

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

**Addressing Mental
Trauma Resulting
from the Burma War**

ELECTION UPDATE

● **ASEAN newsrooms band together:
Democracy under siege**

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 STATE OF A NATION

As Myanmar approaches five years under military rule, the psychological toll on its people has become an unspoken crisis layered beneath the more visible violence, displacement, and economic collapse as our correspondent covers this week in our cover story.

For many, especially young people who came of age with hopes of democratic participation, the coup did not merely overturn a political system - it shattered a sense of future. Living under constant surveillance, arbitrary arrest, and the threat of violence has normalized fear as part of daily life, eroding emotional resilience and creating a climate where anxiety and despair thrive.

Young people - or Gen Z - have been particularly affected because they stand at the intersection of expectation and loss - see our joint story this week with Rappler. Before the coup, many had begun to imagine lives shaped by education, careers and civic engagement. Those pathways have since narrowed or disappeared altogether. Universities have been disrupted, jobs have vanished, and the choice many face is between silence, resistance, or exile. Each option carries psychological consequences - silence breeds guilt and helplessness, resistance invites trauma and grief, and exile often means isolation and survivor's guilt. The sense of being trapped, with no safe or dignified choice, is a heavy mental burden many carry.

Fear in Myanmar is not abstract - it is intimate and unpredictable. Nighttime raids, sudden explosions, and news of friends detained or killed arrive without warning. This constant state of alert mirrors the conditions that produce chronic stress disorders. Sleep becomes fragile, concentration deteriorates, and emotional numbness sets in as a coping mechanism. Over time, these responses can harden into long-term mental health

conditions, particularly when there is little access to professional support or even the language to describe psychological pain.

Economic hardship further compounds the strain. As inflation rises and livelihoods collapse, families struggle to meet basic needs. Young people often feel responsible not only for their own survival but also for supporting parents and siblings. This pressure, combined with the inability to plan for the future, fuels feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness. In a society where mental health has long been stigmatized, distress is frequently internalized rather than shared, deepening isolation.

Yet, amid this darkness, there is also a quiet resilience. Communities have formed informal support networks, offering emotional solidarity alongside material aid. Art, poetry, and music have become outlets for grief and defiance, allowing people to name their pain when direct speech feels too dangerous. For many young people, maintaining empathy and moral clarity in the face of brutality is itself an act of resistance. Still, resilience should not be romanticized. Endurance under oppression is not the same as healing, and survival should not require the permanent suppression of fear and sorrow.

The mental health crisis in Myanmar - as discussed in our cover story - is inseparable from its political reality. Trauma cannot be treated in isolation from the conditions that produce it. As the country moves deeper into its fifth year of military rule, the psychological wounds continue to widen, largely unseen by the outside world. Recognizing this invisible suffering is essential, not only to understand Myanmar's present, but to imagine a future in which recovery, dignity, and hope are once again possible.

EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of a mental health patient supplied



Rachel Moss deploys art-therapy sessions, giving crayons to mental health patients to express themselves. Photo: Antonio Graceffo.

ADDRESSING MENTAL TRAUMA RESULTING FROM THE BURMA WAR

Antonio Graceffo

Telling me about the work she does with civilians and soldiers suffering from trauma, Rachel Moss, a licensed counselor and dance movement therapist from the United States, quoted Dr. Peter Levine: "Trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness." She explained that this lack of witnessing hinders the natural healing process, making experiences feel overwhelming and leaving individuals feeling alone with their pain.

But in Burma, pain is so widespread that no one should have to feel alone. The Burma war has been ongoing for nearly eight decades in the ethnic states and has engulfed most of the country since the 2021 coup. According to UNHCR, 3,639,000 people have been internally displaced, while at least four million have fled to Thailand and Bangladesh. Many have been displaced multiple times as the front lines shift and the resistance gains and loses ground.

In government-controlled areas, nearly all young people face conscription. Even those not sent to fight know people who are. They will almost certainly have friends and family living in active combat zones and will suffer the loss of loved ones. In resistance-controlled areas, the suffering is even more severe. Depending on the region, both boys and girls may be conscripted, while large numbers of youth volunteer to fight for their homeland. Many nineteen- and twenty-year-old soldiers have already spent a quarter of their lives at war. Mothers have lost multiple children, wives have lost husbands, and children have grown up under periodic air and artillery strikes, some becoming soldiers and fathers themselves.

According to the Nationwide Population Study (2024) published in The Lancet, negative mental-health conditions in Burma are widespread. The study reports a 34.9 percent prevalence of mental disorders and an 8.1 percent prevalence of PTSD, along with high levels



Many Myanmar citizens are suffering from trauma and mental health problems due to the civil war and brutality of the military junta. Photo: Priscilla du Preeze

of psychological distress, persistent trauma symptoms, nightmares, and hypervigilance. Another report notes that shame and fear associated with IDP status contribute to daily anxiety. A separate Adolescent Girls and Young Women Study (2024) found that 81.9 percent experienced conflict stressors, 59.8 percent endured education disruption, and 40.2 percent reported combat exposure.

Combined with studies on landmine victims and survivors of sexual assault, the picture is bleak. Nearly every person in Burma appears to have experienced trauma that could leave lasting psychological wounds. Even counting the coup as the starting point, the war is now shaping a second generation of children under the age of five who will grow up regarding violence and loss as normal.

Moss, who works alongside Free Burma Rangers (FBR), shared some of the coping recommendations found in leading journals. "If you look up coping skills for trauma," she said, "you will find a lot along the lines of 'establish healthy routines, distract yourself with positive activities, go for a walk, exercise....'" She noted that such advice is nearly impossible for many in Burma to follow, given the realities of ongoing war, injury, and displacement.

One article warned "Do not lie in bed thinking or worrying. Get up and enjoy something soothing or pleasant. Read a calming book, drink a glass of warm milk or herbal tea, or do a quiet hobby." Moss said recommendations like these often feel idealistic. "There is a difficulty in calming the mind when the war is still happening and friends are still dying," she said.

Treating landmine victims is especially challenging. Many are missing limbs and lack mobility; a simple suggestion like taking a walk may be something they will never do again. Moss said landmine survivors face "so

much at once, traumatic accident, loss of mobility, displacement, war, food scarcity," leaving them with few healthy coping mechanisms and vulnerable to harmful ones like drinking.

Many patients first meet Moss in the hospital, where they come for treatment of physical wounds and illnesses because of a health system that has nearly collapsed. Civilians often suffer from chronic conditions like heart problems or seizures requiring serious medical attention. Soldiers, she said, are "mostly amputees," some missing multiple limbs or their eyesight, and many have "undiagnosed brain injuries as well." Most are extremely young.

While doctors address physical injuries, Moss focuses on psychological harm. She said there is "a lot of trauma that maybe you can't even put words to" because the events pile on endlessly. Using the concepts of "little t" and "big T" trauma, she noted that people in Burma endure both repeated overwhelming moments and life-altering catastrophes with no chance to recover in between.

She explained that in normal therapeutic contexts, having a witness can make trauma survivable. In Burma, however, many patients feel they have no witness at all. Moss said people often tell her they "feel unseen by the world" and believe "nobody cares, no one's doing anything." That sense of abandonment deepens their grief and loss. Amputees mourn the loss of mobility; those with chronic disease bear the weight of knowing they cannot be treated. Caretakers suffer exhaustion and fear as they support their loved ones through unending crisis.

Trauma must be processed slowly, she said, because patients cannot escape the circumstances that caused it. "Normally, if I was counseling someone who was a domestic-violence victim, we would ask them to

remove themselves from the trauma before we begin treatment," she explained. "But that's not possible here. Being able to step away from trauma is a privilege they don't have. Whatever work we do, they're going right back into the same situation."

Moss said soldiers and civilians remain trapped in the war or in displacement camps, constantly worrying about loved ones still in danger. Many wounded soldiers struggle with guilt, longing to return to the front lines even when they can no longer walk.

Some tell her they survived while their friends continue to die. It was tragic to hear that even amputees and those horribly and permanently wounded still carry the burden of surviving when their friends did not.

Moss also described what therapy sessions look like and the breakthroughs that can emerge.

In one art-therapy session, she gave the group a simple crayon prompt. A young man who had spoken of feeling overwhelmed filled his page with heavy black crayon, then flipped it over and drew mountains. At the end, he returned to the black page and added a tiny yellow sun. He said the darkness expressed his frustration and how dark Burma felt to him, but the sun and mountains meant "there's still hope." Initially, he kept darkness and hope separate, but by the end he placed the sun on the dark page itself, showing that he could imagine hope even within suffering.

In another activity, the group tossed a streamer to symbolize connection. When asked how it felt, the men spoke of fellowship, support, and praying for one another. Using the streamers as art materials, one soldier made a kite and recalled flying kites as a child. Another shaped a star to honor a friend killed in battle. A third created a symbol of freedom, saying it represented the freedom he was holding on to. Moss said these abstract prompts often produce unexpectedly powerful re-

sponses: "You never know what's going to arise."

She also used narrative therapy with random images as prompts. A young girl wrote about a bunny that kept moving through hardship while still "holding on to peace." Another participant wrote of a bird that flew into storms each day to find food. A young man wrote, "Each new day there is hope."

Moss said she sees deep resilience in the people she works with. Even in profound darkness, she believes there remains "that sliver of hope that keeps them going." Hearing their stories, she added, reminds her that the people of Burma are "stronger than I could ever imagine."

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

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



Protestors in Mandalay. Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA CRACKS DOWN ON ELECTION CRITICS

Myanmar's military authorities have intensified arrests and legal actions linked to opposition against the planned election, targeting strike leaders, civilians, and resistance-related individuals across several regions, according to independent media and official statements.

In early December, Dr. Tayzar San and other prominent leaders of the non-violent Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) led a street protest in Mandalay opposing the junta's election plan. One of the protest leaders, Htet Myat Aung, aged 24, was arrested on December 14. Prior to his arrest, the junta had announced a reward for information leading to the capture of Htet Myat Aung and other strike leaders.

On December 22, colleagues of Htet Myat Aung released a statement urging the international community to closely monitor his situation and protect his life, warning that he could face serious harm during interrogation while in detention. Political prisoners in

Myanmar have frequently reported torture and ill-treatment during questioning since the 2021 coup.

The junta has also taken action against civilians accused of damaging election-related materials. In Mon State, two men were arrested on December 12 over allegations of cutting down campaign signboards belonging to the People's Party. The following day, two more men were detained for allegedly destroying campaign signboards of the National Unity Party, according to junta statements.

In addition to targeting individuals, the military authorities have opened cases involving armed resistance groups accused of obstructing the election process. In Mohnyin Township, Kachin State, a warrant was issued for a Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) official accused of warning a village administrator in Pinlon Village by phone not to participate in the junta-organized election. Similarly, arrest warrants were issued against two members of People's Defense Forces (PDFs) from Shwegu Township, also in Kachin

State, after they allegedly warned a school teacher against taking part in election-related activities.

Amid these developments, resistance groups called for a nationwide silent strike on December 10. While participation did not reach the scale of earlier silent strikes that completely emptied streets in major cities such as Yangon and Mandalay, reduced movement was observed during the strike period from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in several urban areas.

In Kalay, a major city in Sagaing Region, residents reported that streets were largely deserted. A local resident told Mizzima that Bogyoke Street, typically one of the busiest areas in the city, appeared almost empty during the strike.

According to the junta's Ministry of Home Affairs, as of December 15, a total of 229 people - 201 men and 28 women - had been charged in 140 cases under laws related to election obstruction. However, independent media outlets estimate that around 300 civilians



Ongoing fighting has restricted the junta's ability to run a meaningful poll. Photo: Supplied

nationwide have faced legal action in connection with opposition to the election.

Fighting restricts election reach

Myanmar's military authorities have announced that the planned election will be conducted in three phases across 274 constituencies nationwide, with voting suspended in the remaining 56 constituencies due to armed conflict, raising questions about the feasibility and inclusiveness of the process. During a recent visit to Kachin State, Vice Senior General Soe Win said these excluded areas would be scheduled for by-elections at a later date, without providing a timeline.

The first phase of the election is scheduled for December 28 and is expected to take place in 102 constituencies. However, polling will not cover all areas

within those constituencies. Due to ongoing clashes between resistance forces and junta troops, a total of 1,439 wards and village tracts will be omitted in the first phase, while 1,492 wards and village tracts are set to be excluded in the second phase, on 11th January, according to official data.

Only Yangon Region and Naypyidaw are expected to hold elections across all wards and village tracts without omissions. Elsewhere, voting will be limited to selected urban areas, while many rural communities will be excluded.

Of the 102 constituencies listed for the first phase, only 85 are expected to conduct polling across their entire designated areas. In the remaining 27 constituencies, voting will be restricted largely to urban wards, with rural village tracts excluded. Even within urban areas, polling is not expected to cover all wards.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has stressed that post-election the military will continue to be involved in politics. Photo: AFP

Analysis by Myanmar Now indicates that in six constituencies in Sagaing Region, between 30 and 78 percent of wards will be unable to hold polling due to armed conflict. In five townships - Thandaunggyi in Karen State, Muse in northern Shan State, Bawlahe in Karenni State, and Hakha and Tedim in Chin State - polling cannot be conducted at all in all village tracts.

Significant restrictions are also reported in Myanmar's central dry zone, known as the Anyar region, where the majority Bamar population resides. In seven townships, elections cannot be held in more than 90 per cent of village areas. In Yenangyaung and Chauk townships, polling stations cannot be set up in over 80 per cent of village tracts. In Nyaung Oo Township, which includes the tourist destination of Bagan, more than 60 percent of village tracts are excluded from voting.

In Rakhine State, Kyaukphyu Township - home to major Chinese-backed infrastructure projects including a deep-sea port and oil and gas pipelines to China's Yunnan Province - will see polling in only 10 of its 15 wards and six of its 54 village tracts. Observers say the limited coverage reflects ongoing control disputes between the junta and the Arakan Army, highlighting the challenges facing the election in conflict-affected and strategically significant areas.

Junta leader reiterates the Military will continue to play a political role

Myanmar's junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has reiterated that the military will transfer state power to a future civilian government formed after the planned election, while at the same time underlining the armed forces' continued political role in the post-election period.

Min Aung Hlaing currently holds multiple top positions, serving simultaneously as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, acting president, and chairman of the State Security and Peace Commission,

consolidating authority since the military seized power in February 2021.

Speaking at a gathering with soldiers, their family members, and military cadets in Pyin Oo Lwin on December 6, Min Aung Hlaing said that the military would hand over power to the government that wins the upcoming election. However, he also emphasized that the military must continue to play a leading role in politics. Citing historical experience and the current circumstances, he said the army "will continue to play a role in the country's political leadership." He added that the military's involvement in parliament would only be gradually reduced when democracy is fully established and armed ethnic organizations no longer exist.

The remarks come amid ongoing preparations by the junta for an election widely criticized by opposition groups and independent analysts as lacking credibility due to ongoing conflict, political repression, and the exclusion of major political forces - including the delisted National League for Democracy, which won the 2020 poll in a landslide.

At a junta press conference on December 14, which focused on the crackdown on online scam operations along the Thai-Myanmar border and election preparations, a pro-junta journalist raised questions about Min Aung Hlaing's potential role after the election. In response, junta spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Htun said Min Aung Hlaing had accumulated sufficient experience throughout his military career and could serve as president if appointed by the state.

Zaw Min Htun also recalled that Min Aung Hlaing had previously expressed interest in becoming president, including in a 2014 interview. Political analysts say the comments signal the junta leader's intention to remain at the centre of power after the election, despite repeated claims of a future handover to civilian rule.



AMBASSADOR KYAW MOE TUN URGES UN TO REJECT MYANMAR JUNTA'S SHAM ELECTION

On 16 December, Myanmar's UN Ambassador, Kyaw Moe Tun, stated that the military junta has restricted media freedom and access to information since the 2021 coup. He called on the international community to reject the junta's sham election and support Myanmar's fight for a federal democracy.

His remarks were delivered at the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Overall Review of the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society in New York.

The text of his statement is as follows.

I wish to begin by thanking you for convening this high-level meeting.

Myanmar aligns itself with the statement delivered by the G77 and China.

Madam President,

The outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) have served as a foundational framework for internet governance and the growing impact of ICTs on society.

In an era of rising security threats, emerging technologies and widening digital divides, the WSIS+20 review offers an opportunity to reinvigorate our commitments and address both existing gaps and new challenges in the implementation of WSIS goals.

Madam President,

Myanmar reaffirms our commitment to the vision of the WSIS to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge.

As stated in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) respectively, everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence.

Unfortunately, in my country, Myanmar, this vision has been unattainable due to the ongoing violations of all fundamental rights by the military junta since the 2021 illegal coup. In line with the WSIS+20 review, allow me to underline the following Principles of the Geneva Declaration regarding my country:

First, access to information and knowledge (Principle B3) - the military has violated the right of access to information by shutting down the internet, restricting the use of Virtual Private Networks and blacklisting internet sites, including leading social media sites. According to OHCHR, over half of the 330 townships have been denied the right to receive and impart information, including during the March 2025 earthquake.

Second, media (Principle B9) - the military has crushed independent reporting and arrested 225 media workers, prosecuted and sentenced 93, and withdrawn licenses of 16 media outlets. 9 journalists and media actors have been killed by the military and its affiliates since the coup.

These attacks on the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information serve the dual purpose of suppressing independent voices while promoting military propaganda. Their attempts to

disseminate misinformation and disinformation include a wide range of military-controlled media, Telegram groups, influencer channels, military-aligned subservient diplomats, and their offices among others.

Third and last, ethical dimensions (Principle B10) - according to OHCHR, the military junta has stepped up mass surveillance of the population since the coup by activating the Personal Scrutinization and Monitoring System (PSMS). This system reportedly uses AI, facial recognition, CCTV surveillance, and biometric data among others to identify and arrest human rights defenders and dissidents. The military junta has also acquired the ability to track and locate individuals through their cell IDs due to the technology provided by foreign network security companies.

There are growing concerns over the use of the PSMS by the junta to monitor civilians. As such, the people are living under constant fear.

In this context, it is crystal clear that the so-called election by the junta will never be free nor fair. It will further intensify and expand violence across the country.

As a case in point, the military recently launched an aerial bombardment on a general hospital in Mrauk-U, Rakhine State, killing at least 35 civilians including women and children and injuring 76 people, as part of a systematic and widespread campaign of terror against the civilian population.

Taking this opportunity, Madam President, I urge all Member States and the international community to categorically reject the junta's sham election, and support the people of Myanmar in their efforts to eradicate the military dictatorship and build a federal democratic union.



Photo: Mizzima

MYANMAR JUNTA SEEKS TO PROSECUTE HUNDREDS FOR ELECTION 'DISRUPTION'

Myanmar's junta said 17 December it was seeking to prosecute more than 200 people for "disruption" of upcoming military-run elections, wielding new legislation rights monitors say aims to crush dissent.

The junta is touting phased elections starting December 28 as a step towards reconciliation in Myanmar, which has been consumed by civil war since the military snatched power in a 2021 coup.

Opposition factions are set to block the polls in areas of the country they control, and prominent international monitors have dismissed the ballots as a pretext for continuing military rule.

The junta introduced legislation in July to shield the election from "obstruction, disruption and destruction", with clauses forbidding criticism or protest against the vote, and outlining severe punishments.

"A total of 229 people" are being pursued for prosecution under the law "for attempting to sabotage election processes", junta home affairs minister Tun Tun Naung said Wednesday, according to state media.

Some of the cases involve fugitive activists and rebels operating beyond the junta's reach, making it unlikely that all of the suspects are currently in custody.

Convictions under the July laws in Myanmar's opaque courts can result in up to a decade in prison, and authorities have made arrests for as little as posting a "heart" emoji on Facebook posts criticising the polls.

The legislation also outlaws damaging ballot papers and polling stations -- as well as intimidating or harming voters, candidates and election workers, with a maximum punishment of 20 years in prison.

'Sham' election

The United Nations' human rights monitor for Myanmar, Tom Andrews, has previously called the election a "sham", citing free speech curbs as one of many obstructions to a free and fair vote.

The military government announced last week that it was seeking to arrest 10 activists who staged an anti-election demonstration, tossing political pamphlets in the air in Mandalay city.

A man was jailed in September for seven years with hard labour for a Facebook post questioning the poll, while three artists were arrested the following month for allegedly undermining the vote.

Those three -- a director, an actor and a comedian -- were detained "for making false and misleading criticism on social media" of other artists who produced a pro-election film, state media said.

At least one has been prosecuted for "cursing, threatening and punching" an election organiser.

Those imprisoned under the law will join more than 22,000 people jailed by the junta on political grounds, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Among them is Aung San Suu Kyi -- the Nobel Peace Prize-winning democratic figurehead deposed in 2021.

Her party won the last election in a landslide vote overturned by the military, which made unsubstantiated allegations of voter fraud and afterwards dissolved her party.

While attempting to quash dissent against the election in its territory, the junta has also been waging an offensive to capture more ground before phased polling begins.

Results are expected around the end of January 2026.

AFP



MANDALAY STRIKE LEADER HTET MYAT AUNG ARRESTED AND REPORTEDLY ABUSED IN MYANMAR JUNTA CUSTODY

Prominent activist Htet Myat Aung, leader of the Mandalay City People's Strike Movement, has been arrested by the Myanmar junta and is reportedly at risk of dying following severe beatings during his detention.

In a joint statement released on 17 December, the General Strike Coordination Body (GSCB), the Anti-Dictatorship People's Coordination Committee (Mandalay) (AFCC-MDY), and the Yadanarbon University Students' Union expressed grave concerns for the 24-year-old's safety, stating that the junta's use of violence has placed his life in imminent danger.

Htet Myat Aung, a former president of the Yadanarbon University Students' Union and a wanted figure with a bounty on his head, was reportedly taken into custody on 14 December. His arrest follows a high-profile anti-military strike on 3 December near Mandalay's central market, where he joined other leading activists in calling for an election boycott and a nationwide silent strike.

On 10 December, the junta announced that Htet Myat Aung and nine others, including Dr. Tay Zar San and Ko Nan Lin, had been charged under Section 23(b) of the new Election Protection Law, a charge that can carry a sentence of up to 10 years in prison or even the death penalty.

The joint statement emphasized that Htet Myat Aung was in good health prior to his arrest and was known for his commitment to peaceful expression against the dictatorship.

The strike forces declared that the junta would bear full responsibility and held accountable if any harm comes to his life or health while in their custody. While state media has listed the charges against him, the junta has yet to release any official details regarding his current condition or location.



Photo: AFP

BURMA CAMPAIGN UK URGES LONDON TO TOUGHEN STANCE AS MYANMAR JUNTA PREPARES 'SHAM' ELECTION

Burma Campaign UK has called for a revision of the British government's approach to Myanmar, warning that the UK has slipped from "leaders to laggards" on human rights. The call comes as Myanmar's junta moves ahead with what are widely seen as "sham election" beginning 28 December.

The appeal was issued alongside a new briefing paper outlining steps London should take to increase pressure on the junta. The briefing urges the UK government to reject the upcoming vote and the junta's anticipated post-election "reform" process, which Burma Campaign UK argues will only entrench military rule.

Key recommendations in the paper include resuming targeted sanctions on the military's revenue streams. This includes state-owned banks facilitating weapons purchases, the partly military-owned Mytel telecommunications company, and sources of jet fuel.

They also call for a reversal of recent aid cuts, expanding refugee support, and advancing new strategies to raise Myanmar at the UN Security Council.

Burma Campaign UK also called for the expulsion of Myanmar's military attaché from the UK.

The release follows a warning from UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews, who urged renewed UK leadership amid intensifying attacks on civilians.

"When British government ministers have the political will, the UK can be very effective at mobilising international action to assist the people of Burma in their struggle for freedom," said Mark Farmaner, the Burma Campaign UK's director. "While the Burmese military implement new sham elections as part of their plan for eternal rule, the British government needs to be proactively cutting off their supply of money and arms."



Photo: AFP

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL IN THE TUG-OF-WAR MYANMAR TOWN OF NAWNGHKIO

The election billboards are shining new in Myanmar's northern town of Nawngkhio, but the homes are still shattered by combat.

Myanmar's military clawed back the town in a pre-election offensive this summer, but political campaigning is coloured by the pall of destruction rather than the promise of democratic renewal.

"We are still living in fear," said one resident, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

"We have no idea when fighting could happen," she added.

Nawngkhio is perched on a portion of misty plateau in Shan state, once most famed for plantations yielding a cornucopia of oranges, vibrant flowers and coffee with hair-raising caffeine content.

More recently, it became a turning-point town in Myanmar's civil war - captured by a rebel alliance

last year, then retaken by the military in July after an 11-month battle.

Nawngkhio candidates were shadowed by plain-clothes security last week, apparently for their own safety, and one would-be MP complained his campaign trail around outlying villages was littered with landmines.

The town is bounded by military and police checkpoints, where security forces photograph suspect vehicles and inspect civilian ID cards.

Voting for peace

The military snatched power in a 2021 coup, toppling the democratic government, jailing its leaders and sparking a war that has riven Myanmar.

The junta has promised a phased election - which begins on December 28 in around a third of the country's townships, including Nawngkhio - will salve the conflict and return the country to civilian rule.

Critics say the parties running are vetted by the military and that the poll is a charade to rebrand martial rule.

For the Nawnghkio resident whose ballot is being courted, the vote seems less like an opportunity for hard-won democracy than an obligation to appease the military overseeing the vote.

"We are not interested, but we will go to vote," she said. "We just want to live peacefully here."

"We do not want to flee again. We do not know much about politics."

Nawnghkio was once the apex of a rebel advance that seemed to threaten the junta's grip on power.

Myanmar has a history of guerrilla uprisings, but the coup triggered a full-blown civil war as long-active ethnic minority armies were joined on the battlefield by pro-democracy partisans.

The disordered opposition initially struggled to make gains, before a joint offensive starting in late 2023 made nationwide advances and caught the military on the back foot.

In Shan state, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and pro-democracy People's Defence Force surged out of the country's fringes and down the main trade route with China -- reaching as far as Nawnghkio.

Aik Tun fled that fighting, but is now back home on his farm, and politically engaged as the candidates make their case.

Perhaps, the 58-year-old reasons, the vote will help his ailing homeland.

"We need development for our village, our town, our states and regions," he said.

"Only when we are united can we be successful with happiness and peace in the future."

Polling after the putsch

Just an hour's drive south is Pyin Oo Lwin, housing the military officer training academy.

Myanmar's second city of Mandalay, an ancient seat of royalty, is just a further hour's drive in the same direction.

A watershed battle at Nawnghkio managed to turn the tide on this front of the civil war ahead of the phased vote, which is due to deliver results around late January and install a nominally civilian government.

The National League for Democracy, which won 2020 elections in a landslide, has been dissolved, while the military government has introduced decade-long sentences for election critics and protesters.

In once-threatened Pyin Oo Lwin, Hein Htoo Hlaing is now running for office for the People's Party after serving as a captain in the army that seized power in the coup.

But he strikes a conciliatory tone. "I want to work for peace mainly," the 33-year-old said.

"All groups -- the military or ethnic armed groups -- used to say that they are fighting for the people, they are working for the people. In reality, people are caught between."

He now campaigns in civilian garb, concerned that old rivalries might harm him on the campaign trail.

"I have no idea who is out for me," says Hein Htoo Hlaing. "However, I do not worry because I used to serve as a soldier."

"The difference is I have no gun in my hand to shoot back now if someone attacks."

AFP



Photo: AFP

CHINA AND THE JUNTA WANT THE RESISTANCE DIVIDED, BUT THE SPRING REVOLUTION ALLIANCE IS CONSOLIDATING

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Burma's military junta would like nothing more than to see the resistance collapse. At the same time, it serves Beijing's interests for the resistance to fragment into independent armed factions competing for trade and investment arrangements with Chinese state-backed companies. Both Burmese and Chinese state media consistently portray the resistance as splintering, while international coverage often reinforces this image by focusing on divisions among armed groups.

This framing serves the interests of both Beijing and Naypyidaw. By portraying Burma as a "basket case" supposedly incapable of governing itself without a strongman imposing order, it discourages meaningful engagement by the United States and other democratic powers. The junta's warnings of ethnic "Balkanization" reinforce this narrative, presenting military rule as the only alternative to chaos and positioning dictatorship as the sole path to stability.

This logic mirrors the Trump administration's current approach to Syria, and Burma watchers remain concerned that a similar framework could be applied to Burma, prioritizing short-term order over realities on the ground and ignoring the emergence of a consolidated, federal resistance.

Claims that Burma is unravelling are misleading. The country is already fragmented largely because the military junta controls only a limited portion of national territory, while large areas are governed or contested by resistance forces.

Recent developments show consolidation rather than collapse. Resistance forces have increasingly coordinated military command and political strategy in response to the junta's planned elections, signaling movement toward a more unified federal structure. Armed groups along the ethnic periphery are now more closely linked with resistance forces in the

Bamar heartland, disrupting junta supply routes and weakening territorial control.

At the same time, resistance-held areas have developed governance functions, including local administration, justice mechanisms, and basic service provision, even under sustained military pressure.

This consolidation is now taking institutional form through the Spring Revolution Alliance.

The Spring Revolution refers to the nationwide resistance that emerged after the February 1, 2021 military coup, uniting civil disobedience, mass protests, general strikes, and armed resistance led largely by youth and ethnic forces. What began as a decentralized uprising has now entered a phase of deliberate coordination. The Spring Revolution Alliance, publicly announced in December 2025, brings together 19 revolutionary armed groups into a single operational framework.

Initial coordination began in mid-2025 as revolutionary leaders assessed the limits of fragmented resistance amid sustained junta offensives and preparations for staged elections. By November, face-to-face meetings among resistance groups culminated in a multi-day conference held in a liberated area, resulting in the formal establishment of the SRA.

So far, the alliance includes the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF), Chin Brotherhood (CB), Burma People's Liberation Army (BPLA), Burma Army (BA), 96 Soldiers PDF, Burma Liberation Democratic Front (BLDF), Danu People's Liberation Front (DPLF), Force for Federal Democracy (FFD), Generation Z Army (GZA), Kale Region Revolutionary Force (KRF), Magway People's Defense Force, Mon State Revolutionary Force (MSRF), National Liberation Army (NLA), People's Independence Army (PIA), Pa-O National Defense Force, Sagaing People's Defense Force, Student Armed Force (SAF), Yaw Army (YA), and Yaw Defense Force (YDF).

Together, these forces link resistance groups representing an estimated 15,000 fighters. The Alliance has established a steering committee, regional coordination structures, and specialized departments to

strengthen logistics, communications, and operational planning. According to steering committee member Khun Bedu, the central lesson of the past four years is clear: isolated resistance cannot survive prolonged military pressure. Without unity, fragmentation becomes a strategic liability.

The SRA's stated objective is the abolition of military dictatorship and the establishment of a federal democratic system grounded in human rights, justice, and equality. It recognizes the National Unity Government (NUG) as the interim Union government and supports People's Defense Forces operating under its chain of command, while also integrating revolutionary groups that fall outside formal command structures to prevent further splintering. The SRA states it will continue to invite other Spring Revolution forces that have not yet joined and will work to implement its future plans. When groups with shared principles and goals join hands, the revolutionary movement will advance further.

The alliance is designed to complement existing NUG and Ethnic Revolutionary Organization frameworks rather than replace them.

Operationally, the SRA functions as a mutual defense and coordination mechanism. Member forces share intelligence, supply routes, medical support, and battlefield planning. They commit to defending one another during offensives, supporting regrouping when territory is lost, and strengthening administration in liberated areas. The Alliance describes itself as a strategic safety net, allowing the revolution to absorb pressure without collapsing.

In a Revolutionary Deed of Commitment issued in November 2025, the SRA formally pledged to continue resisting the junta, citing systematic war crimes and nationwide repression. The document emphasizes discipline, civilian protection, and unified strategy, signaling a shift from ad hoc resistance toward a more structured political-military alliance.

Through the Spring Revolution Alliance, the resistance is consolidating power, coordination, and legitimacy, laying the groundwork for a federal order that directly challenges both junta rule and external

actors, including China, that benefit from a divided opposition. The Alliance formed at a critical geopolitical moment, as Chinese pressure on Burma's resistance forces intensified sharply ahead of the junta's planned December 28 elections.

In recent years, China has shifted from tacit tolerance of resistance groups along its border to openly propping up the junta. In August 2024, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi pledged \$3 billion in assistance to the military regime, explicitly earmarked for census operations and elections. Beijing views these elections as an off-ramp, a mechanism to legitimize junta rule, reduce international scrutiny of China's backing of the regime, and stabilize Burma under military control while protecting Chinese economic interests.

A junta-run election would allow China to claim Burma has returned to a political process, easing diplomatic pressure while enabling the reopening of border trade and safeguarding Belt and Road projects disrupted by the war. From Beijing's perspective, the vote offers the appearance of stability without requiring genuine political change.

To make this strategy viable, China has sought to pressure resistance forces into ceasefires, reviving the Tatmadaw's long-standing divide-and-rule approach. Following the success of Operation 1027, China brokered the Haigeng Agreement ceasefire in January 2024, freezing fighting in northern Shan State until June. When hostilities resumed, Beijing escalated pressure, pushing the Three Brotherhood Alliance and the Kachin Independence Organization toward negotiations. By December 2024, all four groups had sent senior delegations to Yunnan.

China has paired diplomacy with coercion, detaining MNDAA commander Peng Daxun to force ceasefire talks, resulting in a January 2025 agreement. Beijing also cut electricity and internet service along the border, shut down cross-border trade, and issued direct threats to groups such as the TNLA, devastating local economies to compel compliance.

The Spring Revolution Alliance appears to be a defensive response to this pressure campaign. By consolidating groups into a single alliance, the resistance presents a unified front that is far harder for

China to fracture through separate ceasefire deals. The fact that nine of the SRA's 19 members already receive support from the Arakan Army suggests preexisting coordination aimed at preventing splintering.

Both the National Unity Government and the Spring Revolution Alliance reject the junta's planned elections as illegitimate. In January 2024, the NUG endorsed the One China policy in an attempt to reduce Chinese pressure, but Beijing continued to sideline the NUG while deepening its engagement with the junta. Following Min Aung Hlaing's November visit to China, the NUG publicly condemned both Beijing's pressure campaign and the election process.

The SRA views the elections as a political maneuver designed to entrench military rule, not restore democracy. The process disregards the 2020 election results overturned by the coup and cannot be credible while the junta continues widespread repression and war crimes. Rather than participate in junta-controlled political theater, the Alliance has committed to ending military rule through continued resistance and the construction of a federal democratic system.

China supports the junta's elections as a means of stabilizing Burma on terms favorable to Beijing. To make those elections possible, China seeks to weaken or fragment the resistance through coercion and divide-and-rule tactics. The Spring Revolution Alliance formed precisely to counter that strategy, signaling greater unity and making clear that the resistance will not be maneuvered into a settlement that advances Chinese objectives or preserves military rule under the cover of elections.

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



Photo: Supplied

THE SPRING REVOLUTION ALLIANCE IS OUR ANSWER TO WASHINGTON'S NEW REALITY

The Spring Revolution Alliance is a breakthrough. But to succeed, we must understand the shift in U.S. policy, the difference between 'Code of Conduct' and 'Chain of Command', and the hard work of real unity.

By James Shwe

The ground has shifted beneath our feet. The new U.S. administration's 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS)—the official document that defines America's global priorities—signals a move to "Flexible Realism." This means Washington is no longer waiting to reward our democratic values alone; it is explicitly looking for partners who can deliver stability, secure supply chains, and counter transnational crime. In this harsh new light, our internal unity ceases to be a moral ideal and becomes a strategic survival requirement.

In this context, the formation of the Spring Revolution Alliance (SRA) and its "Revolutionary Deed of Commitment" is the most significant signal we have sent to the world. But we must be careful not to oversell it or misunderstand it.

The Specifics of the SRA Deed: A Platform, Not a Prop

The SRA's Deed is not an NUG (National Unity Government) document, nor does it subordinate these groups to the NUG. It is an independent pact among 19 diverse resistance forces. However, it creates the possibility for genuine cooperation that was previously impossible.

- Clause 3 commits the signatories to "address and rectify weaknesses in coordination and overall command". This is the key. By creating their own "robust and effective command structure," the SRA groups provide a single, organized entity for the NUG to engage with.

- The Practical Result: Instead of the NUG trying to coordinate 19 separate armies—a logistical nightmare—it can now interface with one Alliance Council. This isn't about forced submission; it's about

efficient partnership. The SRA becomes the "operational arm" that can execute the "federal democracy" vision the NUG champions diplomatically.

The Warning: The Pitfall of Over-Expectation

We must be brutally honest. The public often yearns for a "magic switch"—a belief that a signed alliance means instant victory. This expectation is dangerous.

Coalition warfare is inherently messy. Even with this Deed, there will be miscommunications. Commanders who have fought autonomously for years will clash. If we expect perfection, every small setback will feel like a betrayal. We must understand that unity is a discipline we practice daily, not a destination we reach instantly. The SRA is the beginning of a difficult process, not the end of our problems.

The Internal Solution: Command vs. Conduct

To manage this process, we need to distinguish between two military concepts, just as General Dwight D. Eisenhower did when commanding the diverse Allied forces of WWII.

1. Chain of Command (Operational Control)

In a Federal Democratic Army, the NUG does not need to micromanage every KNDF brigade or Chin Brotherhood unit. EROs can and should retain their distinct identities and operational autonomy. The SRA Deed creates a coordinating structure, allowing for shared strategy without erasing individual group history.

2. Code of Conduct (Moral Standard)

This is where we must be rigid. In WWII, American, British, and French troops fought under different flags, but Eisenhower held them all to the same laws of war.

To the outside world, a unified Code of Conduct is the test of statehood. If a fighter in Sagaing and a fighter in Karenni State follow the same rules of engagement

and civilian protection, we are no longer "rebels"—we are a professional federal army in the making.

The External Myth: "Too Big to Fail"

Finally, we must reject the myth that the Myanmar military is "too big to fail," especially with China's help.

- The "Failed State" Reality: The junta controls only 21% of the country. It cannot secure its own borders. It is not an institution "too big to fail"; it is a hollow shell that is already failing.

- The China Factor: Beijing's support is a hedge, not a guarantee. China's strategy is "managed chaos"—supporting the junta just enough to prevent collapse, but not enough to win, because they fear a strong Myanmar.

Conclusion

The SRA Deed is our declaration that we are ready to govern. But we must proceed with clear eyes. We must forgive the inevitable frictions of coalition building, insist on a unified standard of conduct over a single chain of command, and refuse to be intimidated by the myth of the junta's strength.

We do not need to be uniform to be united. We just need to be professional, coordinated, and persistent. That is the only realist path to victory.



JUSTICE FOR MYANMAR WELCOMES REMOVAL OF JUNTA PROPAGANDA ACCOUNTS BY BIG TECH

On 18 December, Justice For Myanmar (JFM) released a statement welcoming the removal of Myanmar military junta propaganda accounts by Twitch, Facebook, YouTube, and MediaFire. The accounts were operated by the junta's Ministry of Information and the military's Directorate of Psychological Warfare and Public Relations.

The group said the action weakens the junta's ability to spread disinformation and fear, especially ahead of its planned sham elections. However, JFM stressed that Big Tech companies must do more to fully block the military from using their platforms to promote violence, hate speech, and false legitimacy.

The full statement is as follows.

The takedown of junta-controlled propaganda accounts follows Justice For Myanmar's letters to the tech companies, raising significant sanctions compliance and human rights concerns over the continued provision of products and services for the accounts, and ongoing civil society pressure.

The Myanmar military has a long-standing track record of using state-controlled media and propaganda channels to spread hate speech against the Rohingya, incite violence against civilians, and spread disinformation, including about the junta's sham election slated for December 2025 and January 2026.

The Amazon-owned video platform Twitch has removed accounts that were livestreaming 14 Myanmar Radio and TV (MRTV) and Myanmar Radio channels on its website and mobile apps that are hosted in the Google and Apple app stores. Twitch also removed the Myanmar International TV (MITV) livestream that was embedded on the MITV website.

MITV, MRTV, and Myanmar Radio are all operated by the junta's Ministry of Information. MRTV primarily broadcasts in Burmese for a Myanmar audience, while MITV broadcasts in English and is aimed at influencing foreign audiences.

The MRTV website and apps were launched by war criminal and junta head Min Aung Hlaing in a 2022 ceremony that touted the livestreaming feature. While the junta initially responded to the Twitch account removals by creating new channels for continued livestreaming, Twitch has proceeded to shut down multiple other accounts reported by Justice For Myanmar.

Facebook terminated the MITV page and YouTube, which is owned by Alphabet, removed an account of the junta's Ministry of Information from its platform. However, YouTube has so far refused to remove an MITV account.

Facebook and the filesharing site MediaFire both terminated accounts of Yadanabon Newspaper, a publication linked to Myawady Newspaper that is run by the Myanmar army's Directorate of Psychological Warfare and Public Relations. The army was using MediaFire to host PDFs of its propaganda newspaper that were shared on its Facebook account.

Facebook's actions are in line with its ban on military controlled state and media entities, which it put in place in February 2021, following the military's illegal coup attempt.

The termination of junta propaganda accounts is an important step to undermine its capacity to spread propaganda both to the Myanmar public and to foreign audiences.

The junta accounts reported by Justice For Myanmar are controlled by individuals and entities that have been sanctioned in multiple jurisdictions, including the U.S., UK, EU, Canada and Australia.

Letters were also sent to Alphabet (the parent company of Google), Apple, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), Telegram, Cloudflare and ApkPure. To date, these tech providers have yet to take action against the remaining junta propaganda accounts flagged.

Justice For Myanmar urges all tech companies to take down junta propaganda accounts and block the junta from using their platforms.

The Myanmar junta's propaganda campaign

The Myanmar junta is intensifying its efforts to produce and disseminate propaganda and disinformation ahead of its sham election set to take place in stages in December and January.

Big Tech is an essential means for the junta to spread fear to Myanmar people in an attempt to mobilise votes, repress criticism and manufacture false legitimacy.

In the run up to its sham election, the junta has been committing an increasing number of serious international crimes, including arbitrary arrests, torture and indiscriminate airstrikes.

On December 10, 2025, the junta carried out an airstrike on the Mrauk-U General Hospital in Arakan State, killing dozens of civilians. Healthcare workers, patients and a baby were among the dead. In response to international criticism, including from the UN and the World Health Organisation, the junta falsely claimed that no civilians were killed. The junta widely disseminated these claims on social media platforms, including Telegram, X, TikTok and apps hosted on Apple and Google app stores.

Military junta propaganda accounts identified by Justice For Myanmar also use language that dehumanises Rohingya. Tech companies have allowed this despite findings by the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar in 2018 that hate speech published on some of the same media directly contributed to atrocities against the Rohingya and indicate genocidal intent.

The junta's propaganda channels currently using international tech platforms' products and services also regularly relay speeches, in video, audio and text, of sanctioned individuals, including junta head Min Aung Hlaing. This includes speeches justifying the illegal attempted coup in February 2021 and the commission of international crimes.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "Propaganda is a pillar in the junta's campaign of terror and the junta has been able to continue to spread propaganda through Big Tech.

"It is unacceptable that tech companies are still providing platforms, products and services to a criminal military junta that is committing the worst crimes known to humanity, with total impunity.

"The junta is using these platforms to spread propaganda as it intensifies its campaign of terror in the lead up to its sham election.

"It is essential that these companies act now and terminate Myanmar military junta propaganda accounts and, in doing so, uphold human rights, protect users and ensure full compliance with international sanctions."



MYANMAR JUNTA THREATENS LEGAL ACTION TO PUSH THROUGH STALLED STATE PROJECTS INCLUDING MYITSONE DAM

The Myanmar military junta has issued a sweeping directive threatening legal action against any individual or group that opposes state-authorized projects without "sufficient evidence." The order, dated 16 December and released publicly on 19 December, was issued by the office of the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) under the direct authority of junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.

"This directive was issued to push forward projects that have been suspended or stalled. It was prompted by objections from certain groups," a military source in Naypyidaw told Mizzima.

The announcement applies to projects approved by Union-level organizations, Union ministries, regional and state governments, as well as the Naypyidaw Council. It covers state-authorized businesses, registered contracts, and related activities.

The junta claimed that objections have been raised against these projects and companies without "firm evidence" or "direct relevance," resulting in delays and undermining the country's investment promotion efforts.

"The threat to arrest anyone who objects without 'sufficient evidence' represents an extremely broad and sweeping use of power," a lawyer commented.

The military junta justified the move by claiming that ongoing objections have caused project delays and are hindering the country's investment promotion efforts.

According to the directive, relevant government departments and agencies are not required to consider or review any objections made against state-authorized projects or registered companies, deemed to lack sufficient evidence or relevance.

Furthermore, authorities are also instructed not to suspend approved projects and to ensure that implementation continues without interruption.

The order was signed by NDSC Secretary Aung Lin Dwe and immediately published in the Myanmar government gazette. Some business observers believe the swift publication signals the junta's intention to accelerate major national-level projects, including the controversial Myitsone hydropower dam on the Ayeyarwady River.

On 16 December, deputy junta leader Soe Win visited Myitkyina in Kachin State, where he reportedly recalled that the Myitsone project had begun during his tenure as a regional commander. He said the project was suspended only when dam construction was nearing its final stage, citing political instability and unforeseen circumstances.

The Myitsone Dam site lies just 25.4 kilometers from the Sagaing Fault line. Despite this, the junta recently claimed the dam's original design was calculated to withstand a Maximum Credible Earthquake (MCE) of magnitude 7.1.

Following that announcement, public opposition intensified, with renewed calls warning against resuming the project. A military source in Naypyidaw told Mizzima that the latest directive threatening legal action was issued in direct response to this surge in criticism of the Myitsone Dam.



UN COURT TO HOLD MYANMAR GENOCIDE HEARINGS IN JANUARY

The United Nations top court announced on Friday that fresh public hearings in a case accusing Myanmar of genocide against its Muslim Rohingya minority will take place in January 2026.

Filed by The Gambia to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2019, the case accuses the southeast Asian country's authorities of violating the UN genocide convention during a brutal crackdown by the army and Buddhist militias on the Rohingya in 2017.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims fled the bloodshed, while witnesses reported murders, rape and arson targeting the minority.

As a result, the ICJ, which rules on disputes between countries, ordered Myanmar in 2020 to "take all measures within its power" to prevent a genocide.

In a press release on Friday, the Hague-based court said the latest set of public hearings will run from January 12 to 29.

"The hearings will be devoted to the merits of the

case and will include the examination of witnesses and an expert called by the Parties," the ICJ said.

Witness hearings will also take place behind closed doors.

The Gambia, a Muslim-majority west African country, has asked the court to rule that Myanmar breached its obligations with regard to the 1948 UN Genocide Convention.

It has demanded reparations for the victims, as well as guarantees that the atrocities will not happen again.

According to the UN refugee agency, more than a million Rohingya are living in makeshift camps in neighbouring Bangladesh, after fleeing the 2017 crackdown in Buddhist-majority Myanmar.

Although the ICJ's rulings are binding and cannot be appealed, the court has no way to enforce its judgments.

AFP



EU ALLOCATES INCREASED FUNDING FOR MYANMAR AND ROHINGYA HUMANITARIAN CRISES

The European Union (EU) will provide €29 million to aid the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, with €15 million allocated for conflict-affected communities and €14 million for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and nearby areas, focusing on sustainability and food security.

The EU's statement continues below.

These new funds come as the intensifying conflict in Myanmar continues to displace more people within the country, while also driving more displacement towards Bangladesh and neighbouring countries. The situation is further aggravated by the earthquake that hit Myanmar earlier this year, leading to a collapse of basic services such as health, access to water and sanitation and education, and to a sharp increase in hunger.

The largest share of the humanitarian contribution, up to €12 million, will support the communities affected by the conflict in Myanmar. The funding will prioritise food and nutrition assistance, given the concerning numbers of people at risk of famine.

In Bangladesh, €2 million will reinforce the existing EU assistance to Rohingya refugees, with a focus also

on food and nutrition. Finally, an additional million will also support Myanmar and Rohingya refugees displaced in other neighbouring countries where they live in vulnerable conditions.

This assistance comes in addition to the almost €50 million provided in humanitarian aid for the crisis in Myanmar and its regional impact, including emergency funding in response to the earthquake that hit the country end of March. It also adds to over €32 million already allocated in humanitarian assistance to Bangladesh this year.

The additional €14 million in development assistance will focus on sustainability and self-reliance in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar. It will include support for skills and livelihoods development.

Increasing numbers of people are fleeing across the border to Bangladesh, with over 136,000 new Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar since January 2024. The worsening situation in the camps in Bangladesh is pushing more people to risk dangerous sea journeys to flee to other countries.



Photo: Antonio Graceffo

MMN STATEMENT CALLS FOR MORE PROTECTIONS FOR MIGRANTS ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION DAY

The Mekong Migration Network (MMN) issued a statement on 18 December, International Migration Day 2025, calling on all stakeholders to stand against rising xenophobia and discrimination, and work to develop comprehensive policies to protect migrant worker rights.

The statement continues below.

Thailand's economic prosperity has long relied on the hard work of migrant workers from neighbouring countries. Despite their decades-long contribution, filling urgent labour shortages, migrant workers continue to be regarded as temporary and disposable. The difficulties in securing legal immigration status, the casualisation of labour, and the exclusion of informal sector workers from Social Security systems leave millions of migrant workers unprotected.

Our network member, the Foundation for Education and Development based in Mae Sot and the South of Thailand, continue to report that costly complex procedures make it difficult for migrants to maintain their immigration status. In Had Yai, migrants have also had to deal with the loss or destruction of their documents in the recent floods.

Another longstanding MMN member, the MAP Foundation based in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot, echoes these concerns. A listener to its community radio station recently commented that:

"My employer refused to take responsibility for my registration and asked me to hire an agent to sort it out. I made Social Security contributions, but I don't even know if I was enrolled by my employer"

Many migrant workers take loans to cover the cost of registration. Some have told the MAP Foundation that they had not yet paid off the debts accrued for last years' registration, and now they have to pay again. Compared to their wages, migrants feel that the document costs are too high, and as a result they cannot support their families.

Yaung Chi Oo Workers Association, an MMN member based in Mae Sot, has observed that employers are increasingly taking advantage of Myanmar migrants. There is a growing trend whereby workers are given repeated one-month contracts so that employers can evade various responsibilities owed to employees. Female garment factory workers in Mae Sot have detailed their increasingly precarious working conditions:

"We can now be dismissed at the whim of the employer. They don't need any reason to fire us. Sometimes they claim there are no orders; other times, ten workers are dismissed simply for being two minutes late. In the morning, we have a job. By evening, we are told we are out."

"When we are dismissed, our unpaid wages are withheld and we are told to wait until next month for our money. No letter of dismissal is given. Instead, we are forced to sign papers falsely stating that we resigned voluntarily. Our work permits are also cancelled without our knowledge, and by the time we find out what has happened it's too late. Trying to survive with neither a job nor documents is terrifying."

Recommendations

As we mark International Migrant Day 2025, MMN calls on all the stakeholders to do their utmost to foster social cohesion and promote a diverse and inclusive society. We call on the Royal Thai Government to:

1. Make the migrant registration processes more accessible and affordable;
2. Increase the duration of work permits to at least two years; and
3. Protect migrant workers' rights through the active enforcement of the Labour Protection Act B.E. 2541.



Photo: Supplied

NINE CIVILIANS KILLED AS MYANMAR JUNTA INTENSIFIES AIRSTRIKES IN WETLET TOWNSHIP

At least nine local residents, including a four-year-old child, were killed in Wetlet Township, Sagaing Region, following two separate junta airstrikes conducted within a five-day span. According to the Wetlet Informational Network, the attacks targeted civilian areas and displacement camps despite the absence of active ground fighting.

The most recent fatal attack occurred at 8:31 pm on 17 December, when the junta air force dropped two 250-pound bombs on Si Taw village in eastern Wetlet Township. The bombs killed four people at the scene – 70-year-old U Nyunt Wai, his 70-year-old wife Daw Myint Kyi, 25-year-old Zeyar Htun, and an unidentified middle-aged woman. Five other residents sustained injuries, and the explosion caused fires that destroyed three houses and a vehicle.

This follows an earlier strike on 13 December, where two bombs were dropped near the Thangonetawtike area, south of Htone Bo village, at 9:30 pm and 9:36 pm. That attack initially killed four people, including Ma Tuzar Nwe (34), Tutpi (26), U Khin Maung Lwin (70), and four-year-old Aye Myat Thuzar. One of the ten

injured victims later died from their wounds, bringing the total death toll from the 13 December strike to five. The victims were internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Kalama village in Shwebo Township who had fled to Wetlet to escape previous conflict.

"There was no ground fighting at all. The bombs were dropped on villages where civilians were living without any reason," said Ko Naga Lay, head of the Wetlet Informational Network, in an interview with Mizzima.

The attacks continued into the morning of 18 December, with reports of a drone strike on Thit Seint village at 10:30 am. Ko Naga Lay, head of the Wetlet Informational Network, stated that the Light Infantry Battalion 12 deployed two "suicide drones," injuring a Buddhist monk and a child.

Revolutionary forces have warned that junta troops are currently advancing toward local irrigation sites and have urged residents to remain on high alert for further aerial attacks in the township, where the military is reportedly struggling to maintain control ahead of its planned elections.



Photo: Supplied

THIRTEEN MYANMAR CIVILIANS KILLED IN DEVASTATING AIR STRIKES ACROSS KHIN-U TOWNSHIP

At least thirteen people, including five women, have been killed following a series of jet fighter attacks launched by the Myanmar junta air force on two separate locations in Khin-U Township, Sagaing Region. According to reports from the Khin-U Township Information Team, the aerial campaign targeted a river crossing and a commercial junction on 17 and 18 December, leaving dozens more injured and local infrastructure in ruins.

The first wave of attacks occurred on 17 December at an Ayeyarwady River crossing port in eastern Khin-U.

Residents reported that five jet fighters opened fire approximately 30 times, killing eight internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were attempting to navigate the waterway. The violence continued the following day, 18 December, when a military aircraft bombed a petrol station at the Myay Ni Shoo junction.

That strike killed five additional people and resulted in a "quite high" number of casualties due to the

direct hit on the facility. In total, at least 30 people are estimated to have been injured across both incidents.

The escalating air campaign has created a humanitarian crisis in the region, where hundreds of thousands of IDPs from Singu, Tantse, and Kanbalu townships are currently stranded.

Local sources report that over 300 vehicles are trapped on the Shwebo-Myitkyina road due to junta-enforced checkpoints and road blockades. Displaced civilians are reportedly living in a constant state of fear, forced to flee into hiding whenever aircraft are sighted. These daily airstrikes come as the Military Commission prepares for its upcoming 28 December elections, despite the fact that large portions of Sagaing Region remain under the control of resistance forces and outside the regime's administrative reach.

Photo: Supplied

NUG AND KNU RESOLVE TENSION FOLLOWING DETENTION OF OVER 40 RESISTANCE MEMBERS IN TANINTHARYI REGION

MIZZIMA SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HAN HTOO ZAW

More than 40 individuals, including high-ranking officers from the National Unity Government (NUG) and People's Defence Force (PDF), were detained on 17 December in Tanintharyi Region by a battalion of the allied Karen National Union (KNU).

According to revolutionary sources, those held included Saw Dah Ko (also known as Ko Beik), Tactical Commander of Special Operation Command Tactical Unit (33); Dora, deputy battalion commander of the Tanintharyi Regional Military Command's drone battalion; and Min Thar Gyi, commander of Dawei District Battalion 2, along with other PDF members and civilians.

The detentions were carried out by Companies 1, 2, and 3 of Battalion 12, under Brigade 4 of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in Dawei District.

"They were detained while returning from the border and passing through the territory controlled by Battalion 12. After the officers were taken into custody, other resistance members in the area were tracked down and arrested," a PDF member told Mizzima on the condition of anonymity.

While 11 officers were initially taken, the total number of detainees rose to 44 as related individuals and civilian support personnel were apprehended. KNLA troops also seized weapons, ammunition, and communication equipment during the operation.

While the specific reasons for the incident were not officially released, Mizzima has learned the situation escalated from an argument between members of PDF Dawei District Battalion 2 and KNLA Battalion 12 Unit 2, during which a PDF member allegedly struck a KNLA soldier until he lost consciousness.

On 18 December, Tactical Commander Saw Dah Ko announced on social media that an agreement for their release had been reached following successful negotiations between NUG and KNU officials.

He stated that all detained comrades would soon return to their mother battalion with their equipment, describing the incident as a minor "misunderstanding between revolutionary brothers" and warning military dictatorship lobbyists not to celebrate, as the allied forces remain united in their fight.

Displaced people. Photo: Supplied



ETHNIC ALLIANCE URGES INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION TO HALT MYANMAR MILITARY'S AIRSTRIKES ON CIVILIANS

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) issued a joint statement on 16 December calling on the United Nations and the international community to stop the junta's ongoing aerial bombardments.

The groups, members of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, formally accused the military of committing war crimes by systematically targeting civilian populations, including hospitals, religious buildings, and schools.

The statement highlighted a series of devastating attacks, most notably the 10 December bombing of Mrauk-U General Hospital on International Human

Rights Day, which killed 33 people, including patients and medical staff.

Additional strikes on 11 December in Kyaukphyu Township killed nine civilians sheltering in villages, followed by the 13 December bombing of two monasteries and a school in the same region.

In Sagaing Region, a jet fighter attack on 15 December killed five local men in Yinmabin Township. The alliance warned that these deliberate mass-casualty attacks are pushing Myanmar toward becoming a failed state.



MYANMAR JUNTA STRIKES KILL 12 CIVILIANS IN MONGMIT TOWNSHIP, SAYS SHRF

The Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) reported on 16 December that 12 civilians were killed and 9 injured in Myanmar junta air and artillery attacks in Mongmit Township, northern Shan State.

The text of the SHRF report is as follows.

On December 6 and 11, 2025, twelve civilians were killed, and nine others were injured in air and artillery attacks by the military regime in Mongmit township, northern Shan State.

Around 9 am on December 6, the junta first bombed Myitsone village, on the Shweli River 20 kilometres northwest of Mongmit town, with a Y-12 aircraft. Subsequently, at around 9:20 am, while local residents were transporting the wounded and deceased victims of the bombing, the junta returned and bombed the area again with a jet fighter.

These two airstrikes resulted in a total of eleven civilian deaths, including one pregnant woman and two children, and nine injuries. The majority of the casualties were IDPs from the towns of Mongkok and Mongmit who had fled fearing the re-entry of junta troops into the towns.

Although heavy fighting took place on the main road from Mongmit township to Thabeikkyin township after the SAC regained control of Mongmit town in the last week of November 2025, there was no fighting whatsoever near Myitsone village that was bombed.

Numerous gold mines, primarily operated by Chinese nationals, are located on the other side of the Nam Mit river, 3 kilometres away from Myitsone village, where the junta conducted the air strikes.

Myitsone village lies about 8 kilometres downstream of the Shweli 3 dam site. This 671-megawatt hydroelectric dam project was suspended by France's state-owned Electricite de France (EDF) in March 2021, after the military coup. In August 2023, the junta called for a tender to resume the dam project, but the results of the tender have not been published.

On the morning of December 11, clashes broke out between junta troops and revolutionary forces on the Mongmit-Thabeikkyin road. At around 11 am that day, junta troops stationed at Ma Kyi Pin village, 20 kilometres west of Mongmit town, fired heavy artillery in an eastward direction, killing a woman in her 40s tending buffaloes in a field near Yae Ta Khon village.

ASEAN



ASEAN URGED TO ACT AS AIRSTRIKES KILL CIVILIANS WATCHING SEA GAMES REPLAY IN MYANMAR

A civil society statement released on 15 December has urged Malaysia, the current Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Philippines, the incoming Chair, to lead ASEAN action against military junta airstrikes in Myanmar. The statement cited deadly attacks that killed civilians in Mrauk-U on 10 December and on Depayin on 5 December, where civilians were killed, including people watching a replay of a SEA Games women's football match.

The statement is as follows.

In light of this, we appeal to Malaysia as the current Chair and the Philippines as the incoming Chair of ASEAN to lead ASEAN to demand the illegal military junta in Myanmar to stop these aerial bombings. Such a gesture would send a powerful message of regional

unity and moral leadership.

Within the true spirit of the SEA Games unity, mutual respect, and cooperation, we urge ASEAN to step up and take concrete action to cease the Myanmar military's unprecedented violence in Myanmar. The Games symbolize more than athletic achievement; they represent a temporary truce, a neutral ground, and a powerful metaphor for peaceful coexistence. It is now incumbent upon regional leaders to honor that spirit by transforming the temporary goodwill of sports diplomacy into a political commitment with substantial action to ensure human security and peace for the people of Myanmar and the region.

Let the SEA Games fulfill their higher purpose: to remind us that we are neighbors bound by a shared region, a shared humanity, and a shared hope for peace.



MARKET HIT BY MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE IN SINGU TOWNSHIP

An airstrike carried out by Myanmar's military commission targeted the market in Letpanhla Village, Singu Township, Mandalay Region, destroying seven buildings, according to the Singu Township People's Defence Force (PDF).

The attack occurred at 3:51 pm on 15 December and was carried out by a jet fighter which took off from Tada-U Air Base, local resistance sources reported.

"A single jet fighter dropped two bombs and then fired machine guns. The resulting fire burned for about two hours, but it has since been extinguished," a member of the PDF told Mizzima on the evening of 15 December.

The attack destroyed seven buildings, including two homes and five market stalls. Fortunately, there

were no civilian casualties, as local residents managed to flee the area in time, the PDF source added.

The incident is part of an intensified offensive by the junta, which, after reportedly regaining control of Madaya Township, is now advancing into neighbouring Singu Township.

Resistance groups noted that this offensive includes both ground troop movements and intensified aerial attacks, which have repeatedly targeted areas where internally displaced people (IDPs) are taking refuge.

Just days earlier, on 11 December, a junta airstrike on Pinlelgyi Village in Singu Township killed one local man and injured five others, according to local sources.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE KILLS FIVE CIVILIANS IN YINMARBIN, SAGAING REGION

At least five local men were killed, and several other civilians were injured after a Myanmar junta jet fighter carried out an airstrike near Zeetaw village in the western part of Yinmarbin Township, Sagaing Region, according to local residents.

The bombing took place at approximately 12:30 pm on 15 December.

"The victims were hit by bomb shrapnel, and their bodies were badly damaged. We have not yet been able to identify all of them. The sound of the explosion could be heard as far as 30 miles away," a local man told Mizzima.

Residents confirmed that the five men died at the

scene after being struck by bomb fragments, while others sustained injuries of varying severity.

Local sources indicate that the junta has been conducting repeated aerial attacks using jet fighters, gyrocopters, and drones in areas where it has been unable to exert control or hold elections.

Following the airstrikes, junta troops launched a ground offensive in Yinmarbin Township on the morning of 16 December. As a result of the ground operation, around 7,000 residents from villages including Kyaukhmaw and Sonechaung have been displaced and are fleeing the fighting, according to local sources.



CHIN GROUPS CONDEMN MRAUK-U HOSPITAL ATTACK BY MYANMAR JUNTA AS WAR CRIME

Several Chin organizations have issued strong condemnations following the deadly airstrike on Mrauk-U General Hospital in Rakhine State asserting that the junta military committed a war crime.

The Chin Council (CC), in a statement on 14 December, and the Chin Brotherhood (CB), in a statement on 13 December, denounced the 10 December bombing that killed a total of 33 people including patients, patient attendants, and hospital staff and injured 77 others.

The Chin Council strongly condemned the bombing as an "inhumane act of terror." The statement read, in part, "This act is a brazen violation of International Humanitarian Laws and fundamental human rights principles, constituting a war crime, and also a direct violation of the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council."

The Chin Council urged the international community to immediately stop and take action against the junta for its ongoing bombing attacks targeting civilian infrastructure across Myanmar, and to stand in solidarity with those affected.

Similarly, the Chin Brotherhood (CB), an ally of the Arakan Army (AA) which controls the Mrauk-U area, expressed grief and strong condemnation, stating that

the "bombing and killing of patients, their families, and staff undergoing treatment in the hospital constitutes a war crime."

The CB affirmed its commitment to cooperating with the Arakan National Council/Arakan Army (ANC/AA) in the fight to overthrow the military dictatorship and establish a Federal Democratic Union.

The Arakan National Council (ANC) released a statement on 14 December expressing gratitude for the condemnation and solidarity from the Chin groups. The ANC noted that the strong stance provided immense strength and called for continued cooperation to achieve justice for the deceased and injured victims, as well as assistance with urgently needed hospital equipment and medicines.

The junta's propaganda unit, the True News Information Team, stated on 13 December that the operation was conducted as a counter-terrorism measure. It claimed to have received information that the AA, local People's Defence Forces (PDF), Bamar People's Liberation Army (BPLA), and Asho Chin forces were using the Mrauk-U hospital as a military base and to conduct administrative affairs, and that those killed or injured were not civilians but members and supporters of armed groups.

Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA ADMITS SHELLS LANDED IN THAILAND, BLAMES KNU FOR DELIBERATE FIRING ACROSS THE BORDER

Myanmar junta spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun admitted today that artillery rounds fired by its troops during clashes along the Thai-Myanmar border landed inside Thai territory, but immediately alleged that the Karen National Union (KNU) was deliberately firing shells into Thailand to create international tensions.

Speaking at a press conference in Yangon, Zaw Min Tun stated he would not deny Thailand's claims regarding stray rounds. "Thailand has said that shells fired by our troops, the Myanmar Army, landed inside its territory. Regarding this, I will absolutely not deny it," he said.

However, he then accused the KNU of instigating the fighting and of firing some of the projectiles itself. "They are doing this because instability along the border strengthens their position and presence in the border areas," he claimed.

Clashes have been ongoing as junta troops advance toward the Shunda Park online scam compound in the Min Let Pan area, south of Myawaddy town. The area, which had been under KNU control, has been the site of fierce fighting between junta forces and joint KNU-led allied forces.

Zaw Min Tun accused the KNU of initiating the fighting to disrupt the junta's operations, which he claimed are aimed at arresting those involved in online scam activities and demolishing related buildings. He added that Myanmar and Thailand would cooperate to address incidents involving stray rounds landing inside Thai territory.

Artillery rounds fired from the Myanmar side have repeatedly landed in Thailand throughout November and December, reportedly injuring Thai civilians and damaging residential homes. The KNU, in a 6 December statement citing Thai media reports, had previously accused junta forces of firing heavy artillery into the Min Let Pan area, with three shells landing in Thailand, injuring Thai civilians.

The Shunda Park compound, seized by joint KNU and People's Defence Force (PDF) units on 21 November, was reportedly an online scam centre that had been operating under the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), a group that previously pledged support for the junta's planned election. The KNU has not issued any statement in response to the junta's latest allegations.

Photo: Supplied

KESAN ANNOUNCES THE THAWTHI TAW OO INDIGENOUS PARK

On 16 December, the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN) announced the election of the Thawthi Taw Oo Indigenous Park Governing Community (TTIP-GC). The election, which KESAN says was transparent and inclusive, comes as the Myanmar junta moves to hold a widely discredited election at the end of December.

The text of the announcement by KESAN is as follows.

While the ruling military junta continue to push for their illegitimate election, scheduled from late December 2025 to January 2026, we, the Indigenous people of the Thawthi Taw-Oo Indigenous Park (TTIP) in Kawthoolei under the administration of the Karen

National Union, have successfully completed the final election of the TTIP Governing Committee (TTIP-GC). This marks the conclusion of a transparent and inclusive process that has built accountable democratic governance from the grassroots level. In stark contrast to the junta's sham election – carried out while murdering innocent citizens through airstrikes, bombings, and brutal killings – the TTIP community has built a genuine, inclusive democratic system with the full consent and commitment of more than 113,000 community members from 319 villages.

Between December 10 and 12, eleven members of the TTIP Governing Committee (GC) – comprising five women and six men – were elected from among the 99 members of the TTIP General Assembly, the highest governing body of TTIP. These 99 members

had been elected earlier through a series of community elections held from July to September this year. With a commitment to 50% representation for women, the Assembly comprised of 36 directly elected community members, 12 ethnic representatives, 34 KNU District representatives, and 14 civil society representatives.

This election follows the adoption of the TTIP Charter during the 2024 TTIP Charter Referendum (with 92% community members' endorsement across 18 TTIP village tracts), and the ensuing direct election of the 36 community representatives and 12 ethnic representatives to the TTIP General Assembly.

The TTIP aims to revitalise and protect local communities' traditions, biocultural diversity, and natural resource governance practices. Following several years of collaborative efforts among Thawthi Taw-Oo communities, the TTIP Organizing Committee, KNU leaders, and civil society groups, the TTIP borders have been collectively defined, and the TTIP Charter has been approved by community members from all 18 TTIP village tracts.

The TTIP represents our bottom-up response to the typically top-down approach to resolving some of the most pressing issues of our time, pursuing peace, environmental sustainability and community development that is inclusive and reflective of the local communities' values and approaches that have been utilized for generations.

Enacting our vision in the TTIP creates another path for our communities to pursue peace and self-determination. Rather than waiting for governments to resolve their differences before taking action, we will demonstrate what a more peaceful and sustainable life can be. By developing our own participatory governance structure to protect the environment and manage our lands and natural resources, we can non-violently defy the centralized exploitation of our territories which fuels conflict and undermines our livelihoods.

We, the Indigenous People of Thaw Thi Taw-Oo, are not waiting idly for federal democracy, but are taking actions to establish this TTIP- which recognizes and upholds our communities' customary land management systems while simultaneously uniting community, KNU and CSO representation within the TTIP governing body, to demonstrate that federalism is possible in the here and now.

Ultimately, this initiative aims to create peace and to protect this stronghold of Indigenous culture and biodiversity from threats, both old and new. Our traditions are intimately tied to the land, and there are no better protectors of the forests, rivers and natural resources here than our own communities. From December 10-12, 2025, the 1st General Assembly as well as Governing Committee election was successfully convened, and the elected Governing Committee are as follows:

1. Saw Thaw Tu Htoo – Chairperson
2. Naw Say Paw – Vice Chairperson
3. Naw S'Leh – Secretary
4. Saw Taw Kler Htoo – Joint Secretary
5. Saw Eh Wah – Member of Governing Committee
6. Naw Hsa Pree Paw – Member of Governing Committee
7. Saw Kweh Say – Member of Governing Committee
8. Saw Albert – Member of Governing Committee
9. Naw Tin Zar Lin Cho - Member of Governing Committee
10. Naw Htoo Paw Zar – Member of Governing Committee
11. Saw Ki Doh – Member of Governing Committee



MYANMAR TOWNSHIP EDUCATION BOARDS RESIGN FROM CBBE AMID LEADERSHIP DISPUTE

Members of township education boards have begun resigning from the Committee on Boards of Basic Education (CBBE) following the committee's public opposition to the National Unity Government's (NUG) appointment of Ja Htoi Pan as Union Minister of Education.

Ja Htoi Pan, formerly the NUG's Deputy Minister of Education, was promoted to Minister on 8 December as part of the NUG's cabinet restructuring. The CBBE issued a statement on 10 December opposing the appointment, citing concerns over "disregarding the views of relevant education organizations," "questions over competence and leadership," and a "perceived lack of support" for the minister from the education community.

In response to the CBBE's objection, the Gangaw and Yesagyo Township Education Boards, among others, announced their resignation from the committee while expressing support for the newly appointed minister.

An official from the Gangaw Township Education Board explained that the CBBE issued its letter of objection without proper consultation with its members. An internal poll among an online group of 170 township board representatives showed minimal support for the opposition.

"We conducted a poll, and none of the 170 members cast a vote. Of the 170 members who did not participate, they expressed opposition and then circulated images of all the township boards nationwide to issue a statement. This was not our intention, so after consulting with the township boards, we decided to resign," the official said.

The Gangaw Township Education Board was the seventh to resign, with numerous others following suit. The official claimed that 22 township education boards in Magway Region, 31 of 33 in Sagaing Region, about seven in Mandalay capable of opening ground schools, and all boards in Yangon Region have since expressed confidence in Ja Htoi Pan and resigned from the CBBE.

Conversely, the Magway Interim Basic Education Representative Board (MIBERB), which includes the Gangaw Township Education Board, issued a statement on 13 December supporting the new minister. MIBERB highlighted Ja Htoi Pan's "strong conviction and consistent efforts toward establishing a federal democratic education system" and noted her educational qualifications at an international level.

Ja Htoi Pan holds a postgraduate degree in Social Anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a master's degree in Anthropology from Northern Illinois University in the United States. She has also served as Director of the School of Intensive English Programs (IEP) in Mai Ja Yang, Kachin State, and as Associate Director of the Kachinland Research Centre, bringing experience from ethnic education sectors.

Mizzima reached out to the Committee on Boards of Basic Education (CBBE) regarding the members' resignations, but the committee has yet to respond.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S JUNTA CLAIMS AUNG SAN SUU KYI IS IN "GOOD HEALTH" AMID SON'S CONCERN

Myanmar's military junta issued a statement today asserting that detained former State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is in "good health."

The statement was released shortly after her son, Kim Aris (also known as Htein Lin), expressed deep concern over his mother's well-being. Kim Aris told Reuters that he has been out of contact with his 80-year-old mother for years and has only received sporadic, second-hand information that she is suffering from heart, bone, and gum problems since the 2021 military coup.

Kim Aris stated he was worried that he might not even know if his mother passed away due to the information vacuum surrounding her detention.

The junta dismissed his remarks, claiming they were a "deliberate and timely attack intended to disrupt the upcoming elections."

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has been held incommunicado by the junta since the February 2021 coup. Following her arrest, she was sentenced to a total of 33 years in prison on 19 charges, a sentence that was later reduced to 27 years.

Despite frequent international reports of her poor health, the junta has consistently maintained that she is in good condition, a claim met with growing suspicion due to the lack of independent, verifiable evidence.

Campaigns demanding freedom for all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, have recently gained momentum, with Myanmar communities in Japan and South Korea writing an open letter to U.S. President Donald Trump calling for her release.



UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY KEEPS AMBASSADOR KYAW MOE TUN AS MYANMAR'S UN REPRESENTATIVE

The National Unity Government released a statement on 17 December regarding the adoption of the Credentials Committee Report by consensus at the 80th Session United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York on 12 December, allowing Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun to continue serving as Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

The text is as follows

Regarding the representation of Myanmar, the Credentials Committee report addresses the matter in paragraphs 8 and 10 and the Chair of the Committee noted that, having received two competing sets of credentials for Myanmar, the Committee proposed to defer its decision on the credentials of the representatives of Myanmar. The Committee adopted this proposal without a vote. A copy of the report of the Credentials Committee (A/80/547), as approved by the United Nations General Assembly, is attached herewith.

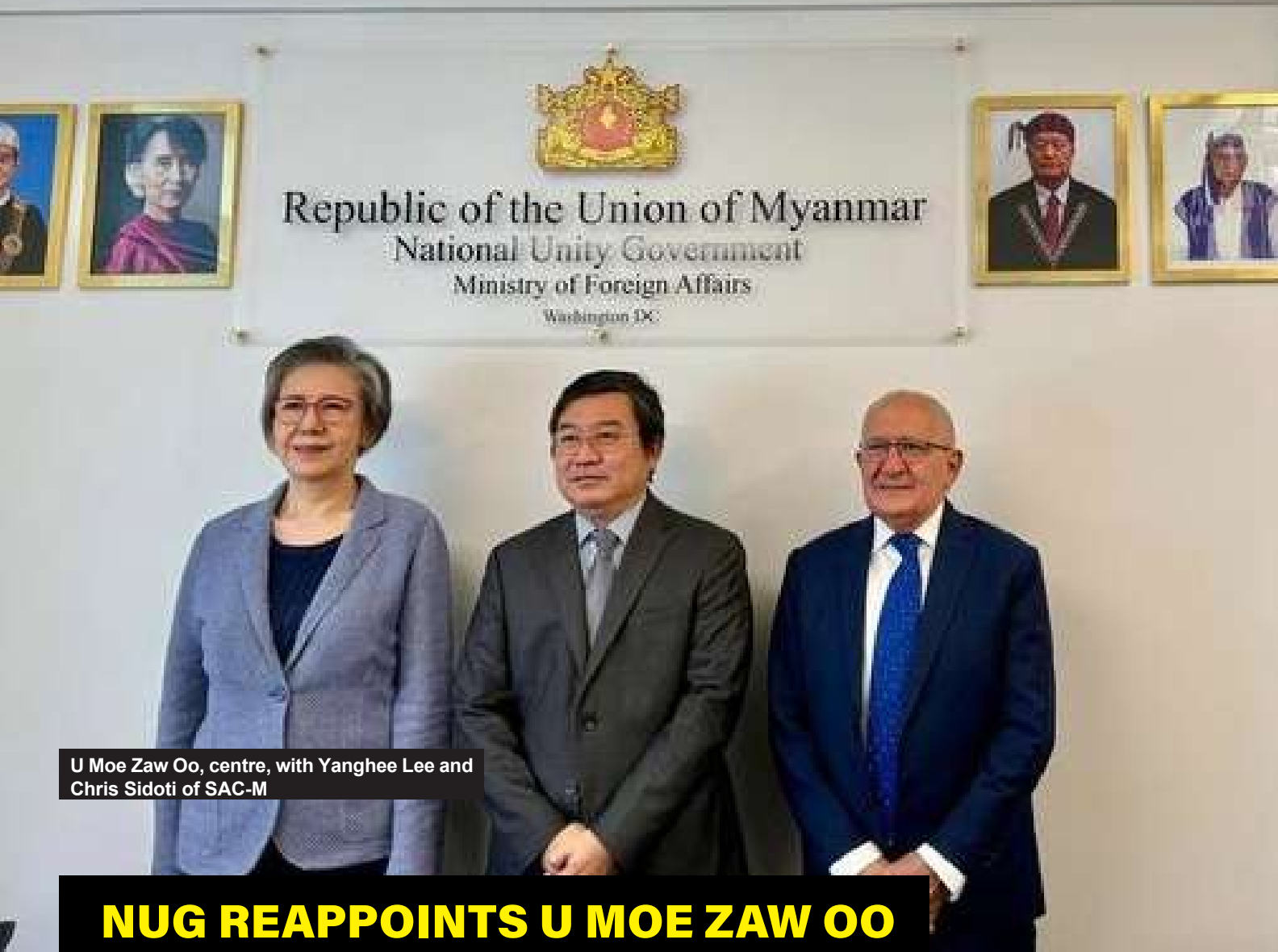
Consequently, Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations, and the Myanmar delegation continue to participate in, attend, and deliberate at the Plenary and Main Committees meetings of the 80th UNGA, meetings of the UN main bodies, and other related

High-level meetings, in consistent with the practice of preceding years.

Furthermore, the Permanent Representative remains steadfast in his commitment to raising, through the UN platforms, the voices of the people of Myanmar regarding the on-ground situation. He will continue to advocate the people's efforts and to get necessary action for putting an end to the military dictatorship and its unlawful military coup, and ensuring international justice and accountability for the terrorist military junta and its affiliates, who continue to perpetrate relentless atrocities against the suffering people of Myanmar.

During the 79th Session of the UNGA, the Permanent Representative delivered a total of 76 statements at the General Assembly Plenary Meetings and its Main Committees meetings, the UN Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, other high-level meetings and the UN Agencies Executive Board meetings.

During the Main Part of the 80th Session of the UNGA (from 9 September to 31 December 2025), a total of 48 statements have been delivered thus far, comprising 42 statements at Main Committee meetings, 4 at Plenary meetings, and 2 at other high-level meetings.



U Moe Zaw Oo, centre, with Yanghee Lee and Chris Sidoti of SAC-M

NUG REAPPOINTS U MOE ZAW OO AS FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISOR

The National Unity Government (NUG)'s Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced today that it has reappointed former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs U Moe Zaw Oo as an advisor to the ministry.

U Moe Zaw Oo was one of several ministers and deputy ministers who were not included in the NUG's restructured cabinet, which was announced by the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) on 8 December. That reorganization saw the government downsized from 17 to 12 ministries.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the reappointment of U Moe Zaw Oo as an advisor is

intended "to ensure that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can carry out its work more effectively."

U Moe Zaw Oo had served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs since the NUG's formation in April 2021. During his tenure, he was active in international diplomacy, engaging with figures like former UN Secretary-General and Vice-Chair of The Elders, Ban Ki-moon, to discuss the situation in Myanmar and the oppression carried out by the military commission.



FRENCH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PASSES LAW ON JUDICIAL COOPERATION WITH UN MYANMAR INVESTIGATION MECHANISM

The French National Assembly unanimously passed a law on Tuesday authorising approval of an international judicial cooperation agreement between France and the UN Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), according to a statement issued on 17 December.

The agreement, signed in Geneva on 12 June 2024, provides a legal framework for cooperation in the

collection and sharing of evidence related to serious international crimes committed in Myanmar.

During the debate, the rapporteur Mr. Laurent Mazaury said the text aims to balance support for civilians with measures condemning the military junta, including sanctions and an arms embargo.



Myanmar protestors. Photo: AFP

ASEAN NEWSROOMS BAND TOGETHER: DEMOCRACY UNDER SIEGE

RAPPLER.COM - MIZZIMA

MANILA, Philippines – Representatives of six ASEAN newsrooms met last November at the Rappler headquarters to discuss common nagging challenges that have affected operations and revenues in recent years.

Editors wearing multiple hats and managers also in charge of growth marketing, community growth, and digital product development huddled for one day to find common ground and possible solutions that newsrooms who want to survive the onslaught of AI and big tech need.

Indonesia's Tempo, Malaysia's Malaysiakini, Myanmar's Mizzima, Cambodia's Kiripost, Singapore's Straits Times, and Rappler were present during conversations on the rapidly changing media landscape, newsroom best practices, and possible areas of collaboration.

As a start, editors agreed to share their thoughts on the state of democracy in their respective countries — very timely, given elections starting December 28 called by the ruling Myanmar military junta that seized power in 2021. We are compiling these contributions

that mirror a spectrum of the state of democracy in select ASEAN countries.

Democracy, according to experts, is a constant work in progress, and not a fixed, static state. The experience of democracy across nations is diverse and complex, if not nuanced. We start this two-part series with contributions from Myanmar and Malaysia, and end with Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Life interrupted – Myanmar Gen Z struggle with threats post-coup

By SRI

Democracy has taken a turn for the worse under the Myanmar military that illegally grabbed power in February 2021 and the country's youth are suffering as a result. Local and international attention is focused on the military's planned elections set to start on December 28 that the generals hope will place a civilian fig leaf over military rule.

While ASEAN has largely dismissed the poll, and many critics claim it will be a "sham," Myanmar Gen Z civilians have other more pressing issues to deal with,

with little or no interest in voting. After all, their choice of government under Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi was axed in the wake of the coup, their elected leader jailed under trumped up charges.

Take the situation of 20-year-old Hnin, a pseudonym. She fled Myanmar to the border town of Mae Sot in Thailand. "I left my home because my mom was so afraid. After my older brother joined the resistance, the fear grew worse. People were saying it was the girls' turn for (forced) military conscription. My mom brought me to Thailand so I could study for the GED (General Educational Development). For the first month, I was sad and wanted to go home every day. Now I am focused on my studies for IT, but if my mom said it was safe to return, I would go back immediately."

For many in Myanmar, life under the military junta is dire. "When I was at home, we had no electricity, no internet, and only fear," Hnin said.

This latest "democratic move" by the junta means little to her. "I don't think about the election much, because how can we talk about voting when people are being forced to flee their homes? A real election can only happen when we are all safe, and my brother can come home."

Gen Z are arguably the most seriously affected by the coup and the unfolding military rollout of an election.

"For me, this is a life that forced me to sacrifice everything just to have a chance to finish high school and maybe go to university. This situation is unfair to my whole generation," Hnin said.

In contrast, 22-year-old Ko Thet, a pseudonym, has taken up arms in Kayin State to fight against the junta. "I wanted to be a football player, but I saw there was no opportunity under the military. So, I came to the jungle with my friends. Now I am a drone operator. We are learning new technology every day. The army is more brutal than before; they only think about how and when to kill us. We fight with our spirit and technology."

He is adamant his generation has no choice but to push back, after the earlier failed push against the generals for democracy in the 1980s and 1990s. "The state of Myanmar is at war. It's simple. We cannot go

back until they (the generals) are gone. My friends and I believe we can use our minds, our skills, and our new technology to keep fighting them as much as we can. Our generation has to be the one that ends this."

Ko Thet said that whatever the junta does, it is only for their own benefit. "We are not interested in their fake political process; we are focused on the revolution."

Twenty-seven-year-old Ma Thuzar, a pseudonym, said Gen Z have to choose between no work at home, staying with their family, and working abroad. She left Myanmar to work in a bar in the Thai seaside resort of Pattaya to then transition to work in a nail salon, which helps her scrape by.

Ma Thuzar has a computer engineering degree but could not find stable work in Myanmar after her father passed away, making her the main provider of her family. She followed friends to Thailand to find work, like millions of Myanmar migrants.

The Myanmar generals may have pulled the plug on a semblance of real democracy in the "Golden Land" but Gen Z have been the ones protesting and fighting back, their lives typically plunged into turmoil. Judging by the comments of the youth interviewed, they hold no store in the election.

As Ma Thuzar put it: "I told my family at home, 'Don't vote.' They told me they won't even walk past the polling station. Our focus is on survival, not generals' fake politics."

Mizzima is an independent Myanmar media organization covering Myanmar that was started 27 years ago in response to the military's crackdown on democracy and human rights. SRI is an independent journalist from Myanmar focused on investigative reporting on human rights and conflict reporting.

Malaysia: Youth activism holds promise for the future

By Zarrah Morden

Malaysia's current prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, began his political journey as a student activist.

This trajectory is emblematic of the country's political landscape, where student unions continue to be a cohesive and influential force, especially in

organized protests. What has changed most since Anwar's early days is the strategic and practical use of social media.

Student activists from Universiti Sabah Malaysia (UMS) have recently made headlines for organizing a series of protests over current events, ranging from campus access to water, the tragic death of a young girl who was allegedly bullied, to a state-wide corruption scandal.

Organized under Suara Mahasiswa UMS (UMS Student Voice), the students distribute information about planned rallies, statements, and related social media posts through a dedicated WhatsApp group for the press.

Their rallies are also live-streamed. After Malaysiakini exposed a mineral exploration license scandal implicating leaders in the Sabah state government, about 50 UMS student activists staged a march that was broadcast live on TikTok.

The live-stream was viewed by thousands of users, who left up to three million "hearts" as a symbol of support.

This digital enthusiasm carried over into more formal avenues of participation.

Ahead of the 17th Sabah election, a coalition of youth groups and civil society organizations held "Bah Bincang Kita" (Let's Discuss), a forum for discourse on policies.

"For the first time in Sabah, and perhaps in Malaysia, youth leaders from across political lines came together not to debate, but to dialogue, laugh, and dream together," co-organizer Noah Raj said in a press release afterwards.

Youth leaders from established political parties attended the forum to present their ideas and policies.

Noah said panelists grappled with issues that directly shape life in Sabah: the state's rights, cost of living pressures, anti-corruption reforms, resource management, road conditions, and inclusivity for persons with disabilities.

As a move to safeguard neutrality, the forum was financed exclusively by grassroots crowdfunding.

The reason for investing in the political education of youth voters is simple: those under 30 comprised



Protestors in Manila rage against corruption.
Photo: AFP

nearly a third (31%) of all Sabahans who were eligible to vote in the state election held on November 29.

According to political analyst Bridget Welsh, an initial look at election data showed that 41% of the youth voters in Karambunai gave the Islamist party PAS its very first seat in the state.

This is a callback to the “Green Wave” that swept the peninsula in the 2022 general election — robust participation from an eager youth electorate gave PAS the highest number of seats it had ever won in the Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) and the highest of any party in that poll.

Welsh said youths were also a decisive force in the Sabah election, helping deliver seven seats to Warisan — a relatively new opposition party. Warisan ultimately secured 25 seats, while the ruling coalition Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (Sabah People’s Coalition) won 29, even as several of its leaders faced corruption allegations.

The role of youths in Sabah hints at their potential power nationwide, but the direction of that influence is far from settled.

How this rising generation intends to use its voice remains to be seen — whether they create a Malaysia that is more inclusive or polarized; and whether they do it on the streets, online, or at the ballot box. (To be concluded) – Rappler.com

Malaysiakini was founded in 1999 to provide the nation with an independent voice in a repressive media landscape dominated by corporate and political interests as well as government censorship. It provided Malaysians with the unvarnished truth about significant political developments, corruption and abuse of power. Zarrah Marie Morden is an early-career reporter who mainly covers politics. She is passionate about human rights, the environment, and labour issues.

ASEAN newsrooms band together: Democracy under siege – Part 2

Rappler.com - Mizzima

MANILA, Philippines – The concluding part of the series of the state of democracy in select ASEAN countries covers Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Contributions from Kiripost, Tempo, and Rappler

reflect different stages of democracy: nascent, if not struggling in Cambodia, setbacks in Indonesia and the Philippines, with resilience still evident in the Philippines itself, despite fears of backsliding.

Cambodian youth uninterested in politics

Cambodia’s tightly-controlled political landscape is dominated by the ruling Cambodian People’s Party, which holds 120 of 125 parliamentary seats under Prime Minister Hun Manet.

Authorities have continued to pursue legal action against opposition figures, with hundreds of members and supporters facing charges, including treason and incitement, while the former opposition leader remains under house arrest alongside others on trial or living in exile.

Against this backdrop, youth engagement in politics remains notably low despite Cambodia’s large Gen Z population.

A 2022 Transparency International Cambodia survey found that 82% of 1,600 young respondents expressed little or no interest in politics, and 76% rarely or never discussed political issues.

Limited avenues for participation, gaps in political knowledge and broader structural constraints are cited as key barriers, prompting calls for a national youth policy and stronger youth representation in decision-making.

Kiripost Media, founded in 2021, is a leading independent media outlet in Cambodia with a focus on business and technology.

Indonesia: The end of the 1998 reform era

By Anton Septian

The awarding of the national hero title to Soeharto marks the official end of Indonesia’s reform era, which began in 1998. Twenty-seven years ago, students and the public forced Soeharto to step down after ruling in a corrupt and authoritarian way for 32 years.

On November 10, 2025, Indonesia’s National Heroes Day, President Prabowo Subianto — Soeharto’s former son-in-law — granted him the national hero

title. This decision appears to cleanse Soeharto's wrongdoings while rewriting historical narratives. A key question emerging from the public is: if Soeharto is now considered a hero, does that make the students and citizens who ousted him rebels?

Beyond that, many suspect this is part of Prabowo's effort to clear his own past. Prabowo, a former army officer, was dismissed for his proven involvement in the abduction of activists who opposed Soeharto in 1998. Obscuring the history of reform means concealing Prabowo's actions at the time.

Granting Soeharto the national hero title is not the only controversial decision Prabowo has introduced since taking office in 2024. His administration is rewriting Indonesia's national history, including the timeline of the 1998 reform movement. One example is the omission from "official history" of the mass rapes targeting ethnic Chinese women during the May 1998 riots.

Since assuming the presidency, Prabowo has given the military broad access to state affairs, including food security programs. This ranges from forest-clearing for food-estate projects to appointing army generals as the head of the State Logistics Agency (Bulog), which oversees rice supplies. He also appointed his former subordinate in the military as director general of Customs.

Prabowo has also established 150 new battalions in every city annually over five years. By 2029, more than 500 new battalions will exist, comprising around 500,000 soldiers. The deployment of additional troops across regions raises concerns about interference in practical politics, including mobilization during elections. More broadly, the military's expanding presence down to the local level threatens the principle of civilian supremacy upheld by the 1998 reform movement.

Indonesia's democracy faces further threats as Prabowo and several political elites plan to eliminate direct regional elections and replace them with elections by regional legislative councils (DPRD). Such a shift would diminish public participation and result in local leaders who are not chosen by the people. These leaders would be more inclined to serve political elites than their constituents. Moreover, elections in regional

councils tend to be transactional and prone to bribery for securing political party votes.

These setbacks had, in fact, begun under President Joko Widodo, who governed from 2014 to 2024. Widely known as Jokowi, he weakened Indonesia's democratic institutions by undermining bodies tasked with checking executive power. This was not done through drastic systemic change, but through executive aggrandizement.

By embracing most political parties, Jokowi co-opted the House of Representatives (DPR), making parliament uncritical and reducing it to a rubber stamp for government policies. Two major products of the 1998 reform era — the Constitutional Court (MK) and the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) — were also weakened. The government and parliament revised the Constitutional Court Law to exert control over constitutional judges, while amendments to the Corruption Eradication Commission Law stripped the anti-corruption agency of its independence.

On the surface, Indonesia still appears democratic. But in reality, its democratic pillars are nearly collapsed. By the end of Jokowi's presidency in 2024, Indonesia had already become a state characterized by autocratic legalism.

Thus, Prabowo — who secured Jokowi's support in the 2024 presidential election by choosing his son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as his running mate — rose to power with a democracy already battered and on the verge of collapse.

Tempo is an Indonesian news organization well-known for its in-depth and investigative reporting. It was first published in 1971 as a magazine. Banned in 1994 by the New Order regime, Tempo resumed publication in 1998 after Soeharto stepped down. Anton Septian is Tempo's Executive Editor.

The ironies of Philippine democracy

By Chay F. Hofileña

After surviving the turbulent, authoritarian-pretending-to-be-democratic years of Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines was bracing for what was anticipated as possibly worse years under the son of a former dictator, Ferdinand E. Marcos.

The return of a Marcos to power — made possible by an unlikely alliance of Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte, then-mayor of Davao City and daughter of the man who initiated a brutal “war against drugs,” dashed hopes of the opposition led by then-independent candidate Leni Robredo.

Despite having ushered in what would be called an impressive “Pink” wave that manifested in huge crowds that attended rallies in 2022 in the lead up to the presidential elections, Robredo got only close to 28% of votes cast. Her opponent Marcos won by a landslide with 31.6 million votes (equivalent to over 58% of those who voted). Robredo got less than half, or over 15 million.

Not a few of the Filipino youth who actively campaigned for her wept after her heart-breaking loss. They had to be reminded that crowd turnouts in rallies alone do not win elections. Many were of the belief that a massive disinformation network boosted and sealed Marcos’ victory.

Voter turnout was at a high 83%, indicative of high interest in the first presidential elections held since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approaching mid-terms, the Marcos-Duterte alliance of convenience quickly tumbled towards the inevitable: an ugly and bitter rupture after allegations of misspent confidential funds by Sara Duterte, the arrest and hauling to the International Criminal Court in The Hague of her father Rodrigo for alleged crimes against humanity, and a failed attempt to impeach her. The Supreme Court played a pivotal role in this controversial decision that ruled the congressional impeachment moves to be unconstitutional.

Mid-term elections in May 2025 were a dismal failure for the Marcos administration which secured only six of the 12 Senate seats that were up for grabs. The results also signaled a significantly weakened presidency unable to muster all the political muscle needed to lift administration candidates to victory.

By the looks of it, democracy is vibrant and very much alive in the Philippines.

Why, no less than the President made public, during his State of the Nation Address in July 2025, a list of the nation’s top contractors who bagged flood control

contracts. He dared investigative journalists to do their own digging, which resulted in numerous exposés on billions of pesos lost to corruption. Both houses of Congress held hearings that revealed never-before-heard-of amounts of public funds being brazenly and shamelessly pocketed by contractors closely tied to politicians.

The Filipino citizenry rose up in anger, attending rallies that denounced manipulation of the national budget that facilitated incredible levels of corruption. Public funds were devoured by commissions that easily reached millions of pesos, leaving only half of the intended budget for projects. This produced substandard flood control infrastructure that resulted in a high number of deaths during disasters.

While democracy has permitted a cacophony of voices to be heard and allowed the different branches of government to operate with some semblance of independence — possibly the welcome consequence, too, of a weak president — it has also stymied economic growth exacerbated by governance issues.

For 2025, despite being weighed down by corruption scandals, the country is still projected by optimists to be among the fastest growing in ASEAN. Pro-democracy forces hope the forecast will prove to be true as a return to power of another Duterte in the 2028 presidential elections could see an ugly repeat of history, with lessons never taken to heart. – Rappler.com

Rappler was formally launched in January 2012, evolving from a Facebook page MovePH in 2011. It stands on three pillars — journalism, community, and technology — and has as its CEO Nobel Laureate Maria Ressa. Chay F. Hofileña, one of Rappler’s founders, is Investigative Editor and Head of Training.



Photo: AFP

TRUMP IMPOSES FULL TRAVEL BANS ON SEVEN MORE COUNTRIES, PALESTINIANS

President Donald Trump on Tuesday expanded a US travel ban by barring nationals of seven more countries including Syria, as well as Palestinian Authority passport holders, from entering the United States.

Trump, who has long campaigned to restrict immigration and has spoken in increasingly strident terms, moved to ban foreigners who "intend to threaten" Americans, the White House said.

He also wants to prevent foreigners in the United States who would "undermine or destabilize its culture, government, institutions or founding principles," a White House proclamation said.

Trump's move comes days after two US troops and a civilian were killed in Syria, which Trump has moved to rehabilitate internationally since the fall of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad.

Syrian authorities said the perpetrator was a member of the security forces who was due to be dismissed for "extremist Islamist ideas."

The Trump administration had already informally barred travel from Palestinian Authority passport holders as it acts in solidarity with Israel against the recognition of a Palestinian state by other leading Western countries including France and Britain.

Other countries newly subjected to the full travel ban came from some of Africa's poorest countries -- Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone and South Sudan -- as well as Laos in southeast Asia.

In a series of new actions, the White House said that Trump was also imposing partial travel restrictions on citizens of other African countries including the most populous, Nigeria, as well as Black-majority Caribbean nations.

Ramping up anti-immigrant tone

Trump in recent weeks has used increasingly loaded languages in denouncing African-origin immigrants.

At a rally last week he said that the United States was only taking people from "shithole countries" and instead should seek immigrants from Norway and Sweden.

He also recently described Somalis as "garbage" following a scandal in which Somali Americans allegedly bilked the government out of money for fictitious contracts in Minnesota.

Trump had already banned the entry of Somalis. Other countries remaining on the full travel ban are Afghanistan, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Myanmar, Sudan, and Yemen.

Trump last month made the ban even more sweeping against Afghans, severing a program that helped bring in Afghans who had fought alongside the United States against the Taliban, after an Afghan veteran who appeared to have post-traumatic stress shot two National Guards troops deployed by Trump in Washington.

The countries newly subject to partial restrictions, besides Nigeria, are Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Dominica, Gabon, The Gambia, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Mauritania, Senegal, Tanzania, Tonga, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Angola, Senegal and Zambia have all been prominent US partners in Africa, with former president Joe Biden hailing the three for their commitment to democracy.

In the proclamation, the White House alleged high crime rates from some countries on the blacklist and problems with routine record-keeping for passports.

The White House acknowledged "significant progress" by one initially targeted country, Turkmenistan.

The Central Asian country's nations will once again be able to secure US visas, but only as non-immigrants.

AFP



Photo: AFP

19 EU COUNTRIES CALL ON EU TO FUND 'RETURN HUBS'

After the European Union significantly tightened its immigration policy earlier this month, 19 EU countries on 17 December urged the European Commission to finance "return hubs" outside the bloc for failed asylum-seekers.

Interior ministers from the 27-member bloc greenlighted a package of measures on December 8 that include the opening of return hubs and harsher penalties for migrants who refuse to leave European territory.

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Sweden called on the Commission to make the changes possible.

"Specifically, the EU countries want ... the Commission to help ensure, going forward, that the financing of, among other things, return centres can be done using EU funds," the Danish immigration ministry said in a statement, with the signed letter sent to the Commission attached.

The European Parliament must still vote on the measures.

Denmark has made illegal immigration one of its main battlehorses during its six-month stint at the helm of the EU presidency, which ends at the end of the month.

"The work is not done, and I'm glad that there are now 19 countries that stand behind a letter calling on the EU system to provide diplomatic and economic help to ensure that the new and innovative solutions -- such as return centres -- will become a reality," Danish Immigration Minister Rasmus Stoklund said in a statement.

"For years, Denmark has worked hard to persuade other European countries of Danish ideas such as moving the processing of asylum applications outside Europe, as well as other ideas involving cooperation with third countries outside the EU," the ministry added.

"The group of EU countries that support such new and innovative solutions has steadily expanded," it said.

Activists working with migrants have meanwhile denounced the measures, saying they violate migrants' human rights and risk pushing them into danger.

AFP



NO SPACE FOR DICTATORS

"No one can stop you from claiming the power of your own mind, but only you can claim it." This statement from Rick Hanson, a clinical psychologist, renowned author and long-time, accomplished meditator, encapsulates the essence of personal agency, and frames an exploration of resilience in the face of oppression.

Rick, who first spoke Insight Myanmar in 2021, appears today alongside Brang Nan, a storyteller and witness of Myanmar's struggle for democracy, who joins from within Myanmar. Their dialogue delves deep into the challenges of living under military oppression, survivor guilt, isolation, trauma, and the mental and emotional toll felt on individuals and communities. Through a mixture of personal accounts, reflections on Buddhist teachings and psychological insights, the conversation paints a vivid picture of the pursuit of inner peace amid turmoil.

Rick begins the conversation by expressing his solidarity with the people of Myanmar, articulating his deep, moral outrage over the military's treatment of its citizens, and emphasizing the urgency and gravity of taking on this conversation. He notes that he has a particularly powerful connection to the country through his practice of meditation; many of his teachers trained in Myanmar and he has close ties to monastics who have fled the country due to persecution.

Brang Nan offers the raw and poignant perspective of someone navigating the dangers of life under a military dictatorship. His recounting of the years following the 2021 coup highlights the collective experience of a

people grappling with grief, fear, and the erosion of trust. He describes the initial unity of the protests as an almost euphoric "high," only to be followed by the crushing reality of isolation and withdrawal as the risks of continuing to speak out became insurmountable due to safety concerns. Despite the knowledge that most citizens are on the same side, fear creates barriers, preventing open conversations and fostering a profound sense of loneliness.

Another central theme that emerges in this dialog is survivor guilt—a heavy burden for those who live through continued violence and oppression while witnessing the suffering and deaths of others. Brang Nan describes his grief over personal losses, including the death of loved ones, while also reflecting on what he sees as the symbolic death of the nation's collective hopes and dreams. He explains how these profound losses create a mental and emotional burden that makes it difficult to fully experience moments of joy, resulting in a kind of collectively shared depression. For Brang Nan, each small instance of happiness he has experienced ultimately becomes overshadowed by the larger context of suffering, creating an internal conflict that results in feelings of guilt. This pervasive tension, he notes, inhibits not only individual healing but also the ability to engage in meaningful relationships or find solace in shared experiences. Moreover, the emotional weight of carrying all this compounds over time, leaving many, including himself, trapped in cycles of deepening numbness and detachment. He articulates an internal conflict about grieving for oneself when surrounded by far greater suffering of others, as well as holding a sense of responsibility to stay engaged, and doing what one can for the country. All of this hinders one's ability to process emotions fully. Whether blocking out joy or sorrow, this contributes to a numbing effect, further complicating efforts to heal.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/11/30/episode-440-no-space-for-dictators>



Photo: Mizzima

MYANMAR NAVY RETURNS FROM ASEAN-US MARITIME EXERCISE IN INDONESIA

The return of the Myanmar Navy frigate, UMS Kyansitta, marks the end on its participation in the 2nd ASEAN-US Maritime Exercise (AUMX), hosted by Indonesia from 9-13 December. The exercise is one of the region's largest multilateral training events involving Southeast Asian navies and the United States.

According to the Myanmar junta-controlled Global New Light of Myanmar, the frigate, under the command of Captain Khun Aung Kyaw, returned to Yangon after the completion of the exercises held off Batam, Indonesia.

The ship departed Yangon on 3 December, arriving in Indonesia for the opening ceremony before participating in a range of coordinated sea and shore-based activities. These included maritime manoeuvring drills, formation sailing, communication exercises, damage control training, search-and-rescue simulations, and offshore medical first aid.

Myanmar personnel also took part in table-top exercises and subject-matter exchanges with regional counterparts.

Naval vessels from Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei and the United States joined the exercise. Observers from Timor-Leste, Cambodia, and Laos attended.

Junta-controlled media framed the Myanmar Navy's participation as evidence of "successful cooperation" with regional partners at a time when Myanmar's junta remains internationally isolated following the 2021 coup.

Although the US continues to maintain a ban on military cooperation with the Myanmar military, the AUMX drills are an ASEAN-hosted multilateral exercise, skirting US legal definitions of "direct military cooperation," thus not in violation of US law or policy.

Myanmar's navy regularly uses ASEAN-hosted events to sustain limited international engagement, even as broader defence ties with the United States and Europe remain frozen.



Election billboard. Photo: AFP

PUBLIC REJECTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA OF JUNTA'S 'SHAM' ELECTION

Election-related discussions have become one of the most visible topics on Myanmar social media last week. Users across Facebook, Telegram and X are actively rejecting the military's "sham" election, with many posts calling for a boycott and warning people not to participate.

The issue gained momentum on social media after recent protests, arrests and increased security measures in major cities.

Public sentiment online is largely negative and distrustful. Many users say the election lacks legitimacy and is taking place amid ongoing conflict, arrests and airstrikes. Others express fear that voter registration and election activities could be used to monitor or target civilians. Because there is no clear public information from authorities, speculation and anxiety continue to grow online.

Common user-style comments include:

"This is not an election. It's just a show."

"How can there be voting when people are being arrested every day?"

"Registering means giving them your data."

"No safety, no freedom, no real choice."

Some users also link the election issue to broader human rights concerns, pointing out that recent incidents including arrests, internet disruptions and airstrikes on civilian areas – including massacres of civilians – show the environment is not suitable for a nationwide vote.

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.