing the Political Parties Registration Law is to ensure the continued survival of the USDP in future elections. By restricting major parties with broad public support, such as the NLD and key ethnic parties, the junta's law prevents the emergence of strong political rivals and allows only weaker parties to persist.

4. Union Election Commission (UEC)

A day after the coup, on February 2, 2021, the military junta established a new Union Election Commission and appointed Ex-General Thein Soe as its chair. He had a questionable reputation because of alleged fraud in the 2010 Election. He also played a key role in the systematic setup of the former State Peace and Development Council for the army-backed USDP's landslide win. During the previous military regime, he served as Military Judge Advocate-General and Deputy Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He is also a graduate of the Defence Service Academy (Intake-16). In a meeting with political parties on May 21, 2021, he expressed their intentions, telling reporters they needed to revoke the NLD's registration for its "unlawful plans" and to take legal action against those involved, calling them traitors.

On June 21, 2021, the junta's UEC announced that the 2020 Election did not comply with the Election Law and by-laws, based on their investigations, and the election was neither free nor fair. On July 26, citing previous reasons, they annulled the results of the 2020 Election.

In response, the NLD claimed that the announcement to cancel the election results insulted the public. According to U Aung Kyi Nyunt, the Chair of the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) formed based on the 2020 election results, the junta's UEC action was questionable as international organizations, observers, and voters already provided evidence of the landslide victory.

Also, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), which won 42 seats in various parliaments during the 2020 election, stated on July 28 that the UEC's cancellation of the election results went beyond what the 2008 Constitution allows. They argued that the decision was unfair, strayed from democratic standards, and was therefore unacceptable. Although there may have been errors in the voter lists or illegal activities during the 2020 election, the SNLD maintained that the overall results still reflected the true will of the majority of the people. Even if electoral disputes or irregularities occurred, they should have been resolved in court, following the law. However, the junta's UEC did not provide candidates with the chance to make legal statements or appeals and simply canceled the entire results. For these reasons, the SNLD described this as an act of bullying against candidates who ran honestly and against the voters.

This raised the question of whether the UEC has the authority to cancel an election result. According to Article 399 of the 2008 Constitution, the UEC's responsibilities include conducting and supervising elections, forming and overseeing sub-commissions, managing constituencies, updating voter lists, postponing elections in areas where voting cannot take place, instructing political parties, and forming election tribunals to address electoral disputes. The article does not mention any authority to investigate and annul an entire election result or to hold a new election. Similarly, Article 10 of the Union Election Commission Law, which outlines the UEC's rights and responsibilities, does not

grant the commission the power to investigate the national results, cancel them in full, or organize a new election.

According to Article 5 of the Law on Various Parliaments, only rival candidates from the same constituency or voters from that area can file a complaint against an elected MP. Organizations such as political parties or the military are not allowed to submit such objections. Under Article 5, these complaints must be reviewed by a tribunal court. Only if it is proven that an elected MP achieved victory through illegal actions, the UEC will annul that MP's election victory.

According to the above provisions, the UEC may only form a tribunal when a complaint is filed in a specific constituency and may cancel the winning status of MPs on an individual basis. Therefore, their annulment of the entire election result clearly violates the Constitution, the Union Election Law, and the relevant parliamentary election laws.

At a press conference held by the junta's Information Team on August 17, 2022, U Khin Maung Oo, a member of the UEC, stated that they are preparing to take legal action against 505 individuals involved in alleged violations of election procedures, electoral fraud, and unlawful acts in the 2020 election. The list includes the former President, former State Counsellor, former UEC Chair and members, Minister U Min Thu, former Chair of Naypyitaw Territory, former Chief Ministers of states and regions, election candidates, winning party teams, and members of sub-commissions. He also claimed that legal action is being prepared against 2,449 chairs and members of former commissions at various levels who failed to systematically oversee the election process.

Once again, on August 11, the UEC issued an instruction to political parties stating that they must notify the UEC in advance and obtain permission before meeting with any foreign organization or individual. The instruction warned that failing to do so could result in the party being dissolved. This indicates that even meetings with international media organizations based abroad could threaten the political parties' existence.

UEC Chairman Major General Thein Soe was replaced by former Lieutenant General Ko Ko in January 2024. However, he was also dismissed after serving just one year. The military then appointed the current chair, former Major General Than Soe. He had already served as a member and vice-chair of the UEC during the military coup period. In the new UEC formed after the abolition of the SAC and the establishment of the SSPC, he became the Chair. Since then, he has been on the sanctions list of many Western countries, including the European Union. During the NLD government, he was appointed head of the military MPs' group. He is known for his hardline stance. He was the only military MP on the team reviewing Presidential qualifications. He neither supported nor opposed the NLD's nomination of U Htin Kyaw as a candidate for President. He commented that U Htin Kyaw was not an elected MP. He also submitted a complaint to the Constitutional Tribunal, requesting a review of Vice President Henry Van Thio, who had lived abroad for six years.

Overall, the primary role of the UEC is to oversee the right to vote and run for office in accordance with the Union Election Law and to supervise political parties. However, the military has imposed restrictions on the freedoms of all parties except for the USDP. The UEC has also gone far beyond its mandated responsibilities, seemingly to appease the military junta. After all, it is clear that instead of supervising, the UEC has issued various orders and suppressed political parties.

5. The electoral system

On July 29, 2025, the junta adopted the sixth amendment to the parliamentary election laws for the three parliaments: Pyithu Hluttaw, Amyotha Hluttaw, and State/Regional Hluttaw. With several amendments, these laws were designed to align with the electoral system across all levels of parliament. The latest amendment introduced additional eligibility requirements for candidates. A candidate must be at least 25 years old, born to two citizen parents, listed on the voter roll of the constituency where they plan to run, and must have completed basic high school education. They must also be free from any inappropriate debts to the state or private individuals, which was the basis for removing Daw Thet Thet Khine from the PPP candidate list. Only those who meet these criteria are eligible to run for office.

5.1 The constituencies

In the 2025 elections, the First Past the Post (FPTP) system will be used for 274 constituencies in the Pyithu Hluttaw. For the Amyotha Hluttaw, both FPTP and Proportional Representation (PR) systems will be applied across 101 constituencies, including six self-administered zones. For the State/Regional Hluttaw, FPTP will be used in 266 constituencies, while PR will be used in 42 constituencies, totaling 308. Additionally, for the State/Regional Hluttaw, FPTP will be used in 29 ethnic constituencies.

The Pyithu Hluttaw election will use only the FPTP system. For the other two bodies, a Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) system will be used, combining FPTP and PR. When forming the Amyotha Hluttaw, each state or region will elect 12 MPs: 6 through FPTP and 6 through PR. For the FPTP seats, each state or region will be divided into six constituencies, with one MP elected from each. For the six PR seats, the votes received by political parties in those FPTP constituencies will be counted and allocated based on proportional representation. In the self-administered regions and zones represented in the Amyotha Hluttaw, as well as in the ethnic constituencies represented in the State/Regional Hluttaw, only one MP will be elected per area; therefore, the FPTP system will apply.

Similarly, to form the State/Regional Hluttaw, each township will elect two MPs: one through FPTP and one through PR. For the FPTP seat, the entire township will serve as a single FPTP constituency. For the PR seat, several neighboring townships will be grouped into a PR constituency, and the votes received by political parties in each township will be combined and allocated proportionally.

5.2. Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)

In the 2025 election, the military introduced a voting system that had never been used before in the country's history. They replaced the traditional ballot-paper stamping method with Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), which they claimed were developed by local experts.

Including EVMs, 34 countries worldwide extensively use electronic voting systems. These countries include Argentina, Brazil, France, the United States, India, Belgium, and Venezuela. Therefore, by observing EVM use in other countries, the system was reportedly designed to match Myanmar people's literacy levels and comprehension skills.

The screen is connected to the ballot box and printer. When a voter presses the "Vote" button, a paper slip about two inches long displays the selected candidate's number, name, and symbol for three seconds before automatically dropping into the ballot box below. The ballot box and printer are secured with a security cable and closed. Unlike a computer, the machine does not contain an operating system like Windows, nor does it have internet access or wireless features such as Wi-Fi or Bluetooth. Therefore, it cannot be interfered with through online or wireless means. All components are connected directly with specialized cables. According to the junta's media, voters can immediately view the paper slip on the screen to verify their choice.

During a coordination meeting on electoral procedures, the former Chair of the UEC, U Ko Ko, advised state and regional governments to assist with the secure transportation of EVMs between townships within the designated timeframe, as the election will be conducted in phases. This indicates that EVMs will not be assigned to each polling station individually but will instead be reused across multiple stations. It is reported that at least 50,000 EVMs will be deployed nationwide.

The junta's propaganda newspapers also highlighted several weaknesses of e-voting. These include the need for non-experts to understand the system, potential risks of manipulation by insiders or external hackers, higher initial purchase and maintenance costs compared to previous methods, increased infrastructural and environmental requirements such as power supply and communication systems, the need for voter education, and the necessity to amend existing legal frameworks.

5.3. Voter list errors

The military used voter list errors as an excuse to annul the results of the 2020 Election. However, such errors appeared when they issued the first voter list for the planned 2025 Election. The UEC urged the public to review the lists through state-owned media and social media platforms. However, very few people did so during the two-week display period from September 30 to October 13. Some political parties also pointed out errors in the voter lists.

Through social media, U Hla Swe, known as Bullet Hla Swe, the Chair of the USDP for Naypyidaw Union Territory, criticized serious errors in the voter list within his constituency. It quickly went viral and drew widespread public attention. He is a candidate for the Pyithu Hluttaw and will contest the election in Pobba Thiri Township, a constituency in Naypyitaw Union Territory. He stated that the voter lists contained major mistakes: even in Zayar Thiri Township Constituency, where USDP Chair U Khin Yi will run, only his name appeared on the list while his family members were left out. Additionally, in one village in Pobba Thiri constituency, over 700 residents were missing from the list; some listed voters had already died; some families were not included at all; the names of people who had moved away were still on the list; and even some candidates' names were absent. He also discussed these issues with BBC. Subsequently, he was summoned for investigation.

In fact, such voter list errors occurred not only in Naypyidaw Territory. According to several contesting

parties, similar problems were found in Yangon Region, Myitkyina Township in Kachin State, Thayet Township in Magway Region, and many townships in Sagaing Region. After the criticisms surfaced, the UEC extended the voter list display period by one more week. They also stated that door-to-door checks and data collection are underway to ensure the accuracy of the voter lists and to prevent anyone from being left out.

In particular, because of the Law on the Protection of the Multiparty Democratic General Election from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction adopted by the military on July 29, there was little criticism or discussion on social media. Most people did not review the voter lists because they were not interested in the election. Although some eligible voters were not included, they did not request to have their names added. These factors contributed to errors in the voter lists.

6. The situation of political parties

Among the 330 townships nationwide, the 2020 election could not be held in 15 townships in Rakhine State and Shan State. However, in all the remaining 315 districts, the NLD secured the majority of seats in every parliament. When the new parliament was scheduled to reconvene on February 1, 2021, the military took power and canceled the 2020 election results. They then passed a new law on political party registration and enforced strict restrictions on political parties.

Using the excuse that parties failed to apply for registration within the specified period, the junta's UEC also disbanded 41 parties, including the NLD and the SNLD, both of which had won the majority of seats in the 2020 election. As a result, the situation of political parties during the military coup period has become the worst in Myanmar's electoral history.

Despite some parties attempting to re-register, the UEC rejected several applications. They denied the registration application of the Arakan National Party (ANP), which had won most constituencies in Rakhine State in the 2015 and 2020 elections, claiming that the party violated Article 7 of the Political Parties Registration Law. According to this article, no organization may register if it has direct or indirect contact with, or provides support to, any group labeled as blacklisted or terrorist, any armed group fighting against the state, or any member belonging to such groups. However, the UEC did not clearly specify which organization the ANP was connected to. They merely rejected the application without providing sufficient justification.

The UEC also rejected the registration of several other parties, including the Democratic Party, Chin People's Party, Union Development Party, New Society Party (NSP), and Zomi Congress for Democracy. A month after he became the Chair, on September 9, 2025, U Than Soe revoked the registration of four parties: the National Democratic Force Party (NDF), the Democratic Party of National Politics (DNP), the Women's Party (Mon), and the Union Farmer-Labour Force Party, and dissolved them. Additionally, he removed Daw Thet Thet Khine, Chair of the Women's Pioneer Party, who was expected to contest in No. (2) Yangon Regional Constituency, from the candidate list, and also rejected her subsequent appeal. Currently, only 57 parties remain officially registered.

Under the previous law, parties aiming to run campaigns nationwide had to have at least 1,000 members. However, the new law raised this requirement 100 times, now requiring up to 100,000 members. Additionally, parties must recruit this number of members within the 90-day campaign period starting from the day they register. Out of 330 townships nationwide, they must open offices in at least half within six months and contest in at least half of the constituencies. If they fail to submit the required number of recruited members within 90 days of their registration approval to the UEC, they will be removed from the registry.

According to these provisions, the time frame is too short for parties wishing to contest nationwide. Although some requirements were later relaxed through amendments, many parties had to abandon their plans to run at the union level due to ongoing nationwide fighting against the military junta, local insecurity, rising displacement, and increased migration across borders. They now struggle even to contest in their own states and regions. Currently, 3.6 million people have been displaced. Overall, it is unlikely that many parties will be able to compete nationwide. Except for six major parties, the remaining parties can only contest at the state or regional level.

There have also been ongoing armed conflicts in the states and regions, including Northern Shan, Chin, Karen, Kayar, Kachin, Mon, Sagaing, and Magway. Additionally, the junta has declared martial law in 63 townships across nine states and regions. Under these conditions, political parties face significant challenges in conducting free campaigning and opening offices.

The six parties that will run nationwide are the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP),

the National Unity Party (NUP), the People's Pioneer Party (PPP), the Myanmar Farmers Development Party (MFDP), the Shan & Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), and the People's Party (PP). Among them, except for the USDP, the others did not win any seats in the 2020 election. Some are also unable to open offices in Kayah State, Chin State, and Rakhine State due to ongoing local armed conflicts.

Reportedly, 4,963 candidates from 57 parties and independents have registered with the UEC. A total of 6 parties will campaign nationwide, while 51 will compete only within their respective states and regions. Among them, USDP, the party backed by the military junta, will field the highest number of candidates (1,018), followed by the NUP (694), the PPP (672), the SNDP (584), the MFDF (428), and the PP (512), according to the UEC.

6.1 The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)

The USDP was the first party to register under the new Political Parties Registration Law. The UEC approved its registration as Registration No. 1 on April 20, 2023. The USDP will run the highest number of candidates (1,018) in the 2025 election.

The military has already secured 25% of seats in various parliaments. Therefore, they plan to form a government in cooperation with the USDP. To achieve this, they deployed a total of 489 military personnel of different ranks from the Military Office and Ministry of Defense to the USDP starting in early September 2025. The list included a major general, six lieutenant generals, twelve generals, 300 brigadier generals, colonels and lieutenant colonels, 110 captains and majors, and 60 personnel ranging from officers to sergeant clerks.

The election campaign officially started on October 28, 2025. During the first week, only the candidates from the USDP were able to hold activities in the field. On the first day, they organized campaign events nationwide, including at their Naypyidaw headquarters. Supported by strong financial backing and the military, the USDP has managed to conduct more activities than any other competing party.

To maintain power after the election, the junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing placed his key supporters in constituencies with strong military influence. The current prime minister, U Nyo Saw, will run for Pyithu Hluttaw in Cocogyun Township Constituency, which has only a small number of civilians but many military regiments and departments. U Khin Yi, chair of the USDP, will contest for Pyithu Hluttaw in Zayar Thiri Constituency of Naypyidaw Territory, where the Military Office is located. U Aung Linn Dway, CEO of the SSPC, will run for Amyotha Hluttaw through proportional representation from No. (3) Constituency in Naypyidaw Territory. Based on the candidates proposed by the military, it is projected that after the 2025 election, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing will become President, while ex-Major General U Nyo Saw and USDP Chair U Khin Yi will serve as Vice Presidents. Additionally, ex-General Mya Tun Oo is expected to be the Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw, and U Aung Linn Dway will be the Speaker of Amyotha Hluttaw.

On the other hand, many USDP candidates have been sanctioned by Western countries. Twenty of them have been sanctioned by the United States, Britain, Canada, the European Union (EU), New Zealand, and Australia. Others have not yet undergone full review. Most were sanctioned for their involvement in violence against civilians following the 2021 military coup, while a few have been under sanctions since 2018 on allegations of genocide against Rohingya in Northern Rakhine.

According to the latest pre-election updates, some USDP candidates face no competition in 28 constituencies for the first phase of the election scheduled for December 28, 2025. As a result, they are assured victory even before voting takes place. These uncontested seats include 13 for Pyithu Hluttaw, 13 for State/Regional Hluttaw, and 2 for Ethnic MPs. Under Chapter 9, Article 41-a of the election law concerning various parliaments, if a constituency has only one candidate, no election will be held there, and the respective state/regional sub-commission must declare that candidate as the MP.

Similarly, Shan and the Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) will automatically win Moene Township in Namsam District of Southern Shan State. For the Akha Ethnic Constituency in Shan State, there is only one candidate, resulting in an uncontested victory for the Akha National Development Party (ANDP). The Wa National Party (WNP) also secures an Amyotha Hluttaw seat in advance for the Wa Self-Administered Division. Therefore, a total of 31 constituencies currently have uncontested winners.

6.2. The National Unity Party (NUP)

The National Unity Party (NUP), formerly known as the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), which governed Myanmar from 1974 to 1988, won 12 seats in the 1990 election and 46 seats in the 2010 election.

Although it contested nearly every constituency in the 2015 election, it only secured one seat in the Amyotha Hluttaw in Kachin State. In the 2020 election, they fielded over 400 candidates across 177 townships but did not win any seats. Under the junta's new law, they were re-registered, and their registration was approved on April 25, 2023. For the 2025 election, they plan to contest with 694 candidates.

6.3 The People's Pioneer Party (PPP)

The PPP was founded in 2019. Their Chair, Daw Thet Thet Khine, was removed from her position as an EC member of Dagon Township-NLD in November 2018 for publicly criticizing the NLD. In late 2019, she officially resigned from the NLD and founded the PPP. Of the 19 founders, more than half are business owners. Additionally, economists such as Dr. Oo Myint, an economic advisor to former President U Thein Sein, and Dr. Zaw Oo serve as the party's economic and policy advisors.

With more than 240 candidates, the PPP contested the 2020 election, but they did not win any seats. Daw Thet Thet Khine became the Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement in the government formed after the 2021 coup. In mid-2023, she was appointed as Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism. In early 2025, she retired from this position.

The PPP was re-registered with the UEC following the military coup. With 672 candidates, they have the third-largest number of candidates contesting nationwide in the 2025 election. These candidates represent 70% of the Pyithu Hluttaw, 91% of the Amyotha Hluttaw, 57% of the State/Regional Hluttaw, and 40% of the Ethnic Constituency.

In the 2025 election, Party Chair Daw Thet Thet Khine sought to run for a seat in the Amyotha Hluttaw representing No. 2 Yangon Regional Constituency. Although she had already received the candidate recognition card issued by the Yangon Regional Sub-Commission, the UEC announced the removal of her name from the candidate list on October 25.

The UEC excused Daw Thet Thet Khine for not meeting the requirements in Article 8c of the parliamentary election law. This provision states that candidates must be free of inappropriate debts or liabilities to the government or private entities. The rule is controversial because it lacks a clear definition. Reportedly, she took out a loan of over one billion MMK from KBZ Bank for a housing project at 68 Residence, located at the crossroads of Gabar Aye Road and Sayar San Road in Yangon. Although she appealed to the UEC, her appeal was rejected. For the 2025 election, the PPP has put up many campaign signs in various locations. However, many people believe their chances of winning are very slim.

6.4 Shan & Nationalities Democratic Party (The White Tiger Party)

Shan & Nationalities Democratic Party (the SNDP), also known as the White Tiger Party, is a union-level party. Established in 2010, it was originally named Shan Nationalities Democratic Party. After changing its name to Shan & Nationalities Democratic Party, it was re-registered as a party competing at the union level. The party is chaired by Sai Ai Pao. In the 2010 election, they secured the third-highest number of seats, but in the 2015 election, they faced a significant loss, winning only one seat in the Shan State Hluttaw. The same outcome occurred in the 2020 election. For the 2025 election, they will contest with the fourth-largest number of candidates, totaling 584.

6.5 People's Party (PP)

The People's Party is led by U Ko Ko Gyi, a leader of the 88 Generation Students. They registered as a political party in 2018. In 2020, they fielded 144 candidates but did not win any seats. In early 2023, they cooperated with an abolished party called the National Unity Democratic Party, led by former Pyithu Hluttaw MP U Sein Win, and re-registered. They plan to compete in the 2025 election with 512 candidates. Within the democratic community, their policies have faced criticism. Despite running nationwide, they have only a slim chance of entering parliament. Among the parties re-registered under the junta's Political Parties Registration Law, they have received the most criticism.

6.6. Myanmar Farmers Development Party (MFDP)

Established in 2012, the MFDP is chaired by U Kyaw Swar Soe. Although they contested the 2015 election with over 280 candidates, they did not win any seats. In the 2017 by-election and the 2020 election, they experienced the same outcome. They were re-registered in 2023. They have formed an alliance with the USDP. For the 2025 election, they will participate with 428 candidates.

7. Legal Preventions against Disturbances to the Election

On July 31, 2025, the military junta disbanded the State Administration Council (SAC) and reformed

it as the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC). One day earlier, they announced that the Cybersecurity Law, adopted on January 1, 2025, had gone into effect. This law bans the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) without official approval. It also reinforces existing internet-repression laws such as the Telecommunications Law, passed in 2013, and the Electronic Transactions Law.

Furthermore, they suspended the provisions outlined in Articles 5, 7, and 8 of the Law on the Protection of Personal Liberty and Personal Security of Citizens, which was adopted by the NLD government on March 8, 2017. According to Article 5 of the law, at least two members of the local administration must accompany any search or arrest carried out in a citizen's home. Under Article 7, a citizen cannot be detained for more than 24 hours without court approval. Article 8 prohibits searches, confiscations, and arrests without a warrant under existing laws. Suspending these provisions is a legal step aimed at preventing disruptions to their 2025 Election.

However, the junta remains unsatisfied with this situation. Unable to tolerate criticism of their electoral procedures, they passed the Law on Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction, along with strict penalties, on July 29, 2025.

Under that law, even ordinary criticism of the election results can lead to a heavy prison sentence or a fine. If a crime results in a person's death, all those involved face the death penalty. Statements meant to disrupt electoral procedures, campaigns, protests, or the sharing of writings carry a prison sentence of at least 3 years and up to 7 years. If committed by a group or gathering, the sentence ranges from 5 to 10 years. Acts that threaten, obstruct, or harm the duties and activities of voters, polling station supervisors, commission members, or candidates are punishable by imprisonment ranging from 3 to 20 years. If committed by a group or gathering, the penalty ranges from 5 years to life imprisonment. Destroying ballot papers, ballot boxes, voting machines, election commission offices, or polling stations results in a sentence of at least 5 years and up to 10 years, in addition to fines.

Under that law, a "Central Committee Responsible for Overseeing Security During the Period of the Multiparty Democratic General Elections" was established, chaired by the Union Minister for Home Affairs and vice-chaired by the Deputy Minister for Defense. The committee was authorized to monitor activities of local and international organizations that could threaten security during the election period, gather information, and take legal action.

The revolutionary organizations and forces have protested the junta's elections scheduled for December 28 and January 11, 2026. They have also repeatedly warned the public not to participate in the electoral process. It was during this time that the military junta issued this law.

Throughout previous elections in Myanmar, some degree of freedom of expression was allowed to promote a free and fair process. There had never been a situation involving laws with such strict restrictions. Even a simple reaction to a social media post related to the election by a local resident has led to arrest, lawsuit, and imprisonment.

There was also a case where a man was arrested under this law for threatening to kill his wife if she contested the election. Daw Lay Lay Myint, a NUP candidate for Amyotha Hluttaw in an FPTP constituency, was beaten by her husband, who also threatened to kill her. As a result, responsible personnel from the township party reported the case to the police. In another incident, an assistant from a sub-commission, while riding an office motorbike, nearly collided with another motorcyclist, leading to an argument. Legal action was also taken against that case under the same law.

According to the junta's announcement on October 30, 85 men and 3 women, totaling 88 people, were detained under the law to protect the election. A follow-up announcement on November 3 reported an additional 7 detainees, bringing the total to 95. During an electoral meeting on October 31, the junta's Minister for Home Affairs stated that the SSPC would continue to investigate and take action against any campaigns or propaganda targeting the election. Such actions are still ongoing.

In all previously enacted election laws in Myanmar, electoral offenses and penalties have already been outlined. The current laws regarding various parliamentary elections also extensively detail these matters. However, the junta's new law on election protection states that, regardless of existing legislation, any offense under this law must be prosecuted only under its specific provisions.

8. Conclusions

A truly democratic election must meet international standards, including freedom of assembly, freedom of

expression, access to information, and freedom from fear for voters. It also requires a political environment that guarantees the freedom of political parties, impartial and competent election commissions, proper management, integrity, transparency, inclusiveness, and full adherence to the rule of law. Only under these conditions can an election be considered free and fair.

The junta's 2025 election has completely diverged from all the norms mentioned earlier. After seizing power, the military junta arrested and detained senior NLD government leaders, including President U Win Myint, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, MPs, officials from state and regional governments, and leaders of the NLD who have strong public support, and handed down long prison sentences. They also enacted numerous restrictive laws and amendments that severely limit the public's basic rights.

At a SAC meeting on May 19, 2025, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing stated that the provisions for convening a parliament are already detailed in Articles 85, 128, and 155 of the 2008 Constitution. He also mentioned that legal reviews concluded an election could still take place. In other words, he indicated that forming a Union Parliament would only require 56 MPs and 166 military representatives. This statement implied that an election would be held by any means necessary to secure the required number of MPs to convene a Union parliamentary assembly.

In mid-September, 489 military personnel from various ranks, from major generals to sergeant clerks, transitioned to civilian status and were transferred to the USDP to run in the 2025 Election. This move resembled the earlier effort to shape the political landscape before the 2010 Election, when many military officers were sent to the USDP to create favorable conditions for the elected government led by Ex-General Thein Sein as President. At that time, over 100 military officers, including many close aides of then-military ruler Senior General Than Shwe, contested the 2010 Election.

No matter what, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has been shaping the political landscape during the pre-election period to position himself as President after the 2025 Election. According to the presidential selection system outlined in the 2008 Constitution, the Pyithu Hluttaw must nominate a candidate for vice president to the Pyitaungsu Hluttaw. The Amyotha Hluttaw and the group of military representatives must also nominate their candidates for vice president. From these three nominees, the President is chosen. Therefore, he selected the candidates for the MPs from the Pyithu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw who would definitely vote for him to become President. After all, he is simply pursuing his long-held dream of becoming President.

Before stepping down, the junta leader of the 1988 coup, Senior General Than Shwe, added some provisions to Article 432 of the 2008 Constitution. According to this article, during a state of emergency, the Commander in Chief of Defence Services may take any necessary action, and such actions are considered lawful. Once these actions are deemed legitimate, no one has the right to file a lawsuit against them. Similarly, Min Aung Hlaing, the 2021 coup leader, may later claim after the 2025 election that all their activities or violations were carried out in accordance with the 2008 Constitution. It is also expected that he may pass a law to further protect himself and his colleagues from any legal action arising from their actions during the coup period.

The junta's 2025 election will be held under strict laws and political arrangements designed to preserve the military's influence on Myanmar's future politics and sustain the military dictatorship. It completely fails to meet international standards and norms for elections. Compared to the situation before the 2020 election, the current landscape is entirely different. This contrast shows that the military junta, which oppressed the people during the coup period, is now trying to evade accountability through a sham election.

Overall, such a sham election is not a significant step toward resolving the country's major conflicts. It violates domestic laws, including the 2008 Constitution. Therefore, it is purely a sham in terms of legitimacy and political significance. It is simply designed to reinforce the junta's illegitimate hold on power. For these reasons, it is clear that the 2025 Election will not resolve Myanmar's ongoing conflicts; instead, it could further fuel the civil war that has persisted for decades.

Photo: AFP

MIN AUNG HLAING VOWS DIGNIFIED ELECTION AMID WIDESPREAD CRITICISM AND INTERNATIONAL REJECTIONS

Myanmar Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing said on 3 December that the Myanmar junta is working to ensure the upcoming election is conducted in a dignified manner, speaking at the graduation ceremony for the 67th cadet intake at the Defence Services Academy (DSA).

The military leader added that he is making every effort to ensure that the election is free, fair and dignified.

The statement was made amid domestic and international criticism claiming that the junta's election is a sham.

He also criticized certain individuals and organizations for attempting to obstruct the election in various ways, warning that it would be difficult for a government to function if it were formed under such circumstances.

Revolutionary forces and civil society organizations have stated that the junta's post-coup election, citing voter fraud, will be neither free nor fair and will amount to a sham.

Most international organizations and countries, including the United Nations and the European Parliament, have also declared that they do not recognize the junta's sham elections.

ASEAN announced that it would not send an observer mission for the junta's election.

The junta has announced that the elections will take place in phases, with the first phase scheduled for 28 December in 102 townships.

The second phase is set for 11 January 2026, in 100 townships, followed by the third phase on 25 January 2026.

The junta has approved over 50 political parties to participate in the election, while 40 parties including the National League for Democracy (NLD), which won the 2020 general election but did not re-register with the junta have been dissolved.

NUCC WELCOMES THAI FOREIGN MINISTER'S FIRM STAND ON MYANMAR JUNTA'S ELECTIONS

On 3 December, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) made a statement of appreciation for the Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow's remarks regarding the Myanmar junta's planned elections. The minister stated that the election process cannot be recognized while political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, remain detained.

The NUCC's statement is as follows.

The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) expresses its deep appreciation to H.E Sihasak Phuangketkeow, the Foreign Minister of Thailand, for his frank and principled remarks regarding the elections recently announced by the Myanmar military authorities. By clearly stating that such an electoral process cannot be recognized as transparent while thousands of political prisoners remain unjustly detained, and by calling for the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, H.E. the Minister Sihasak has articulated a position that resonates deeply with the aspiration of the people of Myanmar. His stance reflects not only moral clarity but also a commitment to democratic principles and human rights, values that are shared by the wider regional and international community.

The NUCC recognizes and values Thailand's leadership role in promoting justice, peace, and fundamental freedoms in the region. At this critical juncture, such principled support strengthens the collective demand for a genuine democratic transition in Myanmar and underscores the importance of inclusivity, accountability, and respect for human rights as the foundation for lasting stability.

The NUCC looks forward to continued collaboration with Thailand in supporting efforts that enable the people of Myanmar to freely determine their own future and achieve a democratic and peaceful society.

Photo: AFP

SHAN YOUTH URGE PEOPLE TO REJECT MYANMAR JUNTA'S SHAM ELECTION

Five Shan youth civil society organizations released a joint statement on 3 December, strongly urging the Shan people not to participate in the Myanmar junta's upcoming election, which they labelled a "sham."

The statement emphasized the political aspirations of the Shan people saying, "A federal democracy where we have the right to determine our own destiny is what we, the Shan people and Shan youth, aspire to."

"The junta's sham election is only an attempt to revive the 2008 Constitution and will only take us further away from a genuine federal democracy," the organizations declared.

The groups asserted that a fundamental feature of democracy – a free and fair election – can only occur in a nonviolent, peaceful environment where civilians accept the results and all eligible participants are included. They pointed out that the junta has been conducting daily arrests, killings, airstrikes, and the burning and destruction of civilian homes and villages across the country, including in Shan State, since the military takeover.

The Shan Youth Civil Society Organizations claimed that the junta, which uses such widespread violence, is merely trying to cover up its war crimes and gain international legitimacy by holding an election.

The statement also highlighted that many individuals in Shan State who deserve to participate are excluded, a fact the organizations described as common knowledge. The groups vowed to resist the junta's election by all possible means.

The junta has declared that the first phase of its election will be held in 102 townships on 28 December.

Other groups have mirrored this stance. The All Kachin Students and Youth Union (AKSYU) also released a statement on 2 December, strongly denouncing the junta's planned election and urging all domestic and international organizations to reject it.

Similarly, revolutionary forces and other civil society groups have declared they will not recognize the election, calling it a sham that cannot be considered free or fair.

MYANMAR JUNTA SAYS ARRESTED MAN FOR ANTI-ELECTION FACEBOOK CHAT

Myanmar's military said 3 December it arrested a man who sent anti-election messages in a private Facebook chat, wielding laws that rights groups say curb personal liberties to crush dissent.

The junta snatched power in a 2021 coup which plunged Myanmar into a many-sided civil war, but it promises that polls starting in late December will move the country towards peace and democracy.

Deposed lawmakers excluded from the vote, human rights monitors and guerilla rebels opposing the junta have dismissed the election as a charade to disguise continuing military rule.

Ahead of the poll the military government introduced broad new legislation including clauses punishing protesting or criticising the election with up to a decade in prison.

A junta statement said 58-year-old Khaing Soe from Bogyoke village near Yangon was arrested under the law on Friday.

He "was exposed and arrested for writing texts on Messenger using his 'Khaing Soe' Facebook Account with the intent to frustrate election processes and mislead the public", it said.

The statement provided few details about the alleged offence, including how authorities may have accessed his messages on the private Facebook Messenger app.

"Action is being taken to ensure he receives an effective penalty," it said.

Two other men were also arrested -- one for a Facebook post and one for vandalising an election billboard -- while 11 other cases were opened against groups or individuals, the statement added.

The junta has opened more than 100 cases under the election disruption law, according to an AFP tally.

However, some are targeting rebel fighters operating beyond the military's reach.

UN rights office spokesman Jeremy Laurence warned last week that "the military has stepped up mass electronic surveillance to identify dissidents" ahead of the widely criticised election.

Myanmar has historically been ruled by the military, but enjoyed a decade-long democratic thaw starting in 2010 that saw Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi become an elected figurehead.

She was toppled and has been sequestered in jail since the February 2021 putsch.

Her party has been dissolved and will not appear on ballots when voting begins on December 28 in a phased election expected to last around one month.

AFP

PEC DEMANDS RELEASE OF ALL MEDIA PROFESSIONALS BEFORE MYANMAR POLLS

Press Emblem Campaign (PEC), the global media safety and rights body, urges the military regime of Myanmar to release all media professionals before the proposed multi-phase elections starting on 28 December.

In a press release on 7 December, the forum also insisted on abolishing the new election interference law which continues harassing scribes and social media users in the name of "cracking down against anti-nationals" across the South East Asian nation.

PEC says the Buddhist majority country of nearly 55 million people is now witnessing a kind of civil war, where the Min Aung Hlaing-led Tatmadaw continue fighting against pro-democracy armed resistance units and in various battles the government forces face defeats. Almost half of the townships have gone out of military's control, where the voting will be impossible to conduct. Thus a free, fair and comprehensive election in Myanmar remains elusive under the present political system.

In the name of elections, the military rulers have imposed some strict guidelines threatening the mainstream journalists and social media users in Myanmar. Thus they have taken a hard stand against any discussions on the faulty polls. Over five journalists along with press freedom defenders were executed by the military rulers. Many journalists had to escape the country under threat of their lives and take shelter in the neighbouring countries, said Blaise Lempen, president of PEC (pressemblem.ch), adding that journalism must not be treated as a crime by any authority around the world.

PEC's south and South East Asia representative Nava Thakuria informed that over 200 journalists were detained and imprisoned since the military coup that overthrew the democratically elected Aung San Suu Kyi's government in 2021. Nearly 50 media professionals are still behind bars across the trouble-torn country.

Permits of at least 15 media outlets were cancelled compelling them to work undercover and in exile.

PEC said it can only hope that the forthcoming elections will bring some relief to the media fraternity in regards to their security and professional concerns.

VETERAN JOURNALIST SITHU AUNG MYINT, TWO MEDIA WORKERS FREED IN MYANMAR JUNTA'S AMNESTY WAVE

Veteran journalist U Sithu Aung Myint, BBC Media Action freelance producer and "Experience" program host Ma Htet Htet Khine, and Bago Weekly reporter Ko Nyein Chan Wai have been released from prison, sources close to the journalists confirmed to Mizzima.

The release is part of a recent mass amnesty by Myanmar's junta, which claims the move is intended to ensure eligible voters can cast ballots in the upcoming elections.

Ma Htet Htet Khine and Ko Nyein Chan Wai walked free from Tharyarwady Prison, while U Sithu Aung Myint was released from Yangon's Insein Prison last week.

U Sithu Aung Myint, a veteran journalist, was detained in August 2021 in Yangon. He was initially handed a combined sentence of 12 years—three years under Section 124(a) for sedition and nine years under Section 505-A for opposing the coup. His sentence was later reduced through a pardon under Section 401 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Ma Htet Htet Khine, the BBC Media Action producer, was detained with U Sithu Aung Myint in August 2021. She received a total sentence of six years under Section 505-A (incitement) and Section 17(1) of the Unlawful Associations Act.

Bago Weekly reporter Ko Nyein Chan Wai was arrested on 14 May 2021, when a military team raided his home. He was sentenced to a total of 11 years in two separate cases under Sections 124(a) and 505-A.

A source who spoke with Ko Nyein Chan Wai confirmed that upon their release from Tharyarwady Prison, they were made to sign an agreement instructing them to vote. "He said he was freed for the election," the source explained.

The junta announced on 30 November that it would release 724 prisoners jailed under Section 505(a). The Political Prisoners Network–Myanmar (PPNM) reported that 268 inmates had been released from 11 prisons nationwide as of 1 December.

Veteran journalist U Myint Kyaw believes the release of media workers is purely an attempt to seek international legitimacy. "I believe it's primarily an attempt to win international backing for the elections, which most of the global community does not recognize," he told Mizzima. "I think it's all about gaining support."

The Independent Press Council Myanmar (IPCM) reports that 40 journalists have been imprisoned since the 2021 military coup, and seven have died in the line of duty. Myanmar ranks 169th out of 180 countries in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

INTERNET PROJECT DISMISSES MYANMAR JUNTA'S CABLE REPAIR EXPLANATION AS 'UNBELIEVABLE'

The Myanmar Internet Project (MIP) has dismissed the military commission's explanation for the country's ongoing internet outages and slowdowns as "unbelievable," suggesting the intentional suppression of digital rights is the true cause.

The commission, in an announcement published on 5 December, attributed the widespread slow speeds and outages to a reported failure of the UMO submarine fiber cable linking Singapore and Myanmar, one of the country's key international connections on 1 November.

Ko Thit Nyan, a digital freedom researcher at MIP, sharply criticized the late explanation and the timeline provided by the commission.

"It took them a month to announce that the UMO fiber cable was under repair, and their claim that the internet will be restored after 28 December is highly questionable. It's simply not credible," Ko Thit Nyan told Mizzima on 5 December.

The Military Commission stated that repairs to the UMO connection would not be completed until after the first phase of the elections scheduled for 28 December, claiming services would only return to normal then. While the statement claimed that cross-border fiber links had been activated to restore services to a "reasonable" level, residents across the country have reported slow speeds, Wi-Fi outages, and disrupted VPN connections since November.

Ko Thit Nyan questioned the official narrative, noting that details on the failure remain obscured and the long repair time is suspicious by industry standards.

"Why it broke and how it broke remain unclear, and we can't say whether the timeline they've given is reasonable. Under normal circumstances, undersea cables are susceptible to damage, which is why rapid repair systems are typically in place. By that standard, this situation is difficult to accept," he said.

The MIP researcher asserted that the Military Commission's actions constitute a deliberate throttling of internet access intended to suppress the public, restrict freedom of expression, and shield what he described as its "sham elections".

The Military Commission has employed multiple forms of digital repression since the coup. MIP data shows nearly 420 internet shutdowns since 2021.

Slowing down internet access effectively blocks connectivity, a measure the Myanmar Internet Project has repeatedly criticized as both oppressive and a violation of digital rights. This extensive digital repression has caused Myanmar's ranking to plummet. The US-based Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2025 report gave Myanmar a score of just nine out of 100 on the internet freedom index, placing it alongside China among the countries with the worst internet freedom.

Photo: AFP

AMBASSADOR KYAW MOE TUN URGES UN ACTION AS MYANMAR 'S CIVILIANS FACE DEADLY ATTACKS FROM THE JUNTA

On 3 December, Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, sent a letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres to highlight the worsening humanitarian and human rights crisis in Myanmar. Attached was an update on the situation in Myanmar as of September 2025.

Copies of the letter and the update were also sent to the President of the 80th Session of the United Nationals General Assembly, Ms. Annalena Baerbock, as well as all Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the UN.

The text of the letter is as follows.

I am writing to you to apprise you of the heart-breaking situation in Myanmar, where people are suffering from overlapping crises due to the violent acts committed by the inhumane military group against the people of Myanmar.

It has been over 58 months since the military attempted an illegal coup. The military has brutally murdered 7,515 people. Over twenty-nine thousand have been arrested, detained, and tortured, and more than 3.5 million have been displaced. Almost 22 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Half of the population is now living under the national poverty line. The military junta has executed four democracy activists who were given death sentences, and the military courts have sentenced many civilians to years of imprisonment including life imprisonment without just cause.

The junta continues to ignore the will of the people and violate their fundamental rights. Amidst people's suffering caused by the manmade and natural disasters, the military junta has continued carrying out of aerial and artillery attacks on civilian areas across the country.

As with my previous letters, I would like to draw your attention to the unspeakable tragedy unfolding in Myanmar.

The military junta conducted (197) aerial attack cases in September, launching airstrikes, drone assaults, paramotor attacks and gyrocopter strikes, in total of (434) times. These attacks resulted in (171) civilian deaths and (285) injuries. Sagaing and Mandalay regions recorded some of the highest concentrations of aerial assaults, while religious buildings, schools and medical facilities were also destroyed during the month of September.

Tragically, according to the reports, thirteen massacre incidents were recorded in September, resulted in (121) deaths. Most victims were adults, although twenty-nine children were among those killed. The majority of the massacres occurred in Sagaing Region, followed by Chin, Rakhine and Kachin States.

Alarmingly, (577) human rights violations were documented during September. (130) extrajudicial killings were reported, alongside widespread property destruction, forced labour, arbitrary arrest and forced displacement. Mandalay Region registered the highest number of abuses, followed by Sagaing, Magwe and Bago regions. The findings indicate that violations have reached critical levels across central Myanmar, especially in areas marked by ongoing resistance activity.

In another concerning trend, forced conscription increased during the month. (17) cases involving (181) individuals were recorded, with Sagaing Region reporting the highest number.

In an escalation linked to its planned sham election, the junta increased aerial and ground attacks across resistance held areas, nearly doubling airstrikes and killing more than one hundred civilians within a month. (27) airstrikes hit twenty townships with severe casualties including (27) children, and several incidents reaching massacre levels. Recent strikes in Mandalay, Sagaing, Kachin and Rakhine destroyed schools, damaged religious sites and deepened civilian trauma.

Such developments once again demonstrate the junta's systematic disregard for human life, human dignity, and international norms. The continued airstrikes, arbitrary killings, suppression of basic freedoms, and deliberate creation of humanitarian suffering amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The situation calls for urgent and decisive action from the international community to hold the perpetrators accountable and to protect the innocent people of Myanmar.

The systematic nature of these violations demonstrates the junta's continued disregard for international humanitarian law and human rights law. The targeting of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, religious buildings, and residential areas, constitutes violations of the Geneva Conventions and fundamental principles of international humanitarian law.

The junta is now attempting to mask this depravity with a sham election. The junta's planned election is illegal. Moreover, the junta's continued atrocities against civilians, arbitrary arrest of political leaders including State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint, collapse of freedom of expression, severely restriction of information, and living with constant fear will make this so-called election neither free nor fair nor inclusive. It must be categorically rejected.

In addition, transnational crimes such as online scam and human and drug trafficking have increased drastically in Myanmar especially in the areas controlled by the military junta's affiliates.

Recently, the Ethnic Resistant Organization, Karen National Union (KNU), issued a number of statements informing current situation on the ground in Karen State and calling for urgent and serious international cooperation for crackdown of this heinous cybercrime including evidence collection and effective investigation. Because of the seriousness of such transnational crime, effective international support and cooperation must be extended immediately to successfully combat this global menace in Myanmar.

For over 58 months, the people of Myanmar have suffered dreadfully from the military junta's inhumane and brutal atrocities and its creation of safe haven for cybercrime.

To help the helpless people of Myanmar, the international community, in particular the UN and the UN Security Council should be bold and take immediate and decisive actions without further delay. Only through a concerted and coordinated effort from the international community to isolate the military and cut it off from all support including the flow of arms and weapons, jet fuel, money to the military junta will Myanmar return its path towards democracy and create a just, peaceful and stable environment.

Under this devastating circumstance, on behalf of the people of Myanmar, I with a very heavy and painful heart appeal again to the international community, in particular the United Nations Security Council, to put humanity first and take concrete action now to save lives and bring peace and bright future back to the people of Myanmar.

As usual, I enclose herewith the Information Update on the current situation in Myanmar as of 30 September 2025 for your kind perusal.

FORMER STUDENT UNION SECRETARY REARRESTED ON TERRORISM CHARGES DAY AFTER MYANMAR JUNTA'S AMNESTY RELEASE

Ma Poe Piti Khaing, Joint Secretary of the Hpa-an Computer University Student Union, was reportedly rearrested the day after her release from Myingyan Prison in Mandalay Region, according to sources close to her.

Ma Poe Piti Khaing was released from Myingyan Prison on 2 December but was rearrested on 3 December after being summoned to a police station in Mandalay's Aung Pin Lei District to sign an undertaking related to her release.

A local source detailed the incident: "The police called her home at night to ask if she was there. She was reportedly summoned to sign a document. The next morning, she went to the police station but contact with her was lost. Later, the police called back and informed the family that a case had been opened against her under the terrorism law."

The student activist, a native of Bilin in Mon State and a third-year student at Hpa-an Computer University, was initially arrested in Mandalay in 2021. She was sentenced to two years under Section 505(a) of the Penal Code (incitement) and three years under Section 17(1) of the Unlawful Associations Act, serving a total of five years at Obo Prison before being transferred to Myingyan Prison.

She was released on 2 December, likely under the recent amnesty announced by the junta but was rearrested the following day and charged under Section 52(a) of the Terrorism Act.

The junta announced on the evening of 26 November that it had closed the cases of those charged under Section 505(a) during the coup, resulting in the release of 724 people convicted under that section.

The Political Prisoners Network - Myanmar (PPNM) announced on 4 December that 639 people had been released under Article 505(a), including 272 released on 1 December.

However, the overall detention picture remains grim. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reported on 3 December that since 2021, 30,071 people have been arrested in connection with the coup, with 22,676 still in detention. Of those detained, 11,414 are serving prison sentences.

JFM PRESS RELEASE HIGHLIGHTS REPORT ON INVESTMENTS BY SWEDISH PENSION FUNDS SUPPORTING MYANMAR'S JUNTA

On 28 November, Justice for Myanmar released a new report, in Swedish, reviewing investments made by Swedish pension funds to companies in Myanmar directly linked to the Myanmar junta.

The text of the English-language press release accompanying the report is as follows.

A new review by the Swedish Burma Committee, Justice For Myanmar and Fair Finance Guide reveals that Sweden's national pension funds AP1, AP2, AP3, AP4 and AP7 have invested over US$484 million in 12 companies linked to Myanmar's illegal military junta.

Despite nearly five years of escalating Myanmar military junta atrocities, airstrikes on civilians, mass displacement, systematic repression and a deepening humanitarian crisis, Swedish public pension money continues to flow into companies that sell weapons, enable surveillance or provide a source of funds for the military.

AP7 is the biggest investor in these dirty companies.

The review highlights three categories of support to the military from Swedish pension fund investees.

Weapons: Indian companies Bharat Electronics and Hindustan Aeronautics have supplied arms and equipment to the military.

Surveillance: Japanese companies KDDI and Sumitomo partnered with junta-controlled MPT, in whose data centres the junta has installed a commercialised version of China's Great Firewall to track, arrest and target activists and journalists.

Oil & Gas revenues: Thailand's PTT and PTTEP and Indian company GAIL are part of offshore gas projects with junta that provide a key financial lifeline and fund its terror campaign.

These companies play a role in enabling the military's commission of international crimes that it commits with total impunity.

We call on AP Funds to use their leverage to ensure companies cut ties with the junta. If companies refuse, the funds must divest to avoid complicity in grave human rights violations.

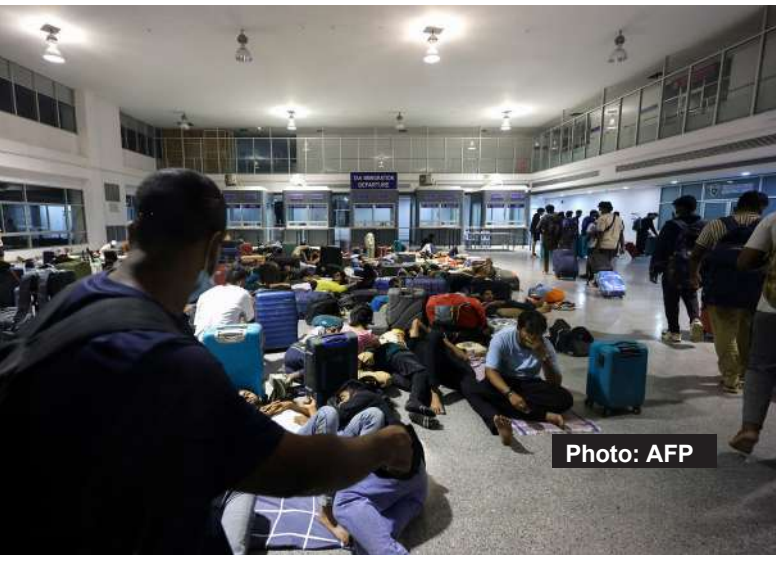


Photo: AFP

ONLINE SCAM OPERATIONS PERSIST AND SPREAD IN MYAWADDY DESPITE JUNTA'S PUBLIC CRACKDOWN

Despite the Myanmar junta's publicized crackdown on online scam operations, locally known as Kyarpyant, these activities have reportedly spread to the town-level wards of Myawaddy. The Myanmar-Thai border town is under the junta's control.

Mizzima's investigation confirmed that recruitment for new scam staff, specifically interpreters and chatting personnel, is being actively conducted on the Telegram platform. Most job postings are focused on operations within Myawaddy's Ward 5, Ward 3, and a site known as the UK Compound.

A Myawaddy resident identified the location of one hub: "The UK Compound is a casino, just near Gate 1. You can go from the sugarcane field. It is located on the east side of Ward 3, the Kyundaw New Ward."

Locals report that dormitories, hotels, and private rented houses across Myawaddy's wards are now filled with foreign nationals, particularly Chinese citizens, as well as individuals holding Myanmar identity cards who cannot speak the language.

"Kyarpyant are operating almost everywhere in Myawaddy. Hotels and dorms are just full. They are living there," locals said.

A former employee of these operations stated that employers and superiors are now actively calling back Myanmar nationals who previously worked in the industry and fled, informing them that the operations are resuming.

The junta is actively staging public demonstrations of its anti-scam efforts. After first relocating the leadership of the online scam compounds to secure locations, the junta began publicizing raids on some buildings in KK Park and Shwe Kokko. These operations were used to demonstrate the arrest of workers, the seizure and destruction of computer equipment, and the controlled demolition of scam buildings, often accompanied by frequent statements.

However, there is widespread public criticism and scepticism, with many pointing out that the destruction of these buildings by the junta and the Border Guard Force (BGF) is merely a way of destroying evidence related to the scam operations in which they themselves were allegedly involved.

In contrast to the junta's actions, the armed organizations of the Karen National Union (KNU) and the People's Defence Force (PDF) jointly raided an online scam compound called Shunda Park on 23 November. This compound was run by Chinese mafia gangs and previously protected by the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), which is allied to the junta.

The KNU has been coordinating with Thai authorities to arrange the repatriation of scam workers wishing to return home. It is also providing food and security for the remaining 1,006 people, including 942 who do not wish to be repatriated.

Despite this humanitarian effort, a combined column of junta troops is advancing toward the Shunda Park compound, intensifying ground battles, and attacking the facility with air strikes and heavy artillery. The KNU consequently stated on 2 December that it is difficult to guarantee the safety of the remaining foreign online scam workers inside the compound due to the ongoing assaults.

Meanwhile, Ko Ye Min from the Aid Alliance Committee (AAC) stated on his social media that during the last week of November, Karen armed forces subordinate to the junta transported Chinese nationals who had fled from the Min Lat Pan village scam area to the sealed and confiscated house of AAC's Ko Ye Min in Myawaddy town.

JFM RECOGNISED WITH RIGHT LIVELIHOOD AWARD FOR ITS WORK EXPOSING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT TO MYANMAR'S JUNTA

Justice for Myanmar (JFM) was recognised by the Right Livelihood Foundation alongside several other countries with the Right Livelihood Award on 2 December in Stockholm, Sweden. JFM's acceptance speech was delivered by activist Greta Thurnberg.

The text of the acceptance speech is as follows.

We are deeply humbled to be recognised by the Right Livelihood Foundation, alongside fellow laureates from the Pacific Islands, Taiwan, and Sudan, whose work inspires us.

We accept this award in honour of the courageous people of Myanmar, who, for nearly five years since the military's brutal coup attempt, have stood against the junta with unyielding strength, dignity, and immense sacrifice.

This award belongs to them.

It belongs to the youth who march in defiance, determined to build a future without tyranny, to those who continue to seek justice after decades of oppression, to the whistleblowers who risk everything to tell the truth, to those who have given their lives so others may live free from the military's brutality, and to the countless people who continue to fight for a federal democracy built on peace and justice for all.

We stand with you.

Since the illegal coup attempt of 2021, the military has unleashed a campaign of terror against the people with mass killings, torture, sexual violence, airstrikes and the burning of villages.

Even the children are not spared.

These crimes are being committed by the same perpetrators of genocide against the Rohingya with total impunity.

Yet, amid the horror, the courage of the people remains unbroken.

Our movement is not only against the generals who commit these crimes, but also against the governments, corporations and banks that continue to fund and enable the junta's violence, and the oppression of oppressed people around the world, from Palestine to Ukraine, from East Turkistan to Sudan, who we stand in solidarity with.

The Right Livelihood Award reaffirms that Myanmar's struggle is part of a global fight for justice and human dignity.

To dismantle the military cartel, we need solidarity and action.

This December, the military junta will be holding a sham election. We call on governments to reject this and stop the flow of funds, arms, equipment and aviation fuel that sustains the junta's terror.

We call on companies and investors: withdraw your money from the military and its cronies. End this complicity. Do not fund atrocities.

This honour strengthens our resolve and sends a clear message to the junta and its enablers:

The world is watching.

The Myanmar people's revolution will prevail.

Thank you.

THREE CIVILIANS, INCLUDING SEVEN-YEAR-OLD CHILD, KILLED IN MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON SHWEBO TOWNSHIP VILLAGE

Three civilians, including a seven-year-old child, were killed and nine others injured when junta forces carried out an airstrike on Thit Cho Pin Village in Shwebo Township, Sagaing Region, according to local sources.

The strike occurred at around 1:20 am on 5 December, when a fighter jet from Tada-U Airbase dropped two 250-pound bombs on the village, a local resident told Mizzima.

"They dropped the bombs while people were asleep. Three people died, and many others were injured, some critically. Several cows were also killed," the resident said.

The victims were identified as seven-year-old Ma Lae Lae Tun, U Myint Thu Win (38), and Daw Thu Thu Win (38). Among the injured is an eight-year-old child, while two of the wounded remain in critical condition, according to local sources.

The attack destroyed ten houses, two motorbikes, and a power tiller, and killed nine cows.

Residents say junta aircraft have increasingly launched late-night raids in recent days, leaving civilians little time to seek cover and resulting in a rising number of casualties.

On 2 December, at around 1 am, a similar strike on Nat Hmaw Oo Village in Wetlet Township killed five people, including a two-year-old child.

MYANMAR JUNTA AIR STRIKES KILL FOUR CIVILIANS, INJURE DOCTOR IN BAGO REGION VILLAGE

The Myanmar junta launched a combined air and artillery attack on Nyaungpintha village in Kyaukkyi Township, resulting in the deaths of four civilians and injuring many others, according to local sources.

Around noon on 3 December, a military gyrocopter reportedly dropped two bombs on Nyaungpintha village while Infantry Battalion 73, based in Zayatgyi, fired heavy artillery, causing numerous civilian casualties.

"They deliberately targeted the people despite a lack of fighting," said a local military source.

A resident of Zayatgyi corroborated this, stating, "They carried out the strikes and then flew back moments later. We saw the aircraft from our side heading east for the bombing run. But there was no fighting, not a single gunshot. We only heard the thud of artillery shells."

Bombs from the gyrocopter and artillery shells struck the area around Nyaungpintha village's hospital and nearby civilian neighbourhoods.

Initial local reports confirmed three deaths, including an on-duty doctor, and 10 injuries. The death toll rose to four after another woman died while the injured civilians were being transported to Taungoo General Hospital. Among the nine survivors, several are in serious condition.

The National Unity Government's (NUG) Ministry of Human Rights recently reported that the junta's airstrikes killed 148 civilians in November alone, using a range of aircraft including fighter jets, support planes, drones, paramotors, and gyrocopters. The NUG further reported that the military junta has carried out 4,200 airstrikes since seizing power on 1 February 2021, resulting in 4,470 deaths.

Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA COLUMN BURNS MORE THAN 60 HOMES IN TAUNGTHA TOWNSHIP

Local sources report that at least 64 houses were destroyed when a Myanmar junta column launched an attack and set fire to Pekhinkyaw village in Taungtha Township, Myingyan District, Mandalay Region.

According to residents, the arson attack occurred at around 11:40 am on 2 December, when a column of roughly 100 junta soldiers left Taungtha town and advanced into the village.

"They dropped bombs from drones before entering. The fire had already begun at that point. Once they reached the village, they went straight to torching houses. It lasted just over half an hour before they pulled back into town," the source explained.

Residents say the junta's command troops have been conducting "clearance operations" in villages within a two-mile radius of Taungtha since 27 November.

"Since the 27th, they have been sweeping from the west and south of Taungtha all the way to the eastern side. Pekhinkyaw is located on the eastern side. It looks like they are doing this mainly because of the upcoming election," local source said.

Displaced villagers from Pekhinkyaw are now in urgent need of assistance, and revolutionary forces have temporarily barred residents from returning to the village due to ongoing military threats.

"Because the village is very close to town, junta troops can return at any time. There is also the risk of drone attacks and heavy artillery, so we are not allowing villagers to stay there yet," a member of a local resistance group said.

The Taungtha People's Movement Committee has warned residents to remain vigilant, saying the junta has deployed up to 500 troops who continue to patrol throughout Taungtha Township.

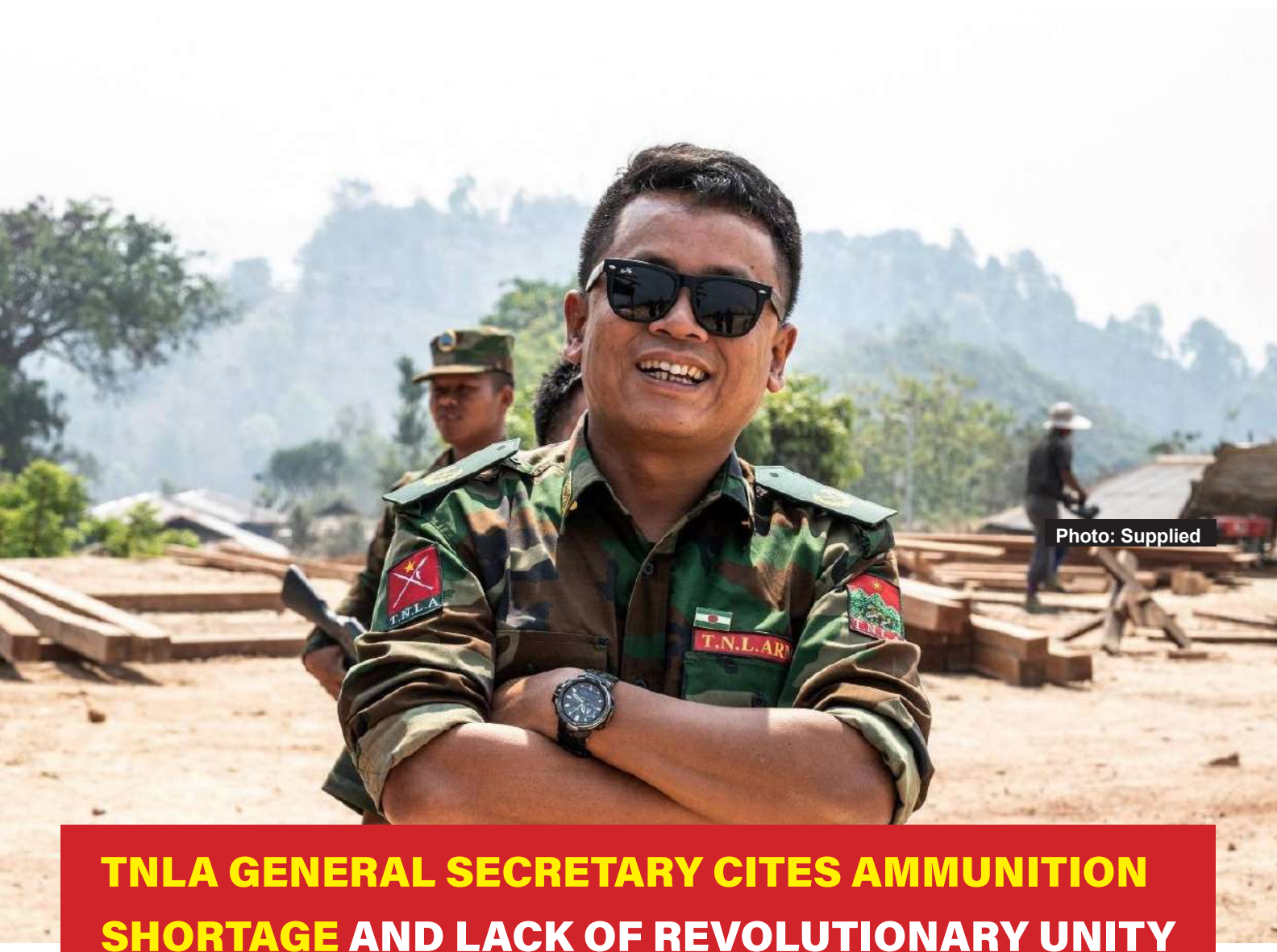


Photo: Supplied

TNLA GENERAL SECRETARY CITES AMMUNITION SHORTAGE AND LACK OF REVOLUTIONARY UNITY FOR CEASEFIRE WITH MYANMAR JUNTA

Major General Tar Phone Kyaw, General Secretary of the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA), wrote on his social media that the TNLA was compelled to declare a ceasefire due to the depletion of ammunition, a lack of budget, and declining troop strength.

"We had no ammo, no budget, and fewer troops to sacrifice. So, after negotiating over Mogok and Moemeik, we had no choice but to halt the fighting. This chapter is not over yet," he wrote on the night of 1 December in a poem titled Mogok Commentary.

In the poem, he said the TNLA had supported the Spring Revolution using resources built over decades, deployed thousands of fighters, and taken on billions of dollars in debt for arms procurement.

"We couldn't keep up with the Bamar in what they called 'D-Day,' but we tried to move with the momentum as much as we could. In reality, when Operation 1027 began, no D-Day ever came and, in the end, we stood alone," he wrote.

Tar Phone Kyaw is apparently referring to the National Unity Government's call for a nationwide uprising in September 2021, which it dubbed "D-Day."

Addressing those accusing the TNLA of betrayal, he urged them to reflect deeply with revolutionary spirit and face reality with clarity.

Regarding the withdrawal from Mogok and Moemit, he expressed sincere apologies to those who had sacrificed, saying the TNLA had hoped to include Mogok within Ta'ang State but now felt "as if slapped down while reaching for a snack we could not eat."

The poem included lines such as, "As long as we are not out of luck, there will always be results for those who keep trying," and "The revolution is not over yet."

Lieutenant General Peng Daxun, Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), previously stated that the Chinese mediated ceasefire reached between the junta and the MNDAA was merely a step forward, not a final peace agreement. Genuine peace, he said, remained distant. He made the remarks during his speech at the MNDAA's 2025 Batch 1 Cadre Alternative Graduation Ceremony on 25 October.

During Operation 1027, the TNLA captured 12 towns, including Mantong, Moemit, Monglon, Mongngaw, Nawnghkio, Kyaukme, Namhsan, Namtu, Namkham, Kutkai, Mogok, and Hsipaw. However, intense counterattacks by the military junta beginning in the middle of this year enabled the junta to retake Kyaukme, Nawnghkio, and Hsipaw.

While the TNLA was losing territories and the military junta was advancing toward Kyaukme, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) convened a meeting on 20 August in Pangkham, Shan State. Representatives from the UWSA, MNDAA, TNLA, and Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) attended. China had exerted unprecedented pressure on the UWSA, forcing the group to announce it would no longer provide weapons, logistical routes, or financial assistance to armed organisations.

Afterward, the TNLA reported facing repeated pressure from China. On 27–28 October, following the ninth round of talks between the TNLA and the junta in Kunming, China, both sides signed a ceasefire effective 29 October, with the TNLA agreeing to withdraw from Mogok and Moemit.

However, on the same day, the Mogok Strategic People's Defence Force and Mandalay People's Defence Force (MDY-PDF), along with other resistance groups, declared they would defend Mogok with all their strength.

Junta forces then entered Mogok and Moemit on the afternoon of 29 November. Clashes erupted the next day, 30 November, in western Mogok and Moemit townships, and continued on 1 December to the east of Mogok, between revolutionary forces and junta troops.

MYANMAR JUNTA AIR STRIKE KILLS FIVE FAMILY MEMBERS, INCLUDING CHILD, IN SAGAING REGION

A midnight air strike launched by Myanmar junta forces on Nat Hmaw Oo village in the eastern part of Wetlet Township killed five family members, including a two-year-old child, when a bomb directly hit their house and exploded, according to the Wetlet Information Network.

Ko Naga Lay, the person in charge of the Wetlet Information Network, stated that two 250-pound bombs were dropped at 12:06 AM on 2 December by a jet fighter that took off from Tada-U Air Base.

"They fired directly into the village. All the family members in the house where the bomb fell died, and the house completely vanished. Other houses around it were also destroyed," Ko Naga Lay said.

The victims of the air strike were identified as Ko Shine Ko (25), his wife Ma Su Myat Lin (24), their daughter Shwe Pon San (2), Maung Maung Win (21), and Yan Naing Win (40).

In addition to the fatalities, more than five local residents, including two more children, sustained injuries, and five houses were destroyed, Ko Naga Lay reported.

He added, "One of the two children was hit in the eye, and the other was hit in the head. The rest are known to be adults."

Nat Hmaw Oo village is located on the bank of the Ayeyarwady River in eastern Wetlet Township.

Revolutionary forces issued a statement arguing that since there were no revolutionary troops' bases in the village and no fighting took place, conducting such an air strike while the civilian population was sleeping constitutes a war crime targeting the people.

The attack follows a previous incident in the township on 27 November, when junta forces fired heavy weaponry, killing a woman in Aung Chan Thar Ywar Thit village.

A mine victim. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S DISABLED POPULATION FACES DIMINISHING RIGHTS, SEVERE NEGLECT UNDER JUNTA RULE

Since the 2021 military coup, Myanmar's vulnerable population with disabilities faces an increasingly uncertain future and diminishing rights, as civil society support collapses and conflict-related injuries mount.

Before the coup, people with disabilities faced structural weaknesses in infrastructure, employment, health, and education, but a robust civil society movement allowed them to voice their demands. Today, this support system has severely deteriorated.

"The current situation is that opportunities and rights for people with disabilities remain largely unrealized. Even ordinary citizens face numerous challenges, making life even harder for those with disabilities," said a mother of a young person with disabilities in Yangon.

She noted the significant lack of support compared to the past: "In the past, if you needed something related to the body, you could go anywhere and receive assistance. Today, you often have to handle it yourself. There is a shortage of care, and services are provided without genuine goodwill."

Local civil society organizations (CSOs) that support people with disabilities can no longer provide the same level of assistance due to oppression by the junta, which has imposed strict controls on CSO registrations and refuses to cooperate with them.

An official from a local disability organization explained the operational freeze: "Our associations for

intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, and the blind all maintain a low profile. When challenges arise, there is virtually no cooperation from the government."

The official added that the junta now only grants temporary, rather than permanent, permission for organizations to operate legally. "Rather than cooperating with each other, we have to monitor what they are doing."

This neglect is starkly reflected in electoral rights. While provisions for advance voting for people with disabilities were made in the 2020 election, the mother noted that this right has been entirely denied in the current election organized by the junta. "I have to report that there is no provision at all now," she said.

The number of people with disabilities, which stood at 5.9 million (13 percent of the population) in the 2014 census, continues to rise steadily due to the ongoing conflict. In regions with strong resistance, those disabled by the war face even harsher conditions, often lacking adequate medical care for injuries caused by landmines and heavy weaponry.

A revolutionary comrade whose leg was paralyzed by artillery fire described the harrowing lack of treatment: "The injury was a fractured thigh. I was hit at 9 a.m. and didn't reach the hospital until midnight. The hospital had run out of supplies, so I had to move again the next day. Then the hospital was bombed, forcing me to leave my bed and lie elsewhere. The injury worsened because of these conditions."

Centres along the Thai border and in revolutionary areas assist those disabled by the war, but they are insufficient as the number of patients grows daily. Funding cuts from international organizations have further constrained capacity.

"Some were injured by landmines, others by heavy weapons, and some by bullets," said an official from the Nwe Oo Metta Trust Centre. "The centre faces financial challenges, but patients keep coming, and the demand is high. Medical expenses are a constant struggle. Last month, I had to sell something at the market to cover costs, which caused further hardship and debt."

The official noted that comrades who are completely disabled stay at the centre, where they are encouraged to consult mental health doctors for psychological recovery, though the centre's limited funds cannot cover surgery costs or help patients establish income-generating businesses yet.

The revolutionary comrade also detailed the psychological toll: "For more than six months, almost a year, I was deeply depressed. I felt like an outsider and experienced many difficult emotions I began counselling and gradually regained my motivation."

The National Unity Government (NUG) has announced plans to introduce a law providing medical treatment, rehabilitation, and life insurance for comrades injured in the revolution.

Disability organizations inside the country and in revolutionary areas unanimously state that their ultimate goal is a peaceful nation, as only peace can secure a more dignified and stable life for people with disabilities. Across the country, whether under junta control or in revolutionary areas, people with disabilities continue to endure the crisis in silence, facing persistent challenges from lack of security, support, and opportunities.

DR. SASA LAUNCHES NEW FEDERAL DEMOCRACY INSTITUTE AFTER LEAVING THE NUG

On 1 December, Dr. Sasa announced that following the dissolution of his Ministry of Internation Cooperation he will head a new Institute of Peace and Federal Democracy (IPFD), focusing on local governance, federalism, and community empowerment, while continuing the fight against the junta for a federal democratic union in Myanmar.

The statement is as follows.

As part of the ongoing reforms of the National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG), I was informed in August by the Acting President, the Prime Minister of the NUG, and the Chairman of the CRPH that the Ministry of International Cooperation would be dissolved.

Serving the courageous people of Myanmar (Burma) during the darkest period in our modern history has been the greatest honour of my life. I remain deeply grateful for the trust you have placed in me. Though this chapter closes, my commitment to our nation continues with even greater purpose.

I will now devote my full efforts to launching three new initiatives— legal entities established under the "People's Platforms" of Myanmar's Advocacy, Finance and Governance strategic framework—beginning with the first of these institutions, the Institute of Peace and Federal Democracy (IPFD).

The IPFD is an independent institution focused on:

Strengthening local governance and bottom-up federalism in liberated areas;

Expanding international engagement so that all voices from Myanmar are heard;

Valuing and empowering our diverse cultural identities while supporting regional development and good governance.

Its mission is to accelerate Myanmar's path toward peace and a genuine federal democracy. This work complements and reinforces the ongoing diplomatic, humanitarian, and nation-building efforts of Myanmar's democratic movements and the international community. It is not a departure from our shared struggle, but a continuation of it in a new capacity.

Together—one voice, one mission, one future—we must stand united against Min Aung Hlaing and his unlawful junta, which is causing immense pain, suffering, death, and destruction across Myanmar. Their charade of a ballot is not an election; it is an act of deception designed solely to lend a veneer of legitimacy to their criminal misrule.

I will not rest until the people of Myanmar are free. We must never give up.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my colleagues in the NUG and to all who stand with the people of Myanmar. The road ahead will be long, but with unity, courage, and determination, we will build the New Myanmar—a powerful vision that keeps us awake at night, where all states come together as one—a United States of Myanmar (USM). This will be achieved not only for our generation but for generations to come, and it will stand as a lasting testament to the resilience and hope of our people.


Photo: AFP

EARTHQUAKES SHAKE SAGAING REGION AND CHIN STATE IN MYANMAR

Two noticeable earthquakes struck Myanmar on 2 and 3 December, prompting residents in Mandalay and Sagaing Regions to evacuate buildings and raising concerns about ongoing seismic activity.

A magnitude 4.2 earthquake occurred at 5:30 pm on 2 December, cantered approximately 14 miles east-northeast of Saintgaing Town in Kyaukse District, Mandalay Region, according to the Myanmar junta's Department of Meteorology and Hydrology (DMH).

Residents in Mandalay City and Sagaing Region reported feeling the tremor strongly.

An Amarapura, Mandalay resident said, "It was very noticeable, like being pulled down. Everyone ran down from the buildings. It's been a long time since an earthquake hit Mandalay."

A Sagaing resident added, "It shook quite strongly in Sagaing. It suddenly shook after a long time, so we were startled."

Another earthquake with a magnitude of 4.9 occurred shortly after, at 1:25 am on 3 December, cantered about 13 miles northeast of Tedim Township, Chin State.

The DMH reported that these tremors are part of a persistent series of aftershocks following a major earthquake on 28 March, with over 200 occurrences recorded in the nine months since.

The National Unity Government's (NUG) Ministry of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Management (MOHADM) has urged the public to be mindful of the earthquake hazard to minimize potential damages and losses caused by the ongoing minor seismic events.

Photo: Supplied

KAREN COMMUNITIES MAKE REQUEST FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, ACTION BY THAILAND

On 3 December, thirty Karen community organisation in Myanmar, Thailand, and across the word issued a call for international cooperation supported by action from the Thai government to support the crackdown by the Karen National Union (KNU) against scam centres in the Myawaddy area.

The text of the statement is as follows.

We strongly call for urgent international cooperation with the Karen National Union (KNU) following the KNU's crackdown on a major transnational scam center in Min Let Pan, Kawthoolei's Dooplaya District (Myawaddy Township, Burma).

The KNU has exposed extensive transnational criminal networks, with torture structures and weapons, where thousands of people are confined. To tackle this effectively, the KNU has called for serious international cooperation. There have been frequent artillery shelling as well as airstrikes by the Burmese military in an effort to disturb the KNU's operation and destroy the evidence of those transnational criminal activities.

Local communities have suffered immensely just as worldwide victims including USA, China, India, Taiwan and Malaysia have suffered at the hands of these criminal operations. The Burmese military remains the root cause of all of these transnational crimes.

We urge the international governments, in particular, the Royal Thai Government to respond without delay. Thai citizens are among those trapped and exploited within these compounds. Full cooperation from international authorities and the Royal Thai Government is essential to ensure immediate protection, repatriation of all foreign victims, and the rapid dismantling of the criminal syndicate responsible for these transnational crimes.

We urgently call for:

- Immediate international coordination with the KNU, especially Thai authorities, on rescue operations, investigations, and comprehensive victim protection.

- Deployment of professional forensic and crime-scene teams to secure evidence before it is destroyed or removed by the Burmese military and the criminals.

- Robust regional and international cooperation with the KNU to dismantle all transnational criminal networks operating along our border areas.

We call on United States of America, European Union and member states, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and all potentially impacted countries to offer support and expertise to the KNU and Thailand to help them deal with this crisis.

Local civil society organisations, led by the Karen Peace Support Network, raised grave concerns years ago as these scam centres were being constructed. Those warnings were dismissed because they conflicted with the false narrative of the Burmese military's so-called reforms. Meanwhile, pro-military groups including the Border Guard Force (BGF), operating in partnership with the Burmese military, facilitated the establishment of these brutal business sites.

It is now crucial that the international community work directly with the Karen National Union to dismantle these scam centres and hold all perpetrators accountable.

The KNU has taken significant risks to expose a criminal system spanning multiple countries. This moment cannot be ignored. Without urgent engagement, especially from Thailand, victims remain in grave danger, and critical evidence may soon be lost.

We call on the Royal Thai government to fully cooperate with the KNU, uphold humanitarian principles, open up the border and allow safe protection and aid for victims. The world must act now. Any delay will result in further unnecessary harm and loss of life.

NAGA GROUPS IN MYANMAR AND INDIA UNITE TO OPPOSE BORDER FENCE

Naga groups and local residents have voiced strong opposition to the Indian government's decision to construct a fence along the India–Myanmar border.

The Eastern Naga Women's Association (ENWA) and the United Tangshang Naga Council (UTNC) issued separate statements on 21 November and 4 December opposing India's plan to fence the stretch between Border Post No. 173 (Pangsaung Mountain Road) and No. 172, located within the Naga Autonomous Region of Myanmar's Nanyun Township, with construction slated to begin in 2025.

"The unilaterally drawn border, which is separating Naga families across the divide, violates both human and Indigenous rights, and we strongly condemn such actions," the ENWA said.

The Eastern Naga Women's Association said in its statement that India, often regarded as a major democratic nation, must respect Indigenous land rights, honour ancestral customs, and heed the voices of the region's Indigenous communities.

"The border fencing project is unacceptable to the Naga people both in the short and long term, and we will continue to demand its halt," a local Naga told Mizzima.

"In the short term, we Naga people are already feeling the pain of having to fence off our history, land, and families. In the long term, we fear that our families, relationships, and identity could be lost due to the actions of these countries," he said.

The decision to halt the fencing project rests with the Indian government, but the Naga people say they will continue using all available means to demand respect for their customs and identity.

The United Tangshang Naga Council (UTNC) said in a statement that the border demarcation area is home to the Tangshang Nagas and that no authority can divide or destroy the Indigenous Nagas as one ethnic group, one family, and one people.

The UTNC has called for an immediate halt to the India–Myanmar border fencing and urged that the existence of the Naga people in both countries be consistently respected and valued.

Additionally, the UTNC stated that the Indian government is responsible for preventing political actions that could divide the Naga people across both countries and for safeguarding their peaceful coexistence. It warned that if the border fencing continues, the Indian government would bear responsibility for any resulting consequences.

The statement was also endorsed by the Naga Cultural Literature Committees of Nanyun and Pangsaung Townships, the Tangshang Naga Baptist Church Council, and the Tangshang Naga Students' Association.

The India–Myanmar border fencing project is being led by India's Border Roads Organization (BRO), with a planned expenditure of ₹31,000 million over five years, covering the Naga and Chin regions.

India and Myanmar share a border stretching over 1,643 km, adjoining Myanmar's Naga Autonomous Region in Kachin State, as well as Sagaing and Chin States.

The Indian central government has justified the border fencing as a measure against drug trafficking, migration, and security threats, while governments and civil society groups in Nagaland and Mizoram have raised concerns that it could disrupt the economic, social, religious, and cultural rights of their communities across the two countries.

Opposition persists: while the Manipur state government has approved the fence, ethnic groups along the border oppose it, and Arunachal Pradesh has yet to issue a statement.

TEN-YEAR HIGH IN MYANMAR'S OPIUM PRODUCTION AMID ONGOING CRISIS, SAYS UNODC

On 3 December, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released its Myanmar Opium Survey 2025, reporting that opium poppy cultivation has reached a ten-year peak.

A statement from the UNODC accompanying the report is as follows.

The report, titled "Myanmar Opium Survey 2025: Cultivation, Production and Implications", analyses data collected in Myanmar during the fourth growing season since the military takeover. Showing a 17 per cent increase in poppy cultivation compared to the previous year - from 45,200 to 53,100 hectares - it reflects the uncertainty the country faces after years of conflict and socio-economic instability. It also reaffirms Myanmar's role as the world's known main source of illicit opium, following the continued decline of cultivation in Afghanistan.

"Myanmar stands at a critical moment," said Delphine Schantz, UNODC Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. "This major expansion in cultivation shows the extent to which the opium economy has re-established itself over the past years - and points to potential further growth in the future."

Increases in cultivations were recorded in all growing regions, with the strongest increases in East Shan (32 per cent) and Chin State (26 per cent), and the lowest increase measured in Kachin (3 per cent). With an increase of 13 per cent, South Shan remained the area with the heaviest cultivation, accounting for 44 per cent of the country's opium fields. The report's analysis includes poppy cultivation in Sagaing Region for the first time, showing 552 hectares under cultivation. Together with the expansion in Chin State, this places increased focus on Myanmar's western border areas, and potential implications for neighbouring countries.

The findings confirm an increasing trend in opium cultivation since 2020, following several years of decline over the years before that. A key factor behind this trend is the price of opium, which has doubled over this period amidst deteriorating social and economic conditions. Compared to 2019, farmgate prices increased from some USD 160 per kilogram to USD 365 per kilogram in 2025. If global demand for opiates from Southeast Asia rises in response to heroin supply shortages from Afghanistan, this trend is likely to continue, UNODC warns.

While the area under poppy cultivation has increased from 2024 to 2025, the amount of opium produced per hectare has not, showing the complex relationship between conflict and illicit crop cultivation. Although economic instability and uncertainty drive more farmers towards opium poppy as a resilient cash crop, intensifying conflict and insecurity make it more difficult for them to care for their fields and obtain the agricultural inputs needed to maintain high yield rates. Decreases in yield were particularly observed in North Shan and Kachin, coinciding with expanding armed clashes in these regions. Nevertheless, the opium yield and resulting productive output remain at historically high levels.

The report also points to emerging signs of heroin flowing from Myanmar to markets that were previously supplied by opium originating in Afghanistan. There have been several seizures of heroin from passengers traveling from the Southeast Asia region towards Europe over the past year. While these appeared to be mostly individual cases, the changed environment could encourage more cultivation and production of opium in Myanmar.

These challenges are only expected to grow, UNODC warns. Conditions in the country and external factors continue to create incentives for poppy cultivation, and with prices set to increase, farmers will see few alternatives to opium as a crop.

"Driven by the intensifying conflict, the need to survive and the lure of rising prices, farmers are drawn to poppy cultivation," Schantz added. "The increase we have seen in the past year will have significant implications for Myanmar's future. Unless viable alternative livelihoods are created, the cycle of poverty and dependence on illicit cultivation will only deepen. What happens in the country will shape drug markets in the region and far beyond, and requires urgent action."

US HALTS IMMIGRATION APPLICATIONS FOR 19 NATIONS INCLUDING MYANMAR

The US government has halted immigration applications for citizens from 19 nations including Afghanistan, Yemen and Haiti, an official memorandum said 2 December, deepening a sweeping crackdown on migration.

Authorities paused green card and citizenship processing for people from countries already subject to travel restrictions announced in June by President Donald Trump, the memo from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) said.

Other affected nations include Venezuela, Sudan and Somalia.

Senior US officials had signaled in recent days they would dramatically tighten restrictions on immigration, a move fueled by the shooting of two National Guard soldiers last week.

The main suspect in the shooting, which killed one, is an Afghan national who entered the United States during mass evacuations as foreign forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021. He pled not guilty to murder charges on Tuesday.

The memo said USCIS "plays an instrumental role in preventing terrorists from seeking safe haven in the United States."

The country had recently seen "what a lack of screening, vetting, and prioritizing expedient adjudications can do to the American people," it added, citing the Afghan murder suspect.

Some immigration law experts said the document had plunged many people into limbo.

"Even people who fully passed the citizenship exam are having their cases put on hold, just inches from the finish line," said Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, a senior fellow at the American Immigration Council, in a post on X.

Those whose applications have already been processed could also face more scrutiny, with the memo vowing a "comprehensive re-review" of nationals from the 19 countries who came to the United States after January 20, 2021.

Trump, who campaigned for the White House on a pledge to deport millions of undocumented migrants, said following the shooting that he planned to "permanently pause migration from all Third World Countries to allow the US system to fully recover."

Homeland Security chief Kristi Noem said Monday she would push to expand the list of restricted countries.

"I just met with the President. I am recommending a full travel ban on every damn country that's been flooding our nation with killers, leeches, and entitlement junkies," she said on X, without naming which countries should be included.

The travel restrictions currently also apply to Burundi, Chad, Republic of Congo, Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Iran, Laos, Libya, Myanmar, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Turkmenistan.

US media reported Tuesday that federal authorities planned to launch a major immigration enforcement operation against Somali immigrants in Minnesota in the coming days, sparking pushback from local leaders who said state police would not cooperate.

"Our values and our commitments to the Somali community, to every community of immigrants and people in our city is rock solid and will be unwavering," said Minneapolis mayor Jacob Frey.

AFP

Photo: AFP

ABOUT ASEAN, MYANMAR, ELECTIONS, CHINA, AND THE FIVE-POINT CONSENSUS

IGOR BLAZEVIC

In the following interview, European democracy activist Igor Blazevic talks with Charles Santiago who is a Malaysian Member of Parliament and Co-chair of the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR), discussing ASEAN, Myanmar, elections, China and ASEAN'S troubled Five-Point consensus.

Igor: Hon. Charles Santiago, through your role as Co-Chair of ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, you are deeply engaged in advocacy work in the South East Asia region and internationally. In the current context — where we are living in a very transactional and increasingly cruel world of international relations, and human rights and humanitarian concerns no longer command the attention they once did — what is the most effective messaging on Myanmar? What arguments are you presenting to ASEAN and EU policymakers, and how do you explain what needs to be done in Myanmar and why they should not accept the junta's elections?

Charles Santiago: The elections scheduled in Myanmar — beginning on December 28th, followed by January 11th, with a third phase later — are being conducted in stages over several months.

We should be very clear: this is an election that the international community, including ASEAN, cannot accept. Why?

1. You cannot hold elections during a civil war.

2. These elections will not be free or fair. People are being forced to vote. Their names are recorded, and those who do not vote may be threatened or even killed.

3. The civil war will continue regardless of the elections. Voting will not stop the conflict.

These elections are being pushed primarily by China to give the junta international legitimacy and allow Min Aung Hlaing to return to ASEAN meetings. Some ASEAN members want the junta back at the table. China is the number one country pushing hard for this.

India is also supporting the elections. It is providing infrastructure such as election booths, managing voter lists, and other logistics. India is actively helping Myanmar organize the elections.

Election monitors are also expected from China, Belarus, Russia, and India. But we should ask: When was the last time China held democratic elections? What exactly are they going to monitor when they have no experience of elections in their own country?

We know that the elections in Belarus and Russia are far from free and fair. So the countries that are coming to observe Myanmar's elections have no real experience with democracy, no experience with credible election management, and no meaningful consultation with their own citizens.

These countries cannot credibly monitor an election.

Some ASEAN members are also prepared to send monitors. Cambodia has already volunteered. The junta has sent invitations to all governments and especially to human-rights bodies.

Malaysia's Human Rights Commission received a letter inviting them to join the observation mission. They responded by saying they cannot participate - because Malaysia's Human Rights Commission, along with others in the region, has already clearly stated that these elections in Myanmar have no credibility.

However, Cambodia's participation is worrying because it may open space for other ASEAN states — such as Vietnam, Laos, and possibly Thailand — to support the elections. This would completely undermine the Five-Point Consensus, which ASEAN adopted as a roadmap for political dialogue and democracy in Myanmar.

We need to keep in mind that the Five-Point Consensus never states that elections can be called as part of the agreement. And it's important to remember that Min Aung Hlaing—the general who carried out the coup—was physically present at that meeting and is a signatory. Despite that, there has been a complete disregard for ASEAN and for the Consensus.

ASEAN is divided. Some member states support the junta. So, ASEAN is in a confused state about what its actual position is. For some time, ASEAN has been doing a kind of diplomatic "tai chi," trying to balance all sides. But when push comes to shove, they will have to show their cards and indicate whether they support these elections or not - because the elections are going to happen.

This is one of ASEAN's biggest responsibilities since its establishment decades ago. If ASEAN fails to act coherently, its very usefulness as a regional body capable of resolving internal regional problems will be called into question.

Emerging Alternatives: Federal Democracy on the Ground

Charles Santiago: The second point, for messaging, it is also important to highlight developments in the ethnic states. These show to the international community and ASEAN that an alternative system is emerging — a bottom-up federal democracy.

In several states, you can see early forms of local governance being established. For example, in Karenni State, new governance structures have formed, including judicial systems and local executive bodies. Despite bombings and constant danger, a functioning system is emerging. Ordinary people are making decisions about the future of their own ethnic states.

This is significant and needs to be promoted more widely.

In parallel, ethnic organizations are forming coalitions — such as the AFTA-grouping — bringing together around 14 or 15 ethnic and political

organizations committed to federal democracy. They are talking to each other and trying to find long-term solutions. The dominant vision now being discussed by both large and small ethnic states is federal democracy.

China's Crucial and Complicated Role

Charles Santiago: The third point, in terms of messaging on Myanmar, must involve China. China is a major player. It provides political legitimacy to the junta, it supplies weapons, and it has extensive investments in the country. So, China plays a crucial role.

It also plays both sides — supporting the junta and maintaining relationships with some ethnic armed groups. Recently, China has pushed hard on behalf of the junta to seize more ethnic territories. It has even threatened some ethnic states to surrender land.

China has enormous influence and could choose to encourage dialogue instead of conflict. But so far, it has chosen to support the junta's consolidation of power.

It may help to recall the Bandung Conference, which took place about 75 years ago. It was a long time ago, but sometimes we need to revisit old ideas to frame the future. The Bandung Conference was a gathering of newly independent, post-colonial countries — nations that were just emerging as sovereign states. One of the main ideas that came out of Bandung was South–South cooperation: how countries of the Global South could support each other, form a united front, and stand together when engaging with the Global North, particularly the West.

At that meeting, Premier Zhou Enlai represented China. He gave strong speech about mutual learning, cooperation, leadership for the developing world, and the importance of dialogue and solidarity among Global South countries.

But today, the same China that promoted dialogue and South–South cooperation has become a hegemon — similar to how the British, Americans, or French once acted. China is behaving as a hegemonic power in its dealings with Myanmar, as well as in Cambodia, Laos, and elsewhere.

We need to push back and insist that China behave as a responsible global actor. We need to tell China: You are a hegemon — fine — but a hegemon does not have to behave destructively. You don't have to contribute to killing people and destroying lives. You can also promote prosperity, share wealth, support development. We need to question China's approach to managing other countries — whether in Africa or, in this case, Myanmar.

China's legitimacy as a hegemon must be questioned. We should be pushing for a far more responsible, democratic-centered, human-rights-centered approach to Myanmar. So far, NGOs, civil society groups, civil society groups, and resistance groups have not applied enough pressure on China to behave like a responsible global actor.

China's current approach is extractive: it wants minerals, jade, natural resources — as much as possible from Myanmar. But that has to stop. We need to push China to think differently, or at least question them strongly enough that pressure builds for change.

Just because it is difficult to talk to China does not mean we should avoid asking hard questions. We must ask those questions and challenge them. We should tell them: You need to become a much more responsible global citizen. Go back to the principles you endorsed at Bandung — the promises you made to the Global South

Malaysia's Role After Its ASEAN Chairmanship

Igor: Malaysia has played an important role in engaging revolutionary stakeholders and facilitating political dialogue. Do you expect its engagement to diminish once it is no longer the ASEAN Chair?

Charles Santiago: There is a difference between being ASEAN Chair and being the Prime Minister of a country. When you are the ASEAN Chair, there is an added burden to fulfill not only your national commitments but ASEAN's commitments as well. The attention on Myanmar becomes higher because your country also appoints the ASEAN Special Envoy, so there is a constant flow of interaction and discussion

during the nine or ten months of the chairmanship.

But Malaysia will likely remain strongly committed to Myanmar and will continue to call out the junta if the elections are not free and fair.

The challenge is whether Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines can sway the rest of ASEAN — especially with China trying to influence Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The situation will be challenging. So far, most ASEAN countries have stayed quiet, except for Cambodia, which has already said it will send election monitors.

Malaysia will stay the course, but ASEAN unity remains uncertain.

The Five-Point Consensus: Structural Weaknesses

Igor: Let me ask about the Five-Point Consensus. There has been considerable disappointment that it has not delivered any meaningful results. After the election, the junta will almost certainly claim that the Five-Point Consensus is no longer relevant because, in their view, "elections have been held" and there is a "new beginning." Does this mean that, for the revolutionary forces, it is strategically useful to play the Five-Point Consensus card — to demand from ASEAN to stand behind its only existing formal framework on Myanmar?

Charles Santiago: Let me answer your question in two parts: first about the Five-Point Consensus itself, and second about its impact on local politics and the resistance groups.

The Five-Point Consensus was put forward in 2021 by all ten ASEAN countries, including Myanmar. At that time, General Min Aung Hlaing was physically present at the meeting. He signed on to the Consensus.

But there were problems built into the structure of the Five-Point Consensus from the very beginning — particularly the Special Envoy mechanism. The Special Envoy rotates every year with the ASEAN Chair, which means each envoy gets only about nine months to work. The first problem is the lack of continuity.

The second problem is that too many different people end up involved in negotiations — with the junta and with the resistance groups. Every year, the entire diplomatic interface resets.

Very early on, NGOs — including APHR — recommended appointing one permanent Special Envoy who would serve ASEAN for three to four years instead of changing the envoy annually. That idea finally appeared in an ASEAN statement this year, but it still hasn't been adopted as policy.

Slow ASEAN decision-making has given the junta the space to do whatever it wants. They have exploited the weaknesses in ASEAN's processes and turned them to their own advantage.

The process must change. ASEAN needs a long-term envoy who can follow discussions over years and report directly to ASEAN leaders.

To be fair, Indonesia held 164 meetings with stakeholders. Malaysia held 170 meetings with everyone. And I remember very clearly that during the ASEAN Heads of Government meeting under Indonesia's chairmanship, President Jokowi said: "We have had 164 meetings, but the two sides are so far apart that you cannot pull even one string to tie them together."

That remains true today. There is still no meaningful progress toward political dialogue or any kind of democratic process. Both the junta and the resistance — including youth organizations, the NUCC, and the NUG — participated in consultations, but no consensus came out of them.

Min Aung Hlaing has actually used the Five-Point Consensus to consolidate his position against the resistance groups. Let me give you an example. In March this year, there was a massive earthquake in Mandalay — a 7.7 magnitude quake that also hit Sagaing and Naypyidaw, causing enormous destruction. The Malaysian government called Min Aung Hlaing for a meeting in Bangkok. During that meeting, the Malaysian Prime Minister told him: "We need a ceasefire. You cannot continue killing and bombing people during an earthquake."

Min Aung Hlaing agreed. He said he would declare a ceasefire. The meeting happened around 10 or 11 in the morning in Bangkok. But by the same evening, bombs were still falling in Sagaing and Mandalay. People were still being killed. The bombing continued.

Here is a man who agrees to a ceasefire in a meeting with the ASEAN Chair — and then goes back and does the complete opposite. Total disrespect for the process. Total disrespect for ASEAN.

The junta now believes it doesn't need ASEAN. It relies on China, Russia, and Belarus. They think: "We can work with them instead."

One more point: around 4,000 senior army officers — brigadiers and generals — have been trained in Russia. Their worldview is totally different from that of ordinary soldiers. Their thinking is deeply pro-Russia and pro-China.

They think: "We don't need the Five-Point Consensus anymore. We should listen to what China says, what Russia says, what Belarus says. We can trade with them. We can work with them. We don't need ASEAN."

That is the worldview inside the current Myanmar military elite. They no longer give priority to ASEAN. They are looking at a completely different geopolitical framework now — different partners, different alliances.

On the other side, you have the ethnic states, and you also have NGOs and research centers based in Myanmar and abroad.

It is quite clear that many ethnic states are reluctant. They do not believe the ASEAN process will lead anywhere. For them, the solution is on the ground — it is the military struggle that will ultimately determine who wins and who loses. Still, they have participated in some of the discussions with various governments, hoping that something might come out of it. Privately, many will say: "We are wasting our time. This is not going to work."

NGOs, research centers, and think tanks continue active engagement. They play an important role because: they talk to the ethnic groups; they talk to the military groups; they talk to the political organizations; they talk to other key stakeholders.

So, NGOs and think tanks play an important role in keeping ASEAN informed about what is happening inside Myanmar. At the same time, they bring ASEAN's messages back to the groups inside the country — helping increase awareness about how to prepare for the future and what approaches could work.

But ultimately, if you speak to the major leaders in the ethnic states, you will find a lot of reluctance and skepticism. They don't think this process will be helpful. They recognize that ASEAN has a role, and they welcome that involvement — but when push comes to shove, they do not believe that ASEAN is where the real solution will be found.

Recruits sing a hymn in their jungle camp. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

FREE BURMA RANGERS TRAINING PEOPLE IN BURMA TO SAVE LIVES IN WAR

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

"Every new ranger we interviewed told us that his or her village is currently under attack by the SAC (Myanmar junta)," said David Eubank, head of the Free Burma Rangers (FBR). During the three-month program for new rangers, he takes time every day to interview one of the 28 basic and six advanced teams going through training. He wants to learn as much as he can about them as individuals, about their motivations, and about their hopes and desires. When possible, FBR tries to help them achieve those dreams by providing the appropriate training and service opportunities.

Several times per day, including before meals, the rangers must stand at attention and shout the ranger motto: "Love each other, unite and work for freedom, justice, and peace. Forgive and don't hate each other. Pray with faith, act with courage, never surrender." One of the messages the motto is meant to communicate is that, to prevail against the dictators, all of Burma's ethnic groups must work together. The current corps of trainees includes members of the Lahu, Karen, Karenni, Arakan, Myeik, Tavoy, Shan, Mon, Pa-O, Bamar, Pegu, and Inle ethnic groups.

Eubank sits in the ranger office, a bamboo building in the training camp where more than 200 basic and advanced rangers are training in medical care, security, reporting, the Good Life Club children's program, video, and photography. As each team comes in for their interview, he explains that one of the questions he asks is why they volunteered for the training. "The usual answer is 'to serve my country,'" Eubank said. Then he added, "But sometimes they say 'because the Burma army killed my family.'"

"The training here in Burma for our Ranger relief teams is to build up young men and women who love God and love each other. That's really the whole hope of this. And then how to help each other and get the news out, which is the main job of FBR," Eubank said. Across Burma there are 150 active teams from 18 different ethnic groups. Over the three decades they have been in operation, he estimates they have trained about 10,000 rangers in roughly 1,000 teams.

He explained that FBR is a humanitarian organization that usually operates at the front lines of the war, treating the wounded and evacuating people, but also caring for internally displaced people and villagers in the back, behind the lines. "We provide medical care in the front and the back, shelter, food, school supplies — whatever we can do."

Each day starts at 5:00 a.m. with PT (physical training): pushups, pullups, running up and down the mountains, and similar group exercises. This is followed by a bath in the river, breakfast, and a daily devotional program. Eubank is quick to say that FBR is not a

Christian organization, although it is driven by Christian principles. "People are free to believe what they want to believe. We have Buddhists, non-believers, atheists, animists, spirit worshipers..." On the FBR teams in the Middle East there are also many Muslims and Yazidis.

"We talk about Jesus every day, but they can believe whatever they want. In FBR there are only three rules. You can be any religion, but you have to do this for love, because we don't pay the teams. Second, you have to read and write in any language because you need to do quality medicine, and reporting requires literacy. And the third is you can't run if people can't run. So it's love, literacy, and moral and physical courage. That's all. It doesn't matter what you believe."

The rest of the day is filled with classes in various forms of combat first aid, taking care of sick patients, treating trauma injuries, giving IVs, stopping bleeding, opening airways, and even basic dental training such as how to pull teeth. Training also includes aid-and-litter teams, how to move casualties, how to swim, lifesaving, using small boats, land navigation, how to draw a map, how to follow a map, how to use a compass, clearing landmines, how to use a GPS, how to make a map, reporting techniques such as interviewing, videography, and photography, and rope work, including climbing ropes on trees or cliffs and rappelling down.

Students also take classes and rehearse for the GLC programs. "And that's about giving joy to kids and families in these war zones. They sing songs, talk about God, hand out shirts, and give out the bracelet with different colored beads that all have meaning. The gold is God. The black is our sin and our separation from God. The red is the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from our sin and for forgiveness. The white is we're clean. And the green is we grow. And we hand those out, along with food, snacks, and games. It's this day of joy," explained Eubank.

In addition, trainees have camp duties like cleaning

Recruits during medical training. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

or collecting supplies and carrying them one and a half hours through the jungle from the road to the camp. They also learn mule packing and how to use animals to move supplies. "About 32 different subjects that they learn so they can help people and get the news out," said Eubank.

The training stresses physical fitness because rangers have to be able to carry the wounded from the frontlines to the casualty collection point, and in some cases, they also have to be able to carry the wounded in a "bambulance," a hammock strung between bamboo poles, sometimes walking for days to reach a hospital.

The rangers receive three meals a day, have a few classes in the evening, and go to bed relatively early, ready to start again the next morning.

The first new ranger comes in for her interview. She is eighteen years old, a member of the Karen ethnic group, and her name translates as Sweet Petal Flower. She says she likes GLC training the most because she wants to help children. When asked what she liked least, she said "swimming." Eubank laughed and said, "That is the most common answer."

The rangers must complete a swimming challenge called the Big Swim, where they swim laps in the river. On the day I observed training, the air temperature was only 12°C. The rangers were visibly freezing and shivering, but they persevered, as one of the takeaways from the motto is to never give up. By teaching rangers to reject comfort, they are more prepared to sacrifice and fulfill their duty of serving others.

During the course, there are several field exercises, some lasting up to two days, where the rangers move from station to station around the mountains, practicing their skills. Eubank explained, "They navigate to each place with the compass skills they just learned. Maybe it's a landmine station. They have to clear a landmine,

Recruits practice CPR. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

then they see a landmine victim and must treat him medically and counsel him. Maybe there's a lady who has been abused by the Burma Army. You have to interview her, comfort her, and tell the story. Then you go to the next place. Maybe you have to swim across a river or make a rope bridge. And they do all these with no sleep, no food, under pressure, to simulate the pressures you would experience in combat." The final exercise before graduation has 40 stations. Then the students go on a real mission before returning to serve in their area.

When asked what she wanted to do in the future, Sweet Petal Flower said she would like to

take advanced medical training at the Jungle School of Medicine–Kawthoolei (JSMK), a training hospital operated by FBR. When asked why, she explained that she wants to go back to her village and "help the villagers who are wounded," because there is no hospital in her region. Eubank told her that if she studied well, FBR would try to make that happen for her.

The next interview was about to begin, but Eubank paused to offer a final reflection. He explained that bringing different ethnic groups together had not been normal when they first began the training program, years ago. One Kachin ranger told him, "When I came here, I would only die for Kachin blood." By the end of the course, however, the ranger realized he was willing to risk his life for anyone in Burma who needed help.

Eubank said their aim is for people to love God, love each other, help each other, and get the news out so the world knows what is happening. He said this is important for victims of attacks "to feel honored, like it's not just happening in darkness. People care and God cares." He added that exposing the truth also confronts the perpetrators. "No soldier wants to be a war criminal. And if you get a photo of him burning a village, it should be convicting."

He continued, "We're not against the Burma Army. We're not against the Burma government. We're against their actions." He said one of FBR's purposes is freedom in Burma and that achieving it will require understanding and unity between ethnic groups, something the training tries to model in a small way.

"It will also require love and reconciliation", forgiving each other within the pro-democracy groups, and eventually forgiving the dictators when democracy returns. "It doesn't mean there won't be justice," he said, "but justice is really justice when it has love and mercy."

Eubank said they pray daily for the dictators' hearts to change. "But until they change, as long as they're attacking people, we're going to stand with the people of Burma as long as God leads us to do that."

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

Sunday church in the jungle. Photo: Antonio Graceffo


FBR recruits at meal time. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

DIPLOMACY MEETS DETERRENCE: HOW US IS BALANCING CHINA & BACKING JAPAN

SUN LEE

The international order is undergoing a precarious period of great power competition, layered with economic coercion, diplomatic escalation, and military manoeuvres, reigniting the embers of a long-dormant geopolitical struggle whose contours now shape every major power's foreign policy calculus. There is an all-encompassing issue of regional security and world dominance at play between China and the US. Within this confrontation, Japan, a US ally, has emerged as the most active balancer and partner in containing China and tightening the regional coalition against it. However, Tokyo's overt display of support for Taiwan has not gone down well with Beijing.

To assuage both parties, the US President Donald Trump made separate calls to the leaders of China and Japan, Xi Jinping and Sanae Takaichi, on 24 November.

President Trump had met Xi Jinping and Sanae Takaichi on 30 October on the sidelines of the APEC summit in Busan, South Korea. According to the reports, the meeting between Trump and Xi went well, resulting in agreements on trade, TikTok, and rare earths.

The two phone calls

On talks with Xi, Trump posted on social media after the call: "I just had a very good telephone call with President Xi of China. We discussed many topics, including Ukraine/Russia, Fentanyl, Soybeans and other Farm Products, etc. We have done a good, and very important, deal for our Great Farmers — and it will only get better. Our relationship with China is extremely strong! This call was a follow-up to our highly successful meeting in South Korea three weeks ago. Since then, there has been significant progress on both sides in keeping our agreements current and accurate. Now we can set our sights on the big picture. To that end, President Xi invited me to visit Beijing in April, which I accepted, and I reciprocated, where he will be my guest for a State Visit in the U.S. later in the year. We agreed that it is important that we communicate often, which I look forward to doing. Thank you for your attention to this matter!"

Interestingly, the Xinhua readout mentioned "the US understands how important the Taiwan question is to China," while Trump's post did not mention Taiwan. Xi was quoted as saying, "China and the United States once fought side by side against fascism and militarism, and should now work together to safeguard the outcomes of World War II," evoking memories of Japan's role in the War and implying Chinese camaraderie with the US. This is not new, as Beijing regularly uses the tactics of mentioning issues never been discussed or mentioned in the joint statements.

President Trump has maintained ambiguity on his stand on Taiwan. Unlike President Joe Biden, who stated on multiple occasions that the United States would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack, Trump's stance has given way to doubts.

Addressing the phone call with Trump, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said, "During the conversation, President Trump explained the current state of US-China relations, including the US-China leaders' phone call held last night." She added, "I believe we were able to confirm the close cooperation between Japan and the US, following President Trump's recent visit to Japan, under the current international circumstances."

The two phone calls reveal how the US is trying to maintain stability with China without flare-ups, but it has not abandoned its ally, Japan, either. China remains a strategic rival for both.

Japan's Defence Posture

Amid the rising tensions, Japan's Defence Ministry confirmed that Japan withdrew the 'Typhon' intermediate-range missile system deployed at the local US base in Iwakuni city, Yamaguchi prefecture. However, Tokyo's outlook on the geopolitical situation and its defence has not changed.

On 23 November, Japan's Defence Minister said that plans to deploy a medium-range surface-to-air missile unit at a military base on Yonaguni, an island about 110 km off Taiwan's east coast, were "steadily moving forward."

On the following day, China reacted sharply, calling Japan's plan to deploy missiles on Yonaguni, near Taiwan, a deliberate attempt to "create regional tension and provoke military confrontation", as a diplomatic dispute remained high.

Responding to the ongoing tensions, Taiwan's Deputy Foreign Minister said, "Japan's strengthening of its relevant military facilities is basically helpful to maintaining security in the Taiwan Strait...So, of course, this is helpful to our national interests as Japan has no territorial designs or hostility towards Taiwan." Taiwan's Premier added that for the island's 23 million people, a "return" to China is not an option.

Beijing reacted sharply against Japan's missile deployment on Yonaguni Island, only 110km away from Taiwan, as "extremely dangerous", stoking concerns for regional stability and military confrontation. But Tokyo's defence minister reverted, saying that the deployment on the island would "reduce the likelihood of any armed attack on Japan itself."

Takaichi's persistent refusal to withdraw her comments, despite repeated complaints from Beijing, has exacerbated the already strained relationship, pushing it to a new low. Beijing's response has involved several punitive measures, including:

- Cutting intergovernmental exchanges.
- Suspending the resumption of Japanese seafood imports.
- Cancelling cultural events.
- Advising its nationals against travel or study in Japan.

These steps signal a deliberate effort to impose political and economic costs, reflecting Beijing's broader coercive toolkit.

A New Axis of Deterrence

While the rare phone call between the US and China gives an impression of better days ahead, the military dimension of the competition is only heightening. Recently, the United States and the Philippines announced the creation of a joint task force aimed at further deterring Beijing's "coercion" in the South China Sea.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and his counterpart, Philippine Defence Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr., unveiled Task Force-Philippines on the sidelines of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 31 October.

Hegeseth explained the motive behind the task force as - "We don't seek confrontation, but of course we're ready to protect our interests, individually and mutually. And that's why we're publicly announcing the Task Force-Philippines here with you today." He called it "another step in our cooperation, increasing interoperability, exercising and preparedness for contingencies, so that we can decisively respond to crises or aggression and reestablish deterrence in the South China Sea."

The US has raised its level of engagement with the Philippines in the last few years, which comes after the realisation that China is a resident power in the region, which can utilise many of its military bases, like in the Mischief Reef, to swiftly come in and out of the disputed areas, while the US only comes for military exercises and leaves. Thereby, a joint task force with a dedicated staff will allow the US to be more agile and responsive during a conflict situation, functioning as a conducive deterrence against China. It provides the US with much-needed goodwill and assures the Philippines of the long-term US commitments.

The diplomatic choreography between Washington, Beijing, and Tokyo offers an illusion of stability but masks deeper structural tensions. China seeks to pressure Japan and reshape regional perceptions of Taiwan; Japan is accelerating defence reforms despite economic coercion; and the United States is simultaneously pursuing stabilisation with China and strengthening a counterbalancing network with key allies.

The rare Trump–Xi call may signal temporary calm, but the Indo-Pacific's strategic landscape is hardening. Missile deployments, punitive diplomacy, and new military task forces point to a future where competition is increasingly militarised, alliances are more deeply embedded, and crisis management is more difficult.

The region is entering an era where deterrence, rather than dialogue, is becoming the default mode of statecraft.

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

FAR FROM HOME

"The key human rights issue within Thailand and more broadly within the region is migration related," says Ben Harkins, a veteran labor rights and migration expert in Southeast Asia. With over seventeen years of work across the region, Harkins has come to see migration as the defining human rights issue of our time— one that cuts across borders, economies, and politics.

Harkins began his work on the Thai-Myanmar border in the late 2000s as a field coordinator for Première Urgence Internationale, providing healthcare in sprawling refugee camps like Mae La and Mae Ra Ma Luang. Tens of thousands of refugees—mostly from ethnic minority groups such as the Karen—lived in limbo, confined to bamboo huts and ringed by barbed wire. Entire families fled violence with only what they could carry, surviving years of uncertainty. "It's only been this year, in fact, that we've finally seen a major transition in refugee policy in Thailand, where they are allowing at least the camp-based refugees to legally start working outside of the camps," he notes. For Harkins, this long-overdue policy shift offers a glimpse of long-denied freedom.

After his humanitarian work, Harkins transitioned into research, joining Chulalongkorn University's Asian Research Center for Migration in Bangkok. "The initial thing that came up for me was that the flows from Myanmar are so complex. These are very heterogeneous flows of migrants," he explains, capturing the intricate web of displacement, labor, and survival that characterizes Myanmar's migration crisis. At Chulalongkorn, he mapped the massive labor flows sustaining Thailand's economy—millions of migrants from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia performing the hardest and least visible work. He came to see migration as not just an economic story but an existential one: a fight for survival in systems that exploit need. His later research with the International Labour Organization (ILO) revealed the persistence of forced labor and human trafficking, particularly in the Thai fishing industry, where he documented conditions akin to modern slavery.

During Myanmar's brief democratic opening, Harkins moved to Yangon to head the UNOPS Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund's Decent Work and Labour Mobility programme. He hoped that reform would bring meaningful change for workers—but found that exploitation simply took new forms, such as the widespread suppression of independent unions, the intimidation of workers who tried to organize, and the quiet coercion built into everyday labor practices. Garment workers were often forced into unpaid overtime, documents were routinely confiscated, and labor inspectors looked the other way, illustrating how reform had changed the language of exploitation but not its essence.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/11/27/episode-439-far-from-home


Photo: AFP

MIN AUNG HLAING SAYS MYANMAR'S MILITARY WILL REMAIN IN POLITICS EVEN AFTER UPCOMING ELECTION

Myanmar's junta chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said on 6 December that the armed forces will continue to play a political role even after the upcoming election.

According to junta-controlled newspapers published on 7 December, he made the remarks during a meeting with officers, soldiers, their families, and cadets at the Defence Services Academy in Pyin Oo Lwin, Mandalay Region.

"Based on historical background and the current situation, the Tatmadaw will continue to take part in political leadership," he said.

He added that the military would only gradually scale back its presence in parliament once a "fully established democratic system" exists and ethnic armed organizations no longer remain active.

Under the 2008 Constitution, which the military still upholds, the Commander-in-Chief is permitted to appoint 25 percent of parliamentary seats without requiring elected representation.

Min Aung Hlaing also reaffirmed that the election will be held on 28 December and conducted in three phases. The second phase will take place two weeks after the first, followed by a third phase another two weeks later.

A total of 57 political parties are set to contest the polls, including the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which will run nationwide.

The military-controlled election commission has dissolved 40 parties, including the National League for Democracy (NLD), which won the 2020 General Election but chose not to re-register after the coup.

Revolutionary forces have described the planned polls as a sham designed to extend military rule.


Photo: AFP

MANDALAY PROTEST NEAR ZAY CHO AND SECURITY CRACKDOWN DRAWS SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSE

The most discussed topic on Myanmar social media today is the unexpected protest near Zay Cho Market in Mandalay. Well-known activists, including Dr. Teza San, Ko Nan Lin, and Ko Khant Wai Phyo, gathered to call for an end to military dictatorship. The protest occurred despite heavy security measures in the city due to Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's planned visit. This incident sparked a significant wave of online conversation, with users sharing videos, photos, and eyewitness accounts.

Public sentiment is overwhelmingly supportive of the protest leaders, with many praising their bravery. However, anger and frustration grew sharply after reports surfaced that junta forces shut down nearby shops and arrested two vendors for allegedly displaying the three-finger salute.

Typical comments from users include:

"Respect for these leaders. Even with all the security, they still showed up."

"Zay Cho shops forced to close again... ordinary people always suffer."

"Every time a protest happens, they punish the whole neighborhood."

"Silent Strike on December 10, we must join."

"Mandalay people are so brave."

The call for a nationwide Silent Strike on December 10 has become another key point driving online engagement. This event has emerged as the leading topic on social media this week, reflecting public solidarity, fear, and rising tension in Mandalay.

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.