

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**The Silent War We Wage With Words —
And the Woman Who Refused to Fight It**

ELECTION UPDATE

● **Outrage over deadly hospital massacre**

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DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

FALLING INTO THE MORAL ABYSS

On 10 December, about two weeks before the Myanmar junta's election, a military jet dropped bombs on Mrauk-U General Hospital in Rakhine State, a facility that should have been a haven for the sick and wounded. Civilians who were patients, caregivers and medical staff were inside that hospital not because they were combatants but because they needed medical care - yet the bombs landed directly on wards and recovery areas, reducing the building to rubble and killing more than 35 people and injuring dozens more.

The stark horror of this attack is impossible to overstate. Hospitals are sacrosanct under international humanitarian law precisely because they shelter those least capable of protecting themselves - the injured, the elderly, children, and the chronically ill. That a military - any military - would use a jet to strike such a place reveals a chilling disregard for human life. Witnesses and aid workers at the scene found bodies and wounded survivors among the ruins of what had been a functioning healthcare facility.

The timing of the attack only deepens its cruelty. The junta has scheduled a series of elections beginning on 28 December, and it is keen to present these polls as a return to some form of legitimacy after years of international condemnation following the 2021 coup. Yet committing an atrocity against civilians while proclaiming a desire for democratic normalcy is not just hypocritical - it is self-defeating. Bombing a hospital in the name of "security" or territorial control does nothing to win hearts and minds - it instead amplifies fear, resentment and despair among ordinary people who have already endured years of conflict and repression.

While the junta may hope that controlling territory and crushing resistance ahead of the vote will manufacture a veneer of stability, its decision to target a civilian hospital reveals the hollowness of that strategy. Killing patients in their beds does not demonstrate strength - it exposes weakness. It exposes a regime so desperate to cling to power that it resorts to slaughtering its own people even as it tries to convince the world that it deserves recognition, investment, and diplomatic legitimacy.

The global reaction to this attack has been one of outrage and alarm. The UN, National Unity Government, human rights groups and foreign governments have condemned the strike as a war crime. The ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) explicitly called the attack a violation of international humanitarian law and urged regional and international actors to press the junta to halt attacks on civilians and ensure accountability.

This massacre at Mrauk-U underscores the bitter reality facing Myanmar. The promised elections cannot mask the ongoing violence that defines daily life for millions of civilians. True legitimacy cannot be built on a foundation of blood and rubble. The junta's choice to bomb a hospital - a place of healing - in the twilight of 2025 illustrates a tragic prioritization of power over people, rhetoric over redemption, and brutality over basic humanity. It is not merely a political miscalculation - it is a moral abyss.

EDITORIAL

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

Managing Editor
Thaw Zin Tun

Network Engineer
Wai Min Han

Video and Graphics Editor
Wai Yan Shein Zaw

General Manager
No No Lin

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

Contact email:
sm@mizzima.com

Phone/Signal/WhatsApp
+420 608 616688

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Cover photo of protestor holding Aung San Suu Kyi photo by AFP



Fears have been voiced about the health of Aung San Suu Kyi who is approaching her fifth year of imprisonment under trumped up charges. Stock photo: AFP

THE SILENT WAR WE WAGE WITH WORDS — AND THE WOMAN WHO REFUSED TO FIGHT IT

Alan Clements

There are moments when an ancient teaching re-enters your life with the searing force of revelation. For me, it struck in the form of a Hebrew phrase I had merely brushed against years ago: Lashon Harah - "evil speech." A simple translation, yes, but a definition so thin it barely scratches the true depth of its danger.

Lashon Harah is not merely gossip or slander. It is the precise, ancient name for the dark art of wounding with words. It is speaking ill of another human being even when the details are true—and especially, perhaps more dangerously, when they are false, distorted, or whispered without any regard for accuracy. It is the weaponization of language. It is language forged into a blade — the subtle, everyday militarization of the tongue.

When this teaching resurfaced recently, it struck me with unflinching, X-ray clarity. Because Lashon Harah is not an ancient moral relic. It is the pulsing, psy-

chic operating frequency of our global moment—the sinister hum beneath domestic and international media, political discourse, and the algorithmic fever we call social media. We live in an atmosphere saturated with the casual willingness to vilify, distort, humiliate, or annihilate another human being's dignity for entertainment, outrage clicks, partisan gratification, or the adrenaline of belonging to a tribe that requires an enemy. Today, truth itself is used as a weapon. And lies—polished, repeated, amplified at industrial scale—travel with the speed and authority of scripture. This is not a minor moral lapse. It is an existential threat to human sanity.

As someone who has spent decades documenting dictatorship, propaganda, and the psychology of authoritarianism, I can say this without hesitation: one of the most dangerous forces on Earth today is not only the violence of weapons, but the violence of words. Lashon Harah is not metaphorical. It is structural. It is the architecture of modern warfare—the front line of consciousness itself.



Photo: AFP

This understanding grew sharper for me when someone recently asked about the most defining quality of my long relationship with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's imprisoned elected leader and Nobel Peace Laureate. The question transported me back nearly three decades, to 1995–96, when Aung San Suu Kyi and I sat together in her home in Yangon, freshly released from her first six years of detention, to create *The Voice of Hope*, a book of dialogues about democracy, dignity, fearlessness, and the spiritual architecture of freedom. Somewhere in the midst of those conversations, we discovered something that startled us both: we shared the same meditation teacher—the late Buddhist master Sayadaw U Pandita.

When I asked her about her most memorable teaching from him, she did not hesitate. She answered with a clarity that felt carved from her core: Right speech. Non-vilification. Non-demonization. Even of the so-called enemy.

Then she said something I have never forgotten—something that shaped her life and reshaped mine: “This revolution must be a revolution of conscience. We cannot mirror the anger or the violence of the oppressor.”

She went on to describe Sayadaw U Pandita's teaching on skillful speech with a precision that revealed its depth. Know your intention before you speak, he taught her; words without beneficial intention are daggers in the shadows. Feel your heart—does your language uplift or denigrate? Speak only when the moment is right—some truths must wait; others must remain unspoken. Let language be energy, not aggression or coercion—spacious, resonant like fine music. Place yourself inside the heart of the one you speak about—will your words awaken them or further entrap them? And above all, he insisted, release all attachment to outcome. Speak freely, unconditionally, non-transac-

tionally—only from the purity of motivation to uplift — never to punish, never to injure.

Then she said something so quiet it felt consecrated: “This is why our Dhamma embodies *ahimsa*—harmlessness—a revolution of reconciliation, with ourselves and especially with our so-called enemy.” In that moment, I understood that Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership was not merely political. It was spiritual engineering, a form of moral design. Speech for her was not rhetoric; it was conscience made audible, a living extension of her practice.

And it was through that lens that the meaning of *Lashon Harah* crystallized for me in a new way. If the world had understood the moral genius of her commitment to right speech, it would have understood the magnitude of what she and her colleagues were attempting: a revolution of the spirit, as they called it, in how human beings treat one another at the most elemental level—as relational creatures, grasping the power of the human voice—speech itself as the catalyst for revolutionary change.

This understanding returned to me while completing my new book, *Politics of the Heart: Nonviolence in an Age of Atrocity*. When I write about ending war, I am not speaking only of artillery or airstrikes or the machinery of death. I am speaking of the interior war that precedes every outer one—the daily microaggressions of contempt, rumor, cruelty, and dehumanization that normalize atrocity long before the first bomb falls. A culture that permits *Lashon Harah* will eventually permit physical violence. One is rehearsal for the other—the warm-up act for catastrophe.

Which brings me—inevitably, painfully—back to Aung San Suu Kyi. For more than 35 years, I have witnessed her devotion to what she calls the Revolution of the Spirit—a revolution rooted in conscience, compass-

ion, and the refusal to dehumanize even one's so-called enemies. She spoke of national reconciliation not as a political slogan but as a moral necessity. Even after decades of imprisonment, harassment, demonization, and incalculable personal sacrifice, she refused to engage in hate speech. She refused to vilify the generals who held her captive. She critiqued systems, not souls; policies, not persons; behavior, not humanity. This discipline—this spiritual restraint—is almost incomprehensible in the modern world. It defies the reflex of retaliation. Yet it is precisely the essence of nonviolence.

And how did the world respond? With Lashon Harah on a global scale. With distortions, fabrications, vilifications—much of it propagated by people and institutions that claim to uphold human rights and decency. She became the target of a moral feeding frenzy, devoured by the very rhetoric she refused to wield. A woman who spent her life humanizing the oppressed was suddenly dehumanized by those who had once praised her. Facts were twisted. Narratives were invented. Her legacy was shattered, not by reason, but by the untrained violence of speech.

I watched this with heartbreak but not surprise. Because a culture addicted to Lashon Harah will always turn its knives on those who refuse to participate in its cruelty. Aung San Suu Kyi's commitment to national reconciliation—the insistence that even perpetrators of harm must one day be welcomed into a future without hatred—was too radical for a world addicted to retribution. She demanded a politics beyond vengeance. And in doing so, she revealed the moral poverty of a global culture that worships punishment more than peace.

Her example matters now more than ever. If we want peace—real peace—we must end the war we wage with words. If we want nonviolence, it must begin with our speech. If we want reconciliation, we must stop the daily assassination of human dignity with ru-

mor, contempt, and performative outrage.

Lashon Harah is the unconscious pandemic of our age: the normalization of cruelty, the erosion of empathy, the collapse of conscience. The antidote is not silence but intentional, evolutionary speech—language rooted in clarity, compassion, truthfulness, and the refusal to diminish another's humanity, even when we oppose them. Even when they oppose us. Even when it breaks our heart to practice such restraint.

Aung San Suu Kyi modeled this at a staggering personal cost. Her life is a reminder that the first act of liberation begins with the tongue—with the courage to speak, and to refrain from speaking, from the heart.

Ending war begins with ending Lashon Harah. The revolution of the spirit begins with the refusal to weaponize language. Human dignity depends on whether we choose to injure with our words—or to redeem, restore, and rehumanize one another through them.

About the Author

Alan Clements is an author, speaker, and former Buddhist monk who has spent four decades documenting the struggle for freedom in Myanmar and the psychological architecture of dictatorship. His latest book, "Politics of the Heart: Nonviolence in an Age of Atrocity," weaves memoir, Dharma, political insight, and psychedelic activism into a bold manifesto for ending war—both inner and outer.

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



Kachin fighters. Photo: AFP

KACHIN INDEPENDENCE ARMY EXPANDS ITS INFLUENCE

The Kachin Independence Army has played a central role in shaping Myanmar's armed resistance since the early months following the 2021 military coup, providing military training and weapons to newly formed revolutionary forces from Myanmar's heartland, including Sagaing Region. As peaceful protesters took up arms, many were trained in KIA-controlled areas before returning to their home regions to fight the junta.

In several cases, when these resistance fighters returned to their respective areas, the KIA reportedly deployed its own soldiers and officials to help establish formal military structures, effectively transforming loosely organized resistance groups into more disciplined regiments, according to resistance sources.

Following the seizure of Banmauk town in Sagaing Region, the KIA's military activities in upper Sagaing have become increasingly significant. Local media outlet The Voice of Shan-Ni reported that fierce clashes have erupted in areas controlled by the Shan-Ni National Army, as joint forces of the KIA and People's Defense Forces launched offensives. At least

seven villages in SNA-controlled areas have reportedly experienced near-daily fighting during the second week of December. The area had seen relative calm for several months before clashes resumed. However, these developments have received limited coverage from independent national media.

Currently, KIA and allied PDF forces are reported to control Banmauk, Pinlebu, and Indaw townships, along with several surrounding sub-townships in upper Sagaing. Heavy fighting is also ongoing in Homalin, Katha, Phaungpyin, Htigyaing, and Kawlin townships, indicating a widening scope of operations across the region.

Analysts note that Sagaing Region's vast geography offers strategic opportunities. If the KIA were to gain influence in Homalin Township, it would strengthen its presence in northwestern Sagaing. Control or influence in Katha Township could further extend KIA reach into northeastern Sagaing. Such developments would significantly alter the balance of power in the region.

Khun Sai, a prominent politician, told pro-junta outlet CNI News Agency that the KIA's ambitions may

extend beyond Sagaing. He suggested the group could seek to expand its influence toward Chin and Rakhine State, not only for cross-border trade but also to gain access to maritime routes in western Myanmar. "Kachin is landlocked, like Shan State," he said. "If it can control Sagaing, it gains access to India. That is why it may not pause after gaining Sagaing. It does not necessarily mean capturing territory, but building relationships with other forces and influencing them. The KIA is strong in diplomacy, and this should be taken as a model for resistance forces."

Sagaing Region also hosts two major India-Myanmar border crossings: the Tamu-Moreh and Pangsau passes. Resistance sources say Kuki resistance forces and the Tamu PDF are attempting to control the Tamu-Moreh crossing with logistical support from the KIA. At the Pangsau Pass, Naga armed groups such as NSCN-K/YA and NSCN-K/AM are reportedly seeking control, again with KIA support in the form of weapons and training.

The KIA's longstanding relationship with the Arakan Army further underscores its expanding influence. The AA was originally trained and supported by the



Arakan Army fighters. Photo: AA

KIA in Kachin State, and ties between the two groups remain strong. Meanwhile, some international media outlets have reported on alleged agreements between India and the KIA regarding rare earth extraction in northeastern Kachin State. The KIA spokesperson has denied these claims in comments to local media.

Political and military analysts say developments in Sagaing Region are being closely watched, as expanded KIA influence there could significantly elevate its military and political standing across western and northwestern Myanmar.

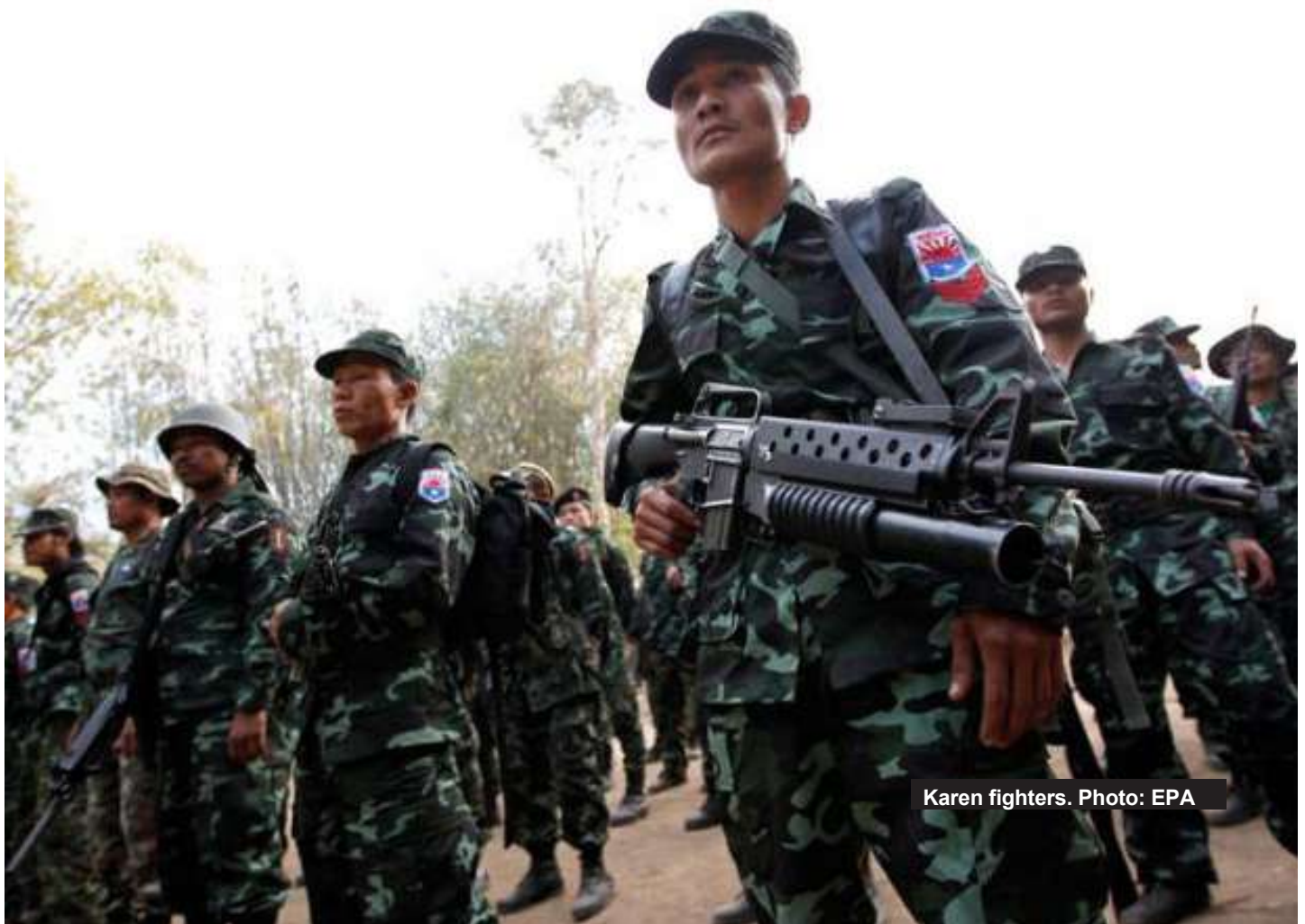
The battle for Kyaukphyu intensifies closer to town

Clashes between Myanmar junta forces and the Arakan Army continued to intensify in Kyaukphyu Township, Rakhine State, with fighting moving closer to the town in early December, according to local residents and frontline sources.

Residents in Kyaukphyu town said they have been hearing frequent gunfire and artillery explosions, particularly at night. A local woman told Narinjara that the sounds of fighting have become noticeably closer since the beginning of the month. "We can hear it clearly, especially at night. Last night and this morning on December 7, machine-gun fire and artillery were very near, which we were not used to hearing before," she said. "All residents are afraid and do not know where to flee if there is an emergency."

Frontline sources said junta troops have suffered significant losses during recent fighting, with casualties reportedly left on the battlefield due to the intensity of the clashes. Battles have taken place in and around Minkonetaing, Yenantaung, Thinechaung, and Zinechaung villages, areas along key approaches to Kyaukphyu town.

"The fighting has intensified," a frontline source said. "AA forces attacked junta troops from both sides. The bodies of junta soldiers are scattered, and they cannot



Karen fighters. Photo: EPA

retrieve them. The smell is very bad. Reinforcements were also intercepted. When junta troops advanced, they were attacked again, resulting in many deaths. The scale of the fighting is much greater than in previous battles, and clashes remain fierce."

As the fighting escalates, large numbers of civilians have been forced to flee their homes, further overcrowding displacement sites. According to a volunteer from the Rammaland charity organization, tens of thousands of villagers have been displaced, and more than 7,000 internally displaced persons are now in urgent need of daily food assistance.

"We used to provide about three kilograms of rice per person per week," the official said. "Now it has become extremely difficult to cover the shortfall."

Meanwhile, as fighting draws closer to Kyaukphyu town, residents with the means to do so are attempting to flee to Yangon by air, pushing flight prices sharply higher. A local resident said airfare prices have more than doubled in December. "The price has risen to two million kyats this month," the resident said. "Many people want to leave for Yangon, and if you want to go quickly, you have to pay two million."

With clashes ongoing and humanitarian needs increasing, residents fear further escalation as fighting approaches the town.

Conflict intensifies in Karen State

Myanmar junta forces have been attempting for nearly four months to retake Phapon (Hpapon) town, which is under the control of the Karen National Union's No. (5) Brigade, according to local resistance sources.

Columns of junta troops have been advancing toward the area along the Kamamaung-Phapon road, supported by airstrikes, the spokesperson for the KNU No. (5) Brigade said. The troops are reportedly using Wadu village as a staging point in their push toward Phapon.

Lt. Col. Saw Kaledoe, an officer with the No. (5) Brigade, told Mizzima that junta forces have been

attempting to advance "every couple of days" but have so far failed to achieve their objective. He added that the junta columns were accompanied by an armed group that split from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). However, Mizzima said it has been unable to independently verify this claim.

Despite repeated offensives, the KNU maintains control of Phapon town and has captured at least five junta regiments along the Kamamaung-Phapon road. The junta did manage to recapture a military post in Kadaingti village in June. Kadaingti is located approximately 36 miles from Phapon and 21 miles from Kamamaung, according to local sources.

Meanwhile, fighting has intensified in areas controlled by the KNU's No. (6) Brigade, particularly following a KNU raid on an online scam center in Minlatpan village. Since the raid, junta forces have launched a heavy offensive in the area, attempting to gain control of the Phalu-Walay road with the use of airstrikes and artillery fire.

Joint resistance forces, including the KNU and allied People's Defense Forces (PDFs), have been defending against the offensive in at least four villages, local media reported. Junta columns are reportedly pushing toward Minlatpan village, where resistance forces seized evidence related to online fraud operations, including technological equipment and buildings.

A village administration member told the Karen Information Center (KIC) that widespread destruction has occurred in Phalu, Phalulay, Minlatpan, and Ingyinmyaing villages. "Many homes and compounds, including buildings used for online scam operations, have been destroyed. Artillery, drones, and Y-12 aircraft are firing constantly," the official said.

According to local sources, the fiercest fighting is currently taking place near Ingyinmyaing village monastery and in areas close to Minlatpan village, as junta forces continue their attempts to regain territory in Karen State.



MYANMAR JUNTA PUSHES AHEAD WITH ONE-SIDED ELECTIONS AMID CONFLICT AND REPRESSION, SAYS ICG

Myanmar's military junta is preparing to hold national elections beginning 28 December despite intensifying armed conflict, political repression and widespread public opposition, the International Crisis Group (ICG) said in a new analysis released on 9 December.

The polls, the first since the military overthrew the elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government in February 2021, lack credibility and appear aimed primarily at restoring a constitutional façade of legitimacy, according to ICG senior adviser Richard Horsey.

NLD top leaders, Aung San Suu Kyi and Win Myint, remain imprisoned and incommunicado. The party itself was dissolved by the junta for refusing to register with what it considers an illegitimate regime.

Most major parties that contested the 2020 elections have met the same fate. This has left the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) positioned to dominate upcoming polls.

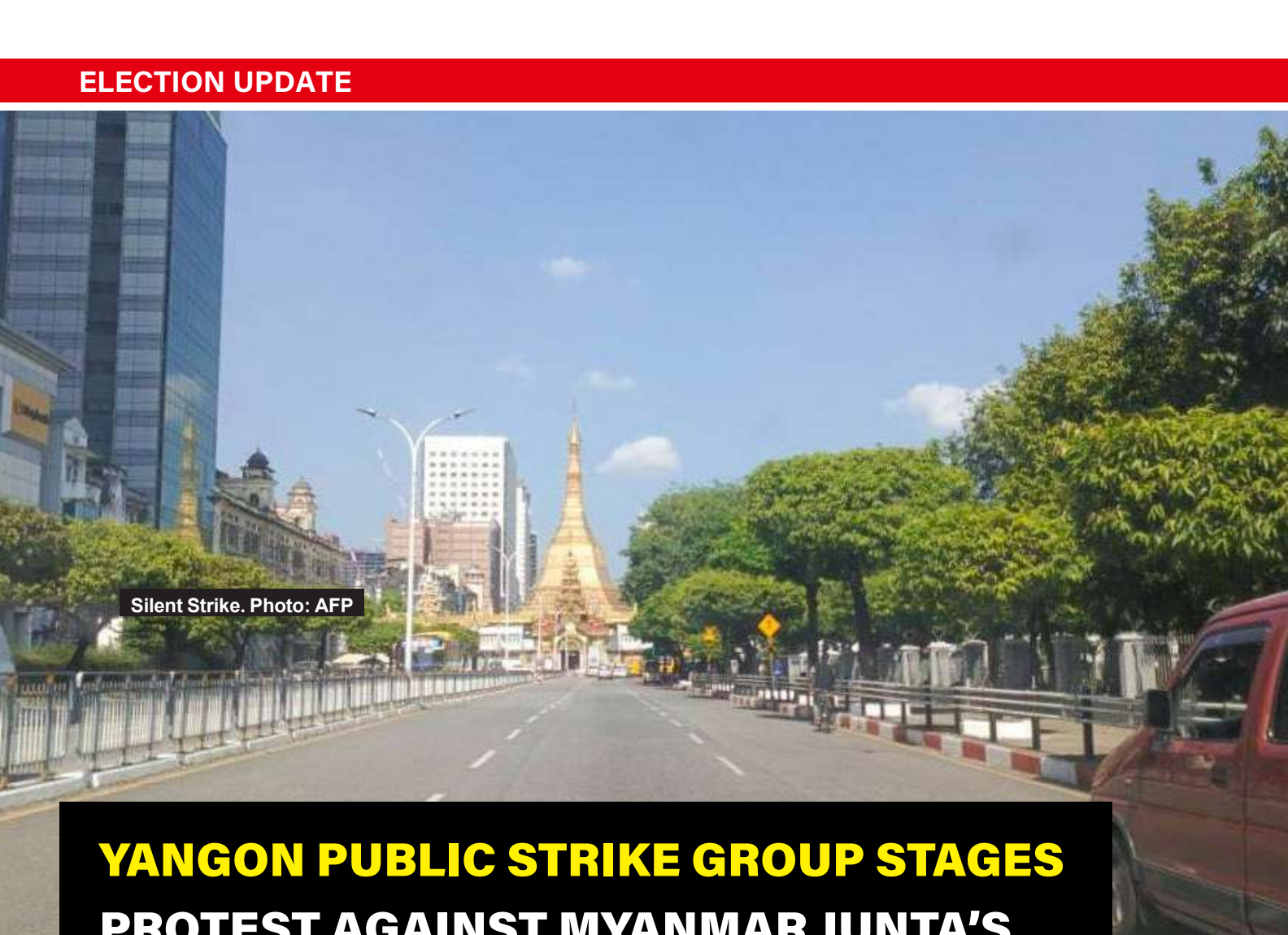
The vote will only take place in part of the country, and polling has already been cancelled in the 56 townships outside military control. Junta authorities are expected to announce additional cancellations as security deteriorates.

Horsey warns that the elections will occur amid escalating violence involving resistance forces and long-standing ethnic armed groups, most of which reject the polls as illegitimate.

Arrests, intimidation, and harsh sentences for even symbolic dissent have surged. At the same time, resistance groups have stepped up targeted attacks on party officials and polling infrastructure. With thousands of poorly protected polling stations and widespread coercion of state employees, the voting period is expected to be volatile and dangerous for civilians.

A USDP landslide is virtually assured, but Horsey argues the outcome will deepen Myanmar's political crisis rather than resolve it. The new administration, which is likely to take office in April 2026, will only serve to entrench military control. The root causes of conflict will remain unaddressed, and there will be no progress towards an inclusive political dialogue.

International actors, he adds, should avoid legitimising the process and instead prioritise humanitarian support for the more than 20 million people in need across the country.



Silent Strike. Photo: AFP

YANGON PUBLIC STRIKE GROUP STAGES PROTEST AGAINST MYANMAR JUNTA'S SHAM ELECTION

A public strike group in Yangon staged a protest campaign on 9 December to oppose the Myanmar junta's planned sham election and to urge people to join the Silent Strike scheduled for 10 December.

The campaign was carried out near the Sule pedestrian bridge in downtown Yangon, where activists placed a green signboard next to a trash can with the slogans: "Reject Sham Election," "Dec.10.2025 Silent Strike," and "Revolt and Defy."

According to the Yangon Public Strike, the trash can placed beside the signboard symbolized the "ballot boxes" of the sham election.

In its statement, the group said that, in line with the will of the people, it regarded the junta's election ballot boxes as "trash cans" where only publicly-ostracized

candidates and useless, nation-destroying garbage would be dumped.

The statement added that the slogans were intended to raise revolutionary awareness, to reject and oppose the sham election, to encourage public participation in the Silent Strike on 10 December, and to emphasize that people must struggle for their own liberation, as genuine freedom can only be won through public "revolt and defiance."

Revolutionary forces nationwide have urged people to observe a Silent Strike from 10 am to 3 pm on 10 December, which marks International Human Rights Day.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA CHARGES DR. TAYZAR SAN AND NINE OTHERS UNDER ELECTION LAW FOR PROTEST

The Myanmar junta has filed charges against prominent protest leaders Dr. Tayzar San, Nan Lin, and eight other individuals who staged an anti-dictatorship protest near Zay Cho Market in Mandalay, according to junta-controlled newspapers published today.

The group was charged on 3 December at the No. 6 Ward Police Station in Chanayethazan Township under Section 23(b) of the military commission's Election Protection Law.

The 10 individuals charged reportedly include: Dr. Tayzar San, Khant Wai Phyto, Nan Lin, Htet Myat Aung, May Chi (also known as Chi Chi), Shun Shun, and four unidentified men whose identities are still being verified.

The junta's Election Commission claimed the group had "shouted to mislead the public regarding electoral

processes and had scattered papers containing messages opposing the junta-organized election."

Section 23(b) of the Election Protection Law carries a severe penalty, including a minimum prison term of five years and up to 10 years, along with possible fines.

On 3 December, Dr. Tayzar San, Nan Lin, and Khant Wai Phyto led a public protest in Mandalay and called on the public to participate in a nationwide Silent Strike on 10 December, coinciding with International Human Rights Day.

The junta enacted the Election Protection Law on 29 July 2024, ahead of its planned election. Since then, the law has been used extensively by the regime to arrest, charge, and prosecute critics of the election, including those making critical comments on social media platforms.



Photo: AFP

THE ELECTION IS A SIDE-SHOW - THE REAL FUTURE OF BURMA IS ALREADY BEING BUILT

NAW WAHKUSHEE, DIRECTOR, KAREN PEACE SUPPORT NETWORK

While a lot of the international focus on Burma is now about the upcoming elections or how much territory the Burmese military has lost or taken, across the country in areas freed from Burmese military occupation, a bottom-up federal nation is being built. Local people are finally in charge of their land and natural resources, and for the first time have a say in how they will be governed, with new local constitutions being consulted on.

An example of this is highlighted in a new report, 'Retaking our Eastern Border' by the Karen Peace Support Network. Local administrations such as the Karen National Union in Kawthoolei, which administer areas freed from Burmese military occupation, need international support to provide essential services to local populations and improve governance.

Since the most recent military coup in 2021, large parts of Kawthoolei previously under Burmese military occupation have been liberated. (Kawthoolei is the Karen name for Karen State. It is larger than the borders of Karen State imposed by the central government in 1951).

The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) under the Ministry of Defence of the Karen National Union (KNU), have, with allies, liberated almost the entire length of Kawthoolei's eastern border with Thailand. People living in these areas are now free from Burmese military rule.

This required taking more than 55 Burmese military bases, bringing the total number of military camps taken by the KNLA and allies since February 2021 to 193, across 7 districts.

By last year, the KNLA and allies had taken back control of the entire Salween river border with Thailand. This year, they have retaken most of the Moei river border adjoining Hpa-an and Dooplaya districts, north and south of Myawaddy, as well as key posts along the Tanintharyi border, adjoining Mergui-Tavoy district. This includes the Htee Hta bases at the main border crossing leading to Dawei, which were taken in April 2025.

Most recently, on November 14, 2025, the KNLA and allies seized back control of the Mawdaung Pass, the main trade route adjoining Prachuap Khiri Khan province of Thailand, with a high trade volume in items such as seafood and agricultural produce, including rubber and palm oil, from Tanintharyi region's southernmost townships. Mawdaung used to be the headquarters of KNU's Mergui-Tavoy district, before being captured by the military regime 35 years ago.

In Kawthoolei the Karen National Union represents the Karen people and has responsibility for administration and services to the local population, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

The Karen National Union has decades of experience of providing administration and services in

the most difficult of circumstances including remote and challenging geography, conflict zones and limited budgets. Departments such as the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) and the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW) have been working to expand the provision of education and health services to new populations under KNU administration.

The Karen Education and Culture Department provides education for more than 140,000 children and has seen the number of schools it is responsible for increase by 23%. The Karen Teacher Working Group, a local civil society organisation which funds teacher salaries, has a 41% shortfall of funding it needs for the basic stipend teachers receive.

Providing education services is increasingly challenging with schools being deliberately targeted by Burmese military airstrikes and large numbers of displaced villagers.

A year after the coup, the Karen Department of Health and Welfare provided 60 health facilities to local populations. This has increased to 90. The Burmese military have deliberately targeted health clinics and hospitals with airstrikes, and there are much more challenging health needs with injuries from Burmese military attacks and landmines, as well as increased health problems created by lack of nutrition, particularly among internally displaced people.

The Karen Department for Health and Welfare also has overall responsibility for displaced people in Kawthoolei, working with the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP) and other civil society organisations, including the Karen Peace Support Network.

The number of internally displaced people in Kawthoolei now stands at a record high of 1.2 million people, the majority of whom are in desperate need of life-saving assistance.

It is a deliberate policy of the Burmese military to create humanitarian crises. It soaks up the capacity of resistance forces and is part of psychological warfare to demoralise the population.

The decision of the Burmese military to hold a series of elections starting in late December where they have made no real effort to even pretend they are free or fair indicates that they have no intention of relinquishing power or allowing democratic reforms. Instead, they have chosen to seek legitimacy and consolidate their rule by re-using a previously used tactic of holding elections to try to rebrand themselves.

The Burmese military has never and will never change in its core belief of Burma as a Bamar Buddhist nation which only they can rule.

At the same time, the people of Burma, including the Karen, have never and will never change in their desire for freedom, human rights and democracy.

The people of Burma will never stop resisting military rule. The only solution to the crisis in Burma is to remove the military. Engaging with a rebranded military dictatorship after sham elections will only prolong their rule and our suffering, as well as prolonging instability in the region.

Local administrations in areas free from Burmese military occupation, such as the Karen National Union in Kawthoolei, are providing essential services such as health and education in the same way governments all over the world do. In the most challenging of circumstances and with limited resources they are building governance and seeking stability in the areas they control.

The Karen National Union has also been engaging in extensive consultations for a constitution of Kawthoolei, where for the first time local people and civil society organisations are able to have a say in the laws that will govern them and how decisions which impact their lives and natural resources are made.

The Karen people are not waiting for a distant and unaccountable central government to grant them their rights and their land. They are taking it. The same is happening across Burma. This is not balkanisation, warlordism or Burma breaking up, it is people across the country working on a local level to build governance structures that work for them, rather than being imposed centrally without consultation.

Kawthoolei under the Karen National Union, and working with local civil society, is a more stable and reliable partner for international donors and neighbouring Thailand than the Burmese military has ever been.

The international community must step up engagement with, and humanitarian and development assistance to, local administrations such as that of the Karen National Union in Kawthoolei. Supporting the development of local administrations free from Burmese military rule is the most effective approach to long term stability in Burma.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER ADMITS NEW VOTER LISTS WILL NOT BE '100 PER CENT ACCURATE'

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the military commission leader, admitted that the voter lists compiled by the military-appointed Election Commission for the upcoming polls would not be entirely accurate. His remarks were published in junta-controlled newspapers today, following his meeting with departmental officials in Yangon a day earlier.

Min Aung Hlaing stated that while the lists "may not be 100 per cent accurate, we must make them as accurate as possible." He justified the focus on accuracy by referencing the military's reason for the 2021 coup: alleged widespread voter-list inaccuracies in the 2020 general election.

The junta leader affirmed the regime's timeline, stating that parliament would be convened after the election and that a handover of power, with expected changes to the government, would occur by the end of March 2026.

The military commission's multi-phase election schedule is set to begin with the first phase of voting in 102 townships on 28 December. A second phase is

scheduled for 11 January 2026, covering 100 townships, and a third phase on 25 January.

However, the military's own Election Commission admitted on 5 December that voting cannot take place in 56 of the country's 330 townships due to insecurity. Furthermore, polling will not be possible in 2,931 wards and village tracts even within the 202 townships where elections are planned.

While the commission began posting voter lists for public inspection in late September, public turnout has been minimal. Some candidates, including U Hla Swe, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) chairman for the Naypyidaw Council area, have already reported numerous errors, including the names of deceased people and those who had moved away.

Revolutionary forces, as well as domestic and international organizations, continue to reject the planned election, dismissing it as a sham intended to legitimize continued military rule.

Photo: AFP

SHAM ELECTION TRACKER SET UP TO TRACK MYANMAR 'SHAM ELECTION' AND RELATED RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

On 10 December 2025 on International Human Rights Day, Sham Election Tracker Working Group (SET WG) held a press conference at the Foreign Correspondent Club of Thailand in Bangkok to launch the Sham Election Tracker (SET).

The illegal military junta in Myanmar is aggressively pushing to hold its sham election scheduled for December 2025 and January 2026 amid its ongoing campaign of terror against the people of Myanmar, including mass killings, mass displacement, aerial bombing, forced conscription, and severe restrictions on civic and political space.

SET is dedicated to document and expose the junta's so-called election related events and human rights violations connected to this fraudulent electoral process. It will collect, verify and upload reports on related incidents and violations to inform the international community and stakeholders including international governments, legislatures, civil society and media and offer critical insights and analysis on the junta's attempts to legitimize and reinstate the military dictatorship in Myanmar.

Inspired by the Burma Election Tracker that was developed by Burma Partnership - the Asia Pacific regional advocacy and campaign network for a free and democratic Burma - to track the previous military regime's farce election in 2010, SET will also present a real-time reporting on the data visualisation and updates on campaigns and advocacy activities as a transparent and accessible tool.

The platform in collaboration with 34 Myanmar civil society organisations, also features a database, interactive mapping, and a secure system for submitting reports.

The launch of the SET was also joined by representatives from Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) and Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) as they shared the findings of their recently published reports on the military junta's sham election.

Yanghee Lee of the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) explained that the junta's sham election is central to its long-term plan, set in motion with the attempted coup, to secure absolute military dominance over the state. She also emphasised that "the only legitimate path towards peace in Myanmar is through the realisation of the common revolutionary vision for federal democracy.

SET calls on the international community and governments, the UN, the ASEAN, and the European Union to:

- 1) Publicly denounce the junta's illegal sham election and its result;
- 2) Refrain from providing any technical, logistical, or financial assistance and abstain from sending observers; and
- 3) Support the Myanmar people's will and aspirations to establish federal democracy.



Civilians mourn the deaths of patients and staff at the general hospital of Mrauk-U. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA AIR STRIKE ON HOSPITAL KILLS OVER 30, AID WORKERS SAY

A Myanmar military air strike killed more than 30 people at a hospital, aid workers said 11 December, as the junta wages a withering offensive ahead of elections.

The junta has increased air strikes year-on-year since the start of Myanmar's civil war, conflict monitors say, after snatching power in a 2021 putsch ending a decade-long democratic experiment.

The military has set polls starting December 28 -- touting the vote as an off-ramp to fighting -- but rebels have pledged to block it from territory they control, which the junta is battling to claw back.

A military jet bombed on Wednesday the general hospital of Mrauk-U in western Rakhine state, bordering Bangladesh, two aid workers said.

A junta spokesman could not be reached for comment.

At least 20 bodies were visible on the ground outside the hospital overnight, while daybreak revealed rubble covering ward beds, masonry peppered by shrapnel and the nearby ground cratered.

"This is an inhuman act. It is vile and violent," said aid worker Wai Hun Aung, who arrived on the scene on Thursday morning.

He said 31 people were killed and 68 wounded. A separatist force gave a toll of 33 dead.

"They are saying that they will hold elections on December 28," the aid worker added. "Even at this time, they are brutally killing the people."

Health workers and patients were killed, and "hospital infrastructure was severely damaged, with operating rooms and the main inpatient ward completely destroyed," said World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on X.

Mass mourning

Carpenter Maung Bu Chay said the strike killed three of his wife, and his daughter-in-law and her father.

"When someone informed me they were in the completely destroyed building, I realised they hadn't survived," said the 61-year-old.

"I feel resentful about their act. I feel strong anger and defiance in my heart."

Locals hammered together plywood coffins outside a funeral hall where bodies lay inside, as mourners wept on their knees in a frenzy of grief.

Hla Maung Oo, the chair of a local committee that organises free funerals, said the death toll of 31 included a months-old infant.

"We don't want this to happen again," he said. "It should not happen like this."

Rakhine state is controlled almost in its entirety by the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic minority separatist force active long before the military toppled the civilian government of democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The separatist force said in a statement that 33 people were killed and 76 wounded in the strike.

State of decline

The Arakan Army has emerged as one of the most powerful opposition groups in the civil war ravaging Myanmar, alongside other ethnic minority fighters and

pro-democracy partisans who took up arms after the coup.

Scattered rebels initially struggled to make headway before a trio of groups led a joint offensive starting in 2023, backfooting the military and prompting it to bolster its ranks with conscripted troops.

The AA was a key participant in the so-called "Three Brotherhood Alliance" but its two other factions this year agreed Chinese-brokered truces, leaving it as the last one standing.

While the military-run election has been widely criticised by monitors including the United Nations, Beijing has emerged as a key backer, saying it should "restore social stability" to its neighbour.

The AA has proven a powerful adversary for the junta and now controls all but three of Rakhine's 17 townships, according to conflict monitors.

But the group's ambitions are largely limited to their Rakhine homeland, hemmed in by the coast of the Bay of Bengal and jungle-clad mountains to the north.

The group has also been accused of atrocities including against the mostly Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority from the region.

Meanwhile the military has blockaded Rakhine, contributing to a humanitarian crisis which has seen "a dramatic rise in hunger and malnutrition", the World Food Programme said in August.

AFP



Coffins laid out outside the hospital.
Photo: AFP

NUG URGES GLOBAL ACTION AFTER MYANMAR JUNTA STRIKE KILLS OVER 35 AT MRAUK-U HOSPITAL

On 11 December, the National Unity Government (NUG) released a statement condemning the Myanmar military's deliberate aerial attack on Mrauk-U District General Hospital the previous night.

The statement is as follows.

The attack was carried out using fighter aircraft with the clear intention of striking a protected civilian facility.

Initial reports confirm that this brutal and indiscriminate assault resulted in the deaths of at least 35 innocent civilians, with a further 76 individuals injured. Among those killed were children, maternity patients, and patients receiving essential medical care, a fact that underscores the shocking cruelty and inhumanity of this act. The National Unity Government (NUG) expresses its deepest sorrow and extends heartfelt condolences to the families of all who lost their lives. We also wish for the swift and complete recovery of all who were injured.

The terrorist military attack constitutes a grave breach of international humanitarian law (IHL), including the core principles of the Geneva Conventions, which explicitly protect hospitals and other civilian infrastructures under all circumstances. Its actions amount to war crimes and a massacre, reflecting a blatant disregard for the distinction between civilian and military targets and demonstrating once again the junta's systematic pattern of violence against the civilian population.

This heinous assault is part of a broader and

longstanding campaign in which the terrorist military has already carried out more than 1,600 attacks on healthcare facilities across Myanmar. The National Unity Government condemns this ongoing campaign of terror in the strongest possible terms.

In light of these atrocities, the National Unity Government urgently calls upon the international community to take the following actions:

Implement immediate and robust measures, including strong diplomatic and economic pressure, to halt all deliberate attacks by the terrorist junta on civilians, civilian infrastructure, and humanitarian facilities.

Ensure prompt international intervention by the United Nations Security Council, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and other relevant international bodies to investigate and prosecute the terrorist military for war crimes and crimes against humanity, holding all perpetrators fully accountable under international law.

Mobilize international humanitarian assistance to guarantee that the wounded receive timely, safe, and unhindered access to lifesaving medical care.

The National Unity Government is already coordinating with relevant organizations to provide necessary support to the victims and their families. We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to pursue justice and accountability for all who have suffered and to continue working in solidarity with the people of Rakhine and across Myanmar.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA DENIES KILLING CIVILIANS IN RAKHINE HOSPITAL STRIKE

Myanmar's military junta denied on 13 December killing civilians in a hospital air strike that left more than 30 people dead.

A military jet bombed late 10 December the general hospital of Mrauk-U in western Rakhine state, bordering Bangladesh, two aid workers said.

"Those killed or injured were not civilians, but terrorists and their supporters," said an article in the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar (GNLM).

The ruling junta has increased air strikes year-on-year since the start of the country's civil war, conflict monitors say, after seizing power in a 2021 coup ending a decade-long experiment with democracy.

The United Nations on Thursday demanded an investigation, saying the attack could constitute a war crime.

Health workers and patients were killed, and "hospital infrastructure was severely damaged,

with operating rooms and the main inpatient ward completely destroyed," said World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on X.

Rakhine state is controlled almost in its entirety by the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic minority separatist force active long before the military toppled the civilian government of democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The separatist force said in a statement that 33 people were killed and 76 wounded in the strike.

People's Defence Forces (PDF) have also risen up to oppose the military coup four years ago.

The junta "carried out necessary security measures and launched a Counter-Terrorism Operation on 10 December against the buildings being used as a base by AA and PDF terrorists," GNLM said.

AFP



OPEN LETTER: 'INDIA'S LEADERSHIP IS NEEDED FOR A GENUINE DEMOCRACY' IN MYANMAR

The following is an Open Letter from the People of Myanmar:

An Appeal to the Indian Government and Parliament to not recognize the Illegitimate Sham Election Being Prepared by the Terrorist Military Junta in Myanmar

Date: December 13, 2025

The Union of Myanmar and the Republic of India are nations with a great historical tradition, having mutually supported each other's leaders and peoples in the struggle for independence even while under colonial rule, and subsequently achieving independence in succession. Furthermore, sharing a border over a thousand miles long, with ethnically, religiously, and culturally similar indigenous peoples residing along the frontier, means that the impact of events in one country has a significantly greater effect on the other compared to more distant neighbours.

However, since the illegal seizure of power by the Myanmar military junta on February 1, 2021, such geopolitical and socio-economic connections have unfortunately shifted towards negative consequences. As a result of the coup, a large number of war refugees have been forced to seek shelter in India, placing a socio-economic burden on the local population. More severely, due to market expansion efforts by the Myanmar military junta and its affiliates, drug trafficking and illegal trade along the border have skyrocketed. We note with regret that this situation poses a major threat to India's social and economic security.

All the political, military, and social calamities currently facing Myanmar are consequences stemming

from the illegal power grab by the Myanmar military junta. Min Aung Hlaing and the military junta bear full responsibility and accountability for these events. The root cause of political instability in Myanmar across generations lies solely with authoritarian-minded Myanmar military leaders, who are the historical culprits. Therefore, the ongoing Spring Revolution in Myanmar is not merely a political conflict but a systemic revolution aimed at uprooting an entire evil system.

A study of Myanmar's political history clearly shows that the military is an institution that cannot be trusted, not only by the people of Myanmar but also by neighbouring countries and the international community. Some evidence includes:

1. Not recognizing the results of the 1990 election, which did not produce the outcome desired by the military, and continuing to hold onto power.
2. Seizing power by rejecting the results of the 2020 election, which emerged under the very 2008 constitution they themselves drafted.
3. Brazenly violating the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).
4. Showing no compliance whatsoever with the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus, which Min Aung Hlaing himself signed in front of ASEAN leaders.
5. Ignoring appeals from diplomats, including those from India, and continuing to commit acts of violence.

Given the above facts, permanently ending the over seventy-year cycle of Myanmar's political problems

is the ultimate goal of our revolution. We believe and hope that India, as the world's largest democracy and our neighbour, will prudently consider refraining from any actions that would obstruct this goal.

We respect India's non-aligned foreign policy. However, the current crisis in Myanmar is a struggle between righteousness and unrighteousness, between the entire populace and a minority of military dictators. Therefore, we believe approaching this issue solely with a policy of non-alignment is inappropriate. Instead, it should be approached correctly, considering the interests of the Myanmar and India people, the responsibility of being a historically good neighbour, and the long-term interests of both nations. We are deeply concerned about the nature of relations developed between the Myanmar military junta and the Indian government over the past five years.

Therefore, the people of Myanmar earnestly and solemnly appeal to the Indian Government and Parliament as follows:

(1) To absolutely refrain from recognizing the illegitimate election being prepared by the terrorist military junta, intended to be held as a mere show only in the few areas under their control in the near future.

(2) To avoid sending observer delegations to the said illegitimate election.

(3) Instead of supporting the military junta's political exit strategy—the sham election—to seriously and earnestly consider providing only practical and constructive assistance that will genuinely contribute to achieving true political stability and the restoration of democracy in Myanmar.

Respectfully,

On behalf of the people of Myanmar and the 113 civil and revolutionary organizations — including 24 anonymous groups — as well as individual signatories who have endorsed this open letter.

1. 5/ of Zaya State Strike Committee
2. 88 Medical Diaspora UK
3. A-Yar-Taw People Strike Steering Committee
4. Anti-coup Forces Coordination Committee (ACFCC -Mandalay)
5. Anti-Junta Alliance Yangon-AJAY
6. Anyar Pyit Taing Htaung Lay Myar
7. Aung San Suu Kyi Park Norway
8. Board of education, Kani, Sagaing Region
9. Budalin Strike Force
10. Burma Canadian Network (BCN)

11. Burma Refugee Committee - Kabaw Valley
12. CDM Civil Servants Council (CCSC)
13. CDM Civil Servants Council – Sagaing Federal Unit (CCSC-SFU)
14. CDM Medical Network (CDMMN)
15. Chaung Oo Township Youth Strike Committee
16. Chin Community in Norway
17. Civil Information Network (CIN)
18. Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw-CRPH
19. Dagon University Student's Union (DUSU)
20. Defend Myanmar Democracy - DMD
21. Democratic Party for A New Society (DPNS)
22. Democratic Party for a New Society, Norway
23. Doh Atu - Ensemble pour le Myanmar
24. Ethnic Youth General Strike Committee (Mandalay)
25. Federal Aid Burma - FAB
26. General Strike Collaboration Committee (GSCC)
27. General Strike Committee of Basic and Higher Education (GSCBHE)
28. General Strike Coordination Body - GSCB
29. Higher Education Group (YeU)
30. Hpakant Hmawlae Strike Force
31. Inle Women Union
32. K'cho Ethnic Association (Europe)
33. Kachin Affairs Organization-Japan
34. Kachin Association Norway
35. Kalay Township People's Strike Steering Committee -KPSSC
36. Kanbalu Strike Force
37. Kani Strike Force
38. KAO
39. La Communauté Birmane de France
40. Latpadaung Anti-coup Strike Force
41. Latpadaung Region Strike Committee
42. LGBT Alliance Myanmar
43. Loveurcontent Entertainment
44. Magway People's Revolution Committee
45. Mandalay Medical Family (MFM)
46. Mandalay Strike Force (MSF)
47. MayMyo Strike Force

CORE DEVELOPMENTS

48. MOHAND -SGG
49. Monywa People's Strike Steering Committee
50. Monywa-Amyint Road Strike Leading Committee
51. Myanmar (CRPH) Support Group, Norway
52. Myanmar Catholic Community In Norway
53. Myanmar Community in Norway
54. Myanmar Democratic Force in Denmark
55. Myanmar Emergency Fund Canada
56. Myanmar Hindu Union
57. Myanmar Labour Alliance (MLA)
58. Myaung People Strike Steering Committee
59. Myaung Youth Network
60. Myingyan Civillian Movement Committee
61. New Myanmar Foundation
62. NLD Organization Committee (International) Norway
63. Norway Matu Community
64. Norway Rvwang Community
65. OCTOPUS (Youth Organization)
66. Pale Township People's Strike Steering Committee
67. Peaceful Myanmar
68. Public Administration Organization (Sagaing Township)
69. Rohingya Community in Norway
70. SFUH
71. Shwe Bo Strike Force
72. Sisters2Sisters
73. Support Group for Democracy in Myanmar SGDM Research Group
74. Taze Board of Education
75. Union Of Karenni State Youth (UKSY)
76. University of Medicine Mandalay Student Union Revolutionary Front - UMMSURF
77. University Students' Unions Alumni Force
78. Voices in Peace
79. Wetlet Revolution Leading Committee
80. White Coat Society Yangon (WCSY)
81. Women Alliance Burma (WAB)
82. Women Lead Resource Center
83. Yadanabon University Students' Union (YDNBUSU)
84. Ye U Education Board
85. Yinmarpin and Salingyi All Villages Strike Committee
86. Youth for Democratization of Myanmar (UDM)
87. Zomi Christian Fellowship of Norway
88. Zomi Community Norway
89. မြင်းခြံလူထုကော်မတီ
90. အင်းလေးလူထုလှုပ်ရှားမှု Individuals
 1. Nyi Htun
 2. Soe Than
 3. Yan Paing
 4. Moong Zilom
 5. Thida
 6. Daniel Kyaw
 7. Ye Tun Win
 8. Thant Wai Kyaw, Member of Sagaing Region Hluttaw
 9. U Soe Lwin
 10. Myint Thein
 11. Daniel Aung Ko Ko
 12. Aung NYI MYAT
 13. Su, Magway Hluttaw
 14. Thiha SOE
 15. Tin Maung Htwe
 16. Mr Than Sei
 17. Kyaw Zin Soe
 18. Daw Khin Mya Thi
 19. Noriki
 20. Daw Zar Zar
 21. Dr AK
 22. Shawana
 23. Yu Yu Swe
 24. Dr. WaiLaMu
 25. Dr Myo Khant Ko Ko , Chief General Surgeon & Clinical Director of Luke Hospital, President of Doctors' Society of Karenni, President of Karenni Medical College
 26. U Myint Aung, Japan
 27. Mg Nay Oo, CRPH (လုံကာကော်မတီဝင်)
 28. U Sein Myint, Pyithu Hluttaw, Myingyan Constituency
 29. Daw Nu Nu Aye, Myanmar (Sagaing Division)

Photo: Supplied

OP-ED: BOMBS, SILENCE, AND DEFIANCE: THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTION THE JUNTA CANNOT KILL

On December 10—International Human Rights Defenders Day—Myanmar's military marked the occasion by bombing a hospital. A junta jet dropped explosives on Mrauk-U General Hospital in Rakhine State, killing at least 34 civilians and wounding many more. Patients waiting for treatment, children accompanying their parents, and health workers trying to save lives were among the dead. Only days earlier, an airstrike reduced a village tea shop in Sagaing to rubble while people gathered to watch a football match. Teachers, elders, and a five-year-old child were killed instantly.

These were not accidents of war. They were deliberate attacks on civilians, carried out to terrorize the population ahead of the junta's staged election. The generals hope that performing the rituals of democracy will distract the world from their crimes. Instead, the violence has only sharpened the people's resolve. Myanmar's citizens have responded with an unmistakable message: they refuse to be ruled by murderers.

A Revolution That Survived What the World Thought Impossible

Five years of determined and heroic resistance have already achieved what many once believed was impossible. Across the country—from northern Shan to Rakhine, Chin, Karenni, Karen, and Sagaing—resistance forces have liberated towns, destroyed military outposts, seized border gates, and cut vital supply routes. The coup regime has lost effective ground control over large parts of the country.

At precisely this moment of vulnerability, the junta was pulled back from the brink by its external enablers.

Regional powers and authoritarian allies—most notably China, Russia, and India—stepped in to resuscitate the regime from political isolation. Weapons, ammunition, technology, and military expertise flowed in. Diplomatic engagement was restored. Financial lifelines were extended. Pressure was applied on resistance groups in the north, while new revenue streams—from criminal economies and scam centers—poured blood money into junta coffers.

This external intervention did not stabilize Myanmar. It prolonged the war.

What followed was a fog of carefully manufactured narratives: elections, ceasefires, de-escalation, peace processes, and “new beginnings.” Fake elections. Fake peace. Fake political transitions. These illusions were eagerly consumed by regional actors and parts of the diplomatic community, not because they reflected reality, but because they were convenient.

Behind this curtain, reality moved in the opposite direction. The junta escalated air terror, forcibly conscripted tens of thousands of young men, deployed new drone and aviation capabilities with foreign assistance, and adopted a scorched-earth strategy. Towns were flattened, civilians massacred, and entire regions turned into killing fields. Cities were destroyed with the full expectation that foreign companies would later profit from “reconstruction.”

This is not a transition. It is a war of annihilation.

And it will not end with the junta's election. Recognition of a so-called “new” government will only embolden Min Aung Hlaing. It will convince him that mass murder carries no consequences. After

the election, there will be more war, not less—more airstrikes, more forced recruitment, more atrocities against civilians, and renewed attempts to crush resistance forces that refuse to surrender.

Resistance Beyond the Battlefield

Armed resistance is only one dimension of Myanmar's struggle. Alongside it runs a powerful social, psychological, and digital rebellion.

On December 10, Myanmar's major cities fell silent as millions joined a nationwide Silent Strike. Shops closed. Streets emptied. Daily life paused. In a police state where even absence can be punished, the act carried enormous risk. Its message was unmistakable: the people reject the junta's election and deny its authority.

Earlier, the Million People's Online Voting Campaign demonstrated the same defiance in digital form. In a country where political expression invites arrest, torture, or death, more than a million people cast a symbolic vote against military rule. It became one of the largest acts of digital civil resistance in Myanmar's history—proof that censorship and fear cannot extinguish collective political will.

Justice Is Not Negotiable

There is now a broad consensus in Myanmar that any form of negotiation or political settlement with the military would be a betrayal of the sacrifices made since 2021. After decades of failed transitions and political compromises that left the military's power untouched, the public has made it clear that this time will be different. A military that bombs hospitals, burns villages, tortures children, and rapes women cannot be part of Myanmar's future. Justice for the victims is not optional, and accountability is not a bargaining chip.

Young freedom fighters understand this with particular clarity. Many are in their twenties, yet they carry the weight of an entire nation's aspirations. They did not join the resistance in pursuit of power or recognition—they joined because they know that without defeating the military, there can be no freedom, no safety, and no future. Their determination stems not from ideology but from lived reality. They fight knowing that compromise would condemn the next generation to the same authoritarian cycle. Their resolve to carry the struggle to its conclusion has become one of the most defining features of this revolution.

Revolutionary Leadership Must Confront the Elephant in the Room

But even as the people remain steadfast, parts of the country's opposition leadership remain hesitant. Some political and armed leaders still cling to the hope

that territorial control or diplomatic ambiguity will allow them to secure future leverage. Others quietly entertain the idea of negotiations with the military or prioritize internal influence over national liberation. This is the elephant in the room—the uncomfortable truth that many leaders fear acknowledging.

Such hesitation threatens the revolution's momentum. Leadership cannot be guided by fear of losing territory, prestige, or political advantage. Nor can it remain trapped in the old culture of "teashop politics"—informal gossip networks, factional rivalries, and speculative power plays disconnected from the suffering of the people. In a revolution defined by sacrifice, the public expects clarity, transparency, and courage from those who speak on their behalf.

To build a new Myanmar, leaders must be willing to confront uncomfortable realities, abandon old habits, and articulate a bold, uncompromising vision for a military-free future. The revolution demands leadership that is rooted in the ground—physically present with displaced families, frontline communities, defense forces, and grassroots organizers. A revolution cannot be steered from afar; it must be lived alongside the people who are paying the highest price.

The Junta's Election Will Not Define Myanmar's Future

The military's election will not heal the country, restore stability, or grant legitimacy to the generals. It will be another performance in a long history of staged political theater. But the people of Myanmar have already decided that they will not participate in another cycle of violence disguised as governance.

Myanmar's future will not be shaped by the junta's ballots or bombs. It will be determined by the courage of the young fighters defending their communities, the resilience of families uprooted by war, the quiet rebellion of citizens who refuse to show up at polling stations, and the millions who have publicly declared—online or in silence—that they reject military rule entirely.

The junta can bomb hospitals, but it cannot bomb out the will of the people. It can burn villages, but it cannot burn the idea of freedom. It can stage elections, but it cannot manufacture legitimacy.

The revolution belongs to the people, and they have already made their choice: they will not compromise, not with a military that has taken so much from them, and not with a future that demands their full courage.



PROTEST IN PRAGUE CALLS FOR RELEASE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND OTHER MYANMAR POLITICAL PRISONERS

As part of a global movement calling for the release of Myanmar's State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, President U Win Myint, and other political prisoners who are being unlawfully detained in Myanmar, an event was held 13 December in Prague, Czech Republic.

This movement was led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's son, Kim Aris (also known as Ko Htein Lin), and was organized internationally as the "All in One Peace Movement". The Czech Republic also participated in this global action.

Myanmar nationals living in the Czech Republic, together with friends of Myanmar who support the Myanmar cause, took part in the movement. The programme began with a one-minute silence in honour of those who have sacrificed their lives for democracy, freedom, human dignity, and human rights.

U Lin Thant, the representative of the National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar to the Czech Republic, spoke about the daily hardships faced by the people of Myanmar. He urged international governments to take

action against the terrorist military junta and expressed gratitude to all participants for showing unity and solidarity through this movement.

Afterwards, participants called on international governments to intensify efforts—including diplomatic pressure and other measures—against the terrorist military group that is carrying out daily inhumane killings, and to work toward the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, President U Win Myint, and all political prisoners.

During the event, a pre-recorded audio message from Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's son, Kim Aris (Ko Htein Lin), was shared with the audience.

Participants also called on the international community to take notice of and reject any sham elections planned while national leaders and political prisoners remain unjustly detained.

The movement concluded with the playing of songs "Thu Ma" ("She") and "Kyar" ("Star") by singer Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein.



Hunger is a real threat. Photo: AFP

WFP WARNS MYANMAR HUNGER CRISIS WILL DEEPEN IN 2026

On 11 December, the World Food Programme (WFP) warned in a statement that Myanmar could see over 12 million people facing acute hunger in 2026, with one million expected to reach emergency levels requiring lifesaving aid.

The statement is as follows.

Intensifying conflict and a sharp jump in displacement now risks pushing an underfunded hunger crisis to breaking point.

The people of Myanmar already face dire levels of hunger; a place where mothers cannot afford enough food to sustain their health, and malnutrition has become a new reality for thousands of children. More than 400,000 young children and mothers with acute malnutrition are surviving on nutrient-deprived diets of plain rice or watery porridge.

"Conflict and deprivation are converging to strip away people's basic means of survival, yet the world isn't paying attention," said Michael Dunford, WFP Country Director in Myanmar. "This is one of the

worst hunger crises on the planet, and one of the least funded. We cannot allow this level of suffering to remain invisible. The scale of need is far outpacing our ability to respond."

Internal displacement is expected to rise from 3.6 million to 4 million next year, according to the latest United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan. This surge threatens to push millions of households who are barely coping into extreme deprivation.

"We're on the ground. We're delivering food and nutrition every day under extremely challenging conditions. But we are massively underfunded," said Dunford. "The international community must act. Sustained funding and diplomatic support are needed to stop this crisis worsening next year."

In 2026, WFP aims to assist 1.3 million people — a fraction of the more than 12 million in need — with humanitarian support requiring a budget of US\$125 million.



Scam workers being guarded.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA USES CHINESE SCAM COMPOUND AS MILITARY BASE IN MYAWADDY FIGHTING

MIZZIMA SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HAN HTOO ZAW

Fierce fighting between the Myanmar junta troops and forces allied with the Karen National Union (KNU) and People's Defence Force (PDF) has continued for over two months near Minlatpan village in southern Myawaddy town on the Thai-Myanmar border.

A Karen military source reports that the Military Commission troops are using Dongmei Park, an online scam compound led by a Chinese mafia syndicate located barely a mile from Minlatpan village, as a base of operations.

Troops are reportedly using the compound and nearby buildings to launch heavy artillery and drone attacks on Minlatpan village. The Military Commission's heavy artillery fire has recently caused shells to land and explode on the Thai side of the border, injuring several civilians, including a child, and damaging residential buildings.

Local residents indicated that Myanmar workers inside Dongmei Park were recently allowed to leave, but only after paying fees to the Border Guard Force (BGF) and the military. Chinese nationals and other foreigners

holding Myanmar IDs are reportedly continuing to run the online scam operations inside the compound.

"The Chinese haven't been moved yet. Inside, the military guys are drinking and partying in the KTV and HI rooms that are for drugs consumption," a 30-year-old local woman told Mizzima.

Furthermore, local sources indicate that the Military Commission troops are also using the KK-Park compound, another notorious online scam operation located between Maethawthalay and Inn Gyin Myaing villages as a rear military hospital.

The Dongmei Park compound, which began operations in late 2021, was co-founded by 14K gang leader Wan Kuok-koi (also known as Broken Tooth) and his Malaysian partners, according to a Justice For Myanmar (JFM) report.

Despite recent highly publicized claims by the Military Commission and the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF) that they are cracking down on online scam operations, foreign countries, including the United States, maintain low confidence and ongoing suspicion regarding the genuine intent of these actions.



Photo: AFP/Myanmar junta

MYANMAR'S JUNTA ESTABLISHES HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE TO COMBAT ONLINE SCAMS

Myanmar's military junta announced on 11 December that it has established a Central Supervisory Committee for Combating Telecom Fraud and Online Gambling. The committee, formed on 10 December, is tasked with coordinating anti-scam efforts domestically and with foreign governments "to ensure that telecom fraud and online gambling activities cannot be operated anywhere inside Myanmar."

The 16-member committee is chaired by Lt. Gen. Tun Tun Naung, the junta's Minister of Home Affairs. Other key members include Foreign Affairs Minister Than Swe as vice chairman 1, Minister of Immigration and Population Myint Kyaing as vice chairman 2, and the governor of the Central Bank, regional military commanders, and various deputy ministers.

The committee's duties include coordinating with relevant countries to repatriate foreign nationals involved in the fraud and gambling operations, creating necessary subcommittees, drafting and implementing standard operating procedures (SOPs), and collaborating with international partners.

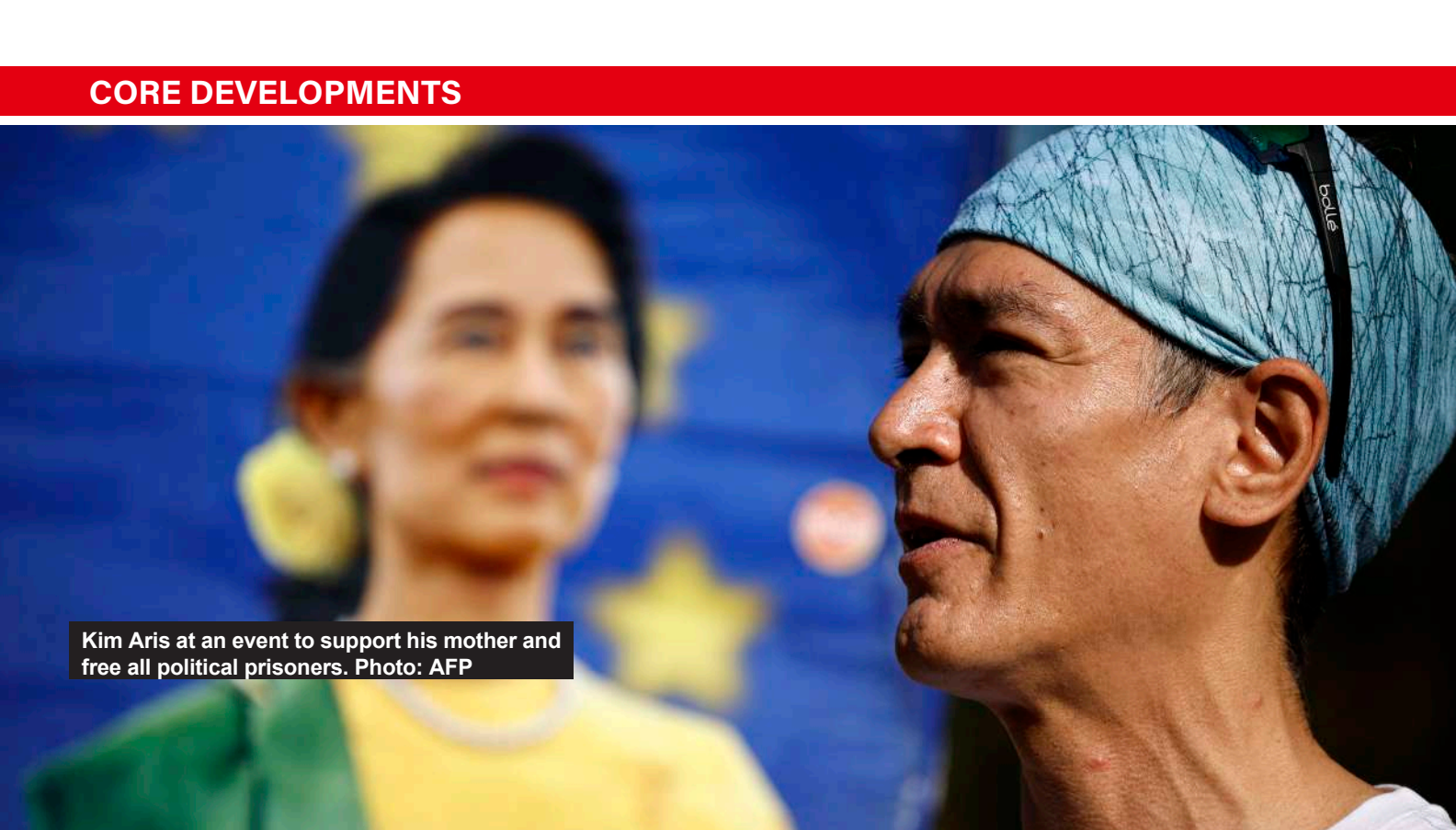
The formation of the high-level body follows weeks of highly publicized junta raids and demolitions of buildings and equipment used for online scam

operations in the Shwe Kokko and KK Park areas along the Thailand–Myanmar border in Karen State.

However, the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) and other monitoring groups remain highly sceptical of the junta's motives. The CRPH stated on 21 November that multiple sources indicate the online scam operations are being protected by the junta and its business-aligned armed groups, which are making significant profits from the activities.

The CRPH statement warned that "these operations will continue to survive and expand as long as the military generals remain in power, and it is important to note that any claim by the junta that it is attempting to eliminate these scam operations is merely a pretence."

Both Shwe Kokko and KK Park have documented links to the junta-aligned Karen Border Guard Force (BGF). Shwe Kokko is a joint venture involving the Chit Linn Myaing Group, owned by BGF leader Colonel Saw Chit Thu, and the Hong Kong-registered Yatai International Holding Group. The BGF is also linked to the KK Park area, according to Justice for Myanmar (JFM).



Kim Aris at an event to support his mother and free all political prisoners. Photo: AFP

NEW MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE IN BURMA LAUNCHED LED BY KIM ARIS, SON OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI

1 3 December marks the launch of the All-in-One Piece Movement, a global campaign led by Kim Aris calling for renewed international action to restore freedom, justice, and peace for the people of Burma, the organizers say in a press release.

The movement's central message is clear and universal: "Freedom for Her, Freedom for All. Justice for Her, Justice for All."

For more than four years, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been held in near-total isolation, denied access to her family, legal support, and basic human rights. Her case reflects the suffering of millions in Burma who continue to face violence, displacement, and repression.

"At this critical moment, unity is essential," said Kim Aris at the launch.

"The struggle has gone on far too long. We will win faster if we are united. When we stand together, we are unbreakable. We are all in one piece."

Aris urged governments and global leaders to increase diplomatic pressure, uphold international human rights standards, and support peaceful solutions for Burma's future.

"Her freedom is inseparable from the freedom of the Burmese people. Justice for her is justice for the nation," he added.

The All in One Piece Movement seeks to:

- Rebuild global awareness of Burma's ongoing crisis
- Advocate for the humane treatment and release of political prisoners
- Strengthen solidarity within Burmese communities worldwide
- Mobilize governments, organisations, and civil society to act
- Promote peaceful and democratic restoration in Burma

Rooted in unity, the movement calls on people everywhere regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or political background to stand together for Burma's future.

"Burma can be whole again," Aris said. "But only if we walk forward together — all in one piece."



COLONEL KILLED IN AMBUSH ON MYANMAR JUNTA CONVOY IN MONYWA

A Myanmar junta military convoy was attacked on the Union Highway in Monywa, Sagaing Region, on the evening of 7 December, resulting in the deaths of 10 personnel, including a colonel, according to the 5/Fighter group.

The ambush occurred at around 8 pm as the convoy was reportedly re-entering Monywa from the Ye-U checkpoint on the outskirts of the town.

"We received advance intelligence and waited near the Union Highway to launch the attack. The vehicle carrying the colonel-level officer caught fire and was destroyed on the spot. Ten people, including the officer, were killed," a spokesperson for the 5/Fighter group said.

Local resistance forces based in Monywa said the assault lasted about 15 minutes, killing 10 junta personnel, including Colonel Tin Ko, Captain Soe Min Oo, and an interrogation officer.

The 5/Fighter group, which spearheaded the attack, was supported by an alliance of groups including the BLDF, PLA, Black Falcon, DLC, Monywa Underground Force, Monywa Brother Attack Force, and Golden Eagle Force. Resistance forces reported no casualties on their side.

Following the ambush, junta troops from the Boe Bwa Yeiktha outpost and the Inn Phyat Road outpost jointly opened fire. Approximately 40 military vehicles, including civilian cars and armoured trucks, were deployed to the scene to conduct clearance operations and retrieve the dead and wounded.

Mizzima has not yet been able to independently verify the reported deaths of Colonel Tin Ko and the other nine personnel and is still investigating the incident.



IDPs flee the fighting. Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA COLUMN DISPLACES 2,700 IN MAGWAY'S PAUK TOWNSHIP

A Myanmar junta military column of approximately 150 troops, reportedly from the Defence Product Industry (Ka Pa Sa) 24, arrived near Chaungku and Pynma villages in Pauk Township, Magway Region, on 3 December, forcing around 2,700 residents from seven nearby villages to flee.

The soldiers initially deployed along surrounding hills, leading to the immediate displacement of over 1,700 residents from five villages – Chaungku, Pynma, Moekaung, Nyaungpinthar and Paypinshinma – shortly after the column arrived on 3 December, according to the Pauk Township Humanitarian and Disaster Management Department.

The column remained positioned along the hills until the morning of 10 December. Around half of the troops later advanced toward Shwebonthar village, where pro-military Pyu Saw Htee militia members are stationed, and joined forces with them, a humanitarian official confirmed.

The expansion of the military operation displaced nearly 1,000 more people from Chaung Wa and

Wetpoke villages, bringing the total number of internally displaced villagers to approximately 2,700.

The humanitarian situation for the displaced population is severe.

“The villagers have now been displaced for about a week. They are sheltering in the forest during the cold season without proper protection and are struggling with low temperatures,” a relief official stated. “Children are suffering from diarrhoea due to the lack of toilets and clean drinking water. There is also an urgent need for blankets and mosquito nets.”

Since its arrival on 3 December, the military column has shelled nearby villages almost daily, and an airstrike was also carried out in northern Pauk Township on 9 December. With the harvest season currently underway, there are growing concerns that villagers, unable to harvest their crops due to the military operations, will face severe food and water shortages.



Part of a drone recovered at the site.
Photo: KNU

MYANMAR JUNTA SUICIDE DRONES STRIKE KNU HEADQUARTERS, ONE INJURED

The Karen National Union (KNU) headquarters in the Kaloeyawlay area was struck by six suicide drones in the early hours of 10 December, injuring one person and causing damage to property, according to a local source.

The drones were launched between 2 am and 5 am, with a local resident near KNU Brigade 7 reporting, "They were targeting the KNU brigade headquarters. The drones were launched after 2:30 am. I heard six explosions."

The attack resulted in minor injuries to one man, as well as damage to two motorcycles and some houses. The source suggested the suicide drones were fired from the junta unit in the Methawaw village area, though Mizzima could not independently verify this information.

This marks the fourth reported drone attack targeting the KNU headquarters in the Brigade 7 area, following similar strikes on 11 June and 31 January in 2025, and 22 October in 2024.

The attack comes one day after the Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN) released its "Retaking Our Eastern Border" report on 9 December.

The report noted that air and artillery attacks by the junta's military damaged 108 civilian buildings, including schools, medical facilities, monasteries, and churches, across all seven districts of the KNU's Kawthoolei region between September 2024 and September 2025.



PDF REPORTS 16 MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS KILLED IN TWO CLASHES IN THAYET TOWNSHIP

People's Defence Force (PDF) Thayet District Battalion 4 reported that two separate clashes in Thayet Township, Magway Region, left 16 Myanmar junta soldiers dead.

The announcement, issued on 8 December, stated that both clashes took place on the same day.

According to the PDF, a 30-member military column from Thayet Township and a 40-member joint military-police unit from the Ye Nan Thar Police Outpost in Kamma Township advanced along the Thayet-Kamma road, engaging revolutionary forces in clashes at around 9 am and again at noon.

"We detonated mines and ambushed their troops. Eyewitnesses confirmed the casualties among the Military Council forces," Ko Myat, the news and

information officer for Thayet District Battalion 4, told Mizzima.

Both columns were reportedly deployed to secure the area ahead of the junta's planned elections.

The column advancing from the Ye Nan Thar side was struck by improvised explosive devices as it entered a minefield, killing six junta soldiers. After a brief four-minute exchange of small-arms fire with stay-behind forces, the column retreated.

The surviving column of roughly 30 troops continued along the Thayet-Kamma road, looting and destroying homes in Htan Phyu and Yay Twin Gyi villages as they advanced before pulling back. When the unit reached Set Taung village, revolutionary fighters lying in wait launched another attack.

The ensuing firefight lasted about 30 minutes at a distance of 15 to 20 meters, killing 10 more junta soldiers. The revolutionary fighters withdrew without suffering any casualties, according to Ko Myat.

Mizzima has not independently verified the reported casualties.

After being intercepted twice, the remaining troops regrouped with the column advancing from Thayet Township. That column brought heavy weapons up near the Set Taung village monastery and opened fire toward the ongoing battle.

Following the clashes, the dead and wounded were evacuated, and troops returned to Thayet Township at around 6 pm. Ko Myat noted that some forces were believed to have remained near Set Taung village, though their current position has not been confirmed.

The Thayet District Battalion 4 has urged travellers to exercise caution on the Thayet-Kamma road, advising them to lower vehicle mirrors due to the risk of heavy weapons fire from junta forces and to cooperate with inspections if necessary.

AUSTRALIA URGES END TO VIOLENCE AND CALLS FOR DIALOGUE AHEAD OF MYANMAR ELECTIONS

On 10 December, the Australian Government released a statement expressing grave concern over Myanmar's political and humanitarian crisis ahead of the junta's planned elections.

The statement is as follows.

The Australian Government has grave concerns about the ongoing political and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. Australia condemns widespread human rights abuses and violations by the Myanmar military regime, and remains deeply concerned by its ongoing attacks against civilians including airstrikes. We also note with concern credible reports of violence and abuses committed by other armed actors.

Australia has consistently maintained that a genuine path to peace requires an end to violence, the release of all those unjustly detained and inclusive dialogue among all Myanmar stakeholders.

We are seriously concerned that elections held without these conditions will lead to greater instability and prevent a peaceful resolution to the ongoing crisis, with grave consequences for the people of Myanmar. The current situation in Myanmar falls short of what is needed for free, fair and inclusive elections.

Australia will continue to urge a peaceful transition of power to a democratic civilian government that reflects the will of the people. We reiterate our strong support for ASEAN's central role in resolving this crisis. We continue to call on the regime to fulfil its commitments under the Five-Point Consensus and to engage meaningfully with ASEAN representatives including the ASEAN Chair's Special Envoy.

Our commitment to universal human rights reflects our national values. Australia will continue to stand with the people of Myanmar, who have demonstrated great resilience and bravery in the face of adversity.



MYANMAR JUNTA ACCUSED OF SYSTEMATICALLY WEAPONIZING HUMANITARIAN AID, NEW BRIEFING WARNS

In a new briefing released on 9 December, Progressive Voice (PV) says the Myanmar junta is systematically obstructing, manipulating, and profiting from humanitarian aid while escalating violence against the civilian population and aid workers.

The Myanmar civil society research group describes a pattern of administrative control, physical blockades, and targeted violence that it says has transformed natural disasters and conflict-driven emergencies into unnecessary humanitarian catastrophes.

The 28 March 2025 7.7-magnitude earthquake in central Myanmar that killed at least 4,000 people is cited as the most recent and obvious example. While calling for international assistance, the junta simultaneously restricted access to quake-hit areas, denied travel authorizations, confiscated relief supplies, and imposed invasive registration requirements on humanitarian aid groups and survivors, the briefing relates.

An incident wherein aid bearing the logo of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was diverted to military warehouses in Naypyidaw is recounted. Another incident describes how Australian doctors reported the theft of lifesaving medicines en route to hard-hit areas in Mandalay and Sagaing Regions.

According to the report, these tactics part of the military's decades-old "four cuts" strategy designed to sever civilian support – food, funds, intelligence, and recruits – to resistance forces.

Since the 2021 coup, the junta has tightened restrictions through laws such as the 2022 Organization Registration Law, which imposes criminal penalties on unregistered humanitarian actors and effectively bans independent operations.

PV documented at least 165 violent incidents targeting humanitarian groups since 2021. These include killings, arrests, intimidation at checkpoints, and the destruction of humanitarian property.

In the six weeks following the earthquake the junta launched roughly 200 airstrikes in the disaster zone, doubling civilian deaths in Sagaing Region and further endangering humanitarian workers.

The briefing warns that international aid routed through junta-controlled systems is vulnerable to diversion. This includes through exchange-rate manipulation in which the junta is able to capture "up to half" the value of incoming assistance. These funds, PV argues, help finance ongoing airstrikes and preparations for the junta's planned December 2025 election.

PV urges donors to halt engagement with the junta and instead redirect humanitarian funding to local civil society and border-based networks with proven access and community trust. "Channelling aid through junta-linked entities guarantees manipulation, diversion, ineffectiveness, and harm to the people," Progressive Voice warned.



WOMEN'S PEACE NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS ONGOING BRUTALITY IN MYANMAR ON INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Women's Peace Network has issued a statement on International Human Rights Day on 10 December.

The following is their statement:

This International Human Rights Day, we, Women's Peace Network (WPN) raise alarm at the deteriorating situation of human rights across the world, reexpress our solidarity with all victims and survivors of human rights violations, and call for urgent actions for their justice.

In Myanmar, a human rights catastrophe continues to rapidly deteriorate. The Burmese military is intensifying its air strikes and ground attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including homes, schools, churches, and hospitals; arbitrarily arresting and detaining over 22,000 people and exposing them to torture and ill treatment; as well as targeting women and LGBTQ+ people with rape, gang rape, and sexual and gender-based violence in Sagaing Region, Karen, Chin, Karenni, Kachin, Shan states, and across the country. The military is continuing to violate the right

to humanitarian assistance by imposing arbitrary restrictions and brutalizing aid workers. Since toppling an elected government nearly five years ago, the military has made Myanmar virtually uninhabitable for our fellow people — including youth, religious minorities, and disabled people. Such a catastrophe has left hundreds of thousands of them with no choice but to seek refuge in increasingly precarious conditions.

Rakhine State is no exception to this man-made tragedy. In its limited areas of control, the Burmese military is continuing to confine hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Rohingya in concentration camps, tighten its policies of apartheid and genocide, and intensify its airstrikes against civilians in the multiethnic region. In other areas, a human rights-based approach to governance unfortunately remains nonexistent: despite its rhetoric, the Arakan Army is continuing to target the Rohingya minority – including the elderly, women and children – with killings, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, forced recruitment, forced labor, sexual violence, and starvation; no form of violence excuses this cruel collective punishment. There are also growing reports of the AA stealing Rohingya-owned lands and converting them to villages for the ethnic Rakhine majority in a widespread and systematic manner. The ongoing genocide is – once again – forcing the Rohingya to flee to squalid refugee camps and be trafficked over land and sea.

History is thus repeating itself in Rakhine State and across Myanmar. For decades, the country has demonstrated how human rights violations can escalate to mass atrocities and become detrimental to sustainable peace and stability. In this context, we remind the world that the Myanmar junta's sham elections will only entrench division: they do not represent the will of the Myanmar people, who remain committed to building a truly inclusive and people-led federal democracy. Alongside our fellow civil society, we urge the international community to denounce the junta's sham election this month; reject its illegitimate results; impose targeted sanctions and accountability on the junta and other perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide; protect all civilians; and pursue measures to abolish the root causes of the catastrophe that has long imperiled the country. Ending impunity is the only way forward.



IRELAND'S AMBASSADOR ASSESSES HIS COUNTRY'S CONCERNS OVER THE MYANMAR CRISIS

Ireland Ambassador Pat Bourne has shown a great deal of interest in Myanmar affairs over the years. In the following interview with Mizzima, the Bangkok-based envoy discusses the crisis in the country and the planned election set to begin on 28 December.

Mizzima: The world appears to be facing a crisis of democracy. But one country is in a particularly serious crisis as its military junta gears up for an election in December and January. How do you view the Myanmar junta's election?

The Irish Government and our EU partners remain gravely concerned about the ongoing and deepening crisis in Myanmar, which was precipitated by the Myanmar military's attempted coup in February 2021. After almost five years now of violence, the humanitarian situation is worse than ever.

We have consistently called for an end to violence and repression of the Myanmarese people by the military, release of all political prisoners and a process of inclusive dialogue, all of which are essential steps if there is to be any meaningful prospect of a return to peace and stability in Myanmar.

These are core components of the ASEAN 5 Point consensus, which was adopted by the members of ASEAN soon after the attempted coup and which remains relevant and valid today. Our focus will continue to be on exerting our influence to ensure progress on these principles. At this time, it is clear that the conditions for free or fair or inclusive elections do not exist in Myanmar. UN experts and other commentators have warned that proceeding with elections in the current circumstances could exacerbate tensions and bring about an increase in violence, and I see this as a

real issue of concern.

How do you view ASEAN's approach to post-coup Myanmar?

The EU has been supportive of ASEAN's efforts to respond to the crisis in Myanmar. The 5 Point Consensus which was adopted by ASEAN in the aftermath of the attempted coup in early 2021 remains relevant and valid, despite the fact that the junta in Myanmar has demonstrated little or no commitment to its implementation.

What can Europe do to respond to the Myanmar crisis?

The EU has sought to make a positive and constructive contribution since the crisis erupted in February 2021. The EU has given its full political support to the efforts of ASEAN to promote the 5 Point Consensus, and we have supported also the practical ongoing efforts of successive ASEAN Chairs and Special Envoys during the terms of office of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia and Malaysia. Importantly, the EU has imposed and is implementing a robust and effective sanctions framework against the coup-plotters and the Myanmar military and associated organisations and individuals. The EU and its Member States, including Ireland, have also been responding with significant humanitarian aid, supporting the UN response to the crisis, other international organisations and international and local civil society. Ireland has provided many millions of Euros to support life-saving programmes, including very significant funding following the earthquake in March.

A number of countries in Europe are turning more inward-looking and cutting back on foreign aid. How might this be affecting Myanmar?

I would not describe what is happening in Europe as 'turning inward'. One important reality is that the EU has, on its doorstep, a conflict raging in Ukraine

triggered by an illegal invasion of that country by Putin's Russia. Putin poses a serious threat to Europe and it is right and appropriate that European countries, most especially those that share borders with Russia, or neighbour Ukraine, should feel duty-bound to ensure that Ukraine is supported, and that their own national security is defended adequately. These issues are not totally divorced from each other. Putin's Russia is also a major provider of support, arms and expertise to the junta in Myanmar. Moreover, notwithstanding these deepening global challenges to the rule of law, sovereignty and peace, Europe remains by far the most substantial and effective contributor to humanitarian, development, democracy and human rights efforts across the world. Ireland, I am proud to say, is not only maintaining its levels of spending on aid, but is increasing its expenditure on these important objectives and has recommitted itself to achievement of the 0.7% spending goal. We continue to care about the people of Myanmar, and we will continue to respond to their call for help.

Do you have any personal reflections on Myanmar?

It is a source of great sadness to me that I have not had an opportunity to visit Myanmar. All of my interactions have been with exiles and migrants, living here in Thailand, and all of them have been inspiring because of the way they demonstrate such extraordinary resilience, passion and determination. I hope I will be able to visit the country someday, and to see all of those exiles back home again, and living in peace and stability in a democratic and inclusive country.



SBC, FAIR FINANCE AND JFM WELCOME SWEDISH PENSION FUND AP7'S EXCLUSION OF FOUR COMPANIES LINKED TO MYANMAR MILITARY

The Seventh Swedish National Pension Fund (AP7) announced yesterday that it is excluding the Indian arms companies Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the Thai oil company PTT Exploration and Production (PTTEP), and the Japanese investment giant Sumitomo Corporation, according to Justice for Myanmar in a press release dated 9 December.

BEL and HAL have sold weapons and other equipment to the military in Myanmar, including after the military coup attempt. PTTEP operates two offshore gas projects with the military junta, which are a major source of its foreign revenue. Sumitomo Corporation is a joint operator of the junta-controlled telecoms company MPT, which has installed a commercialised version of China's Great Firewall in its data centres and collaborates with the junta for digital surveillance.

The four companies were named in a joint review of Swedish pension fund holdings linked to the Myanmar military published by the Swedish Burma Committee

(SBC), Justice For Myanmar (JFM) and Fair Finance Guide in November. It found that Swedish pension funds invest SEK 4.6 billion (US\$484 million) in 12 companies that support the military junta in Myanmar. By far the largest investment is made by AP7, where six million Swedes have their pension money.

SBC, JFM and Fair Finance Guide continue to call on AP7 to live up to its human rights commitments and take immediate action to cut all ties to the military in Myanmar. The fund should demand that the companies it invests in end all business relationships with the junta. If the companies are not willing to terminate their business relationships with the junta, the fund should divest their holdings in these companies.

"We welcome the decision to exclude these companies. Swedish pension money should not be invested in companies that sell weapons to or fund the Myanmar military junta. However, the pension funds must take further action against all the companies we named and ensure no funds are being invested in companies that are arming or financing a brutal and illegal junta in Myanmar," says Yadanar Maung, spokesperson for Justice For Myanmar.

The fund also announced that it is introducing a new risk-based approach when it comes to companies that are criticised for serious abuses and environmental destruction. This means that it can act in many more cases instead of referring to the fact that the company has not been convicted in court or singled out by the UN.

"This is exactly how you have to behave as an investor to land on the right foot in sustainability work. Now the fund must take action and act against the other companies that support the brutal junta in Myanmar," says Jakob König at Fair Finance Guide.

"We welcome today's announcement. I also hope that the Swedish government will reevaluate the decision to phase out aid to the democracy movement in Myanmar. Swedish money should not go to companies that support the military junta, but we should support those who risk their lives to stand up to the junta and fight for democracy," says Kristina Jelmin, executive at the Swedish Burma Committee.



WORLD BANK PROVIDES DISMAL OUTLOOK FOR MYANMAR'S ECONOMY

Myanmar's economy remains deeply constrained, according to the World Bank's latest Myanmar Economic Monitor released on 6 December.

The group indicates the economy is continuing to grapple with the combined effects of the March 2025 earthquake, intensifying conflict, weak domestic demand, and chronic power shortages.

According to the report, economic activity has been slow to rebound, with only 45 percent of firms directly affected by the quake having returned to pre-disaster operating levels.

Capital-intensive sectors show varied impacts. Manufacturing is struggling with ongoing production disruptions, physical damage to factories, and higher raw-material costs. The agricultural sector faces significant crop losses, reduced access to irrigation due to infrastructure damage, and difficulties acquiring farming inputs. Both sectors continue to experience challenges in obtaining financial support for rebuilding and resuming full operations.

The Bank warns that recovery remains "fragile and uneven," with businesses and households facing persistent obstacles.

Household vulnerability has sharply worsened, the report indicates. A national phone survey conducted

between September and November found that 16 percent of households were affected by the earthquake, rising to nearly 60 percent in the hardest-hit areas of Mandalay, Sagaing, and Naypyitaw.

Consumption fell nearly 2 percent nationwide, and poverty increased markedly in areas closest to the epicentre. Only half of affected households have begun repairs, and those living nearer to the epicentre were significantly more likely to receive donor support.

Losses of homes, assets, and jobs, especially in rural areas, have pushed families into deeper insecurity, while informal employment has risen in major cities.

Looking ahead, the World Bank forecasts a modest 3 percent economic rebound in FY2026/27. Growth is expected to be driven by reconstruction efforts, targeted assistance to affected sectors, and increased public infrastructure investment.

However, the Bank cautions that financing shortfalls, labour scarcity, weak demand, and long-standing structural bottlenecks will continue to limit the pace and depth of Myanmar's recovery.



DVB FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS FILMMAKERS' STRUGGLES AND ON-THE-GROUND VOICES

The 2025 DVB Peacock Film Festival opened on 8 December at Chiang Mai University's Communication Innovation Centre (CIC), attracting more than 250 attendees, including filmmakers, activists and international guests. Organised by the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), the three-day festival is being held under the theme "Giving Voice to the Voiceless."

The opening day drew a full hall as audiences watched documentary films made by DVB Short Docs (DSDC) finalists, Citizen Journalists (CJ Shorts), and feature-length documentaries that highlight people's lives, struggles and hopes across Myanmar. Many films were shot inside the country by local contributors who wanted to share stories of truth from the ground.

Festival organiser Ma Chan Thiri Soe told Mizzima that entries for this year have increased despite major security challenges inside Myanmar.

"Filmmakers faced many difficulties – tight security, risks in cities, and delays because of the coming election," she said. "But they still tried their best to send their stories. We also worked hard to make sure the festival could happen, even with budget constraints."

The festival will continue until 10 December, featuring film screenings, workshops, special international showings, and an awards ceremony. Documentary themes include human rights violations, justice during political transition, displacement, and the resilience of conflict-affected communities.



Photo: Supplied

HRM OFFERS ITS 2026 HUMAN RIGHTS PREDICTIONS FOR MYANMAR

On 10 December, Human Rights Myanmar (HRM) released a report detailing its predictions for human rights in Myanmar in 2026. The short report leads off with an analysis of the accuracy of its 2025 predictions as the year comes to an end. It then moves on to what 2026 may offer in terms of the ongoing conflict, political confrontations, civic space, and human rights.

The text of the HRM report is as follows.

Past predictions vs. reality

Prediction 1 (Correct): Transitional challenges for NUG and ethnic groups: As resistance groups consolidated control in areas like Northern Shan and Sagaing, reports emerged of fragmented legal systems and occasional power abuses. While the NUG attempted to enforce codes of conduct, governance remained inconsistent and often male-dominated at the local level.

Prediction 2 (Correct): Escalating military atrocity crimes: The military continued relentless airstrikes, particularly in Rakhine and Sagaing. Collective punishment tactics, including village burnings, intensified throughout 2025 as the military launched clearance operations to secure areas for the December elections.

Prediction 3 (Correct): Deterioration of civic space: The military activated the Cybersecurity Law (2025) and deployed Chinese surveillance tech to monitor communications. Myanmar solidified its status as a global hub for opium production and cyber scams, generating illicit revenue to offset sanctions.

Prediction 4 (Delayed): Impact of ICC actions: While the ICC judges had not issued a warrant by late 2025, an Argentinian court issued a historic arrest warrant in February. However, this legal pressure did not deter China from deepening engagement with the military ahead of the elections.

Prediction 5 (Mixed): Exiled civil society under pressure: Thailand unexpectedly granted legal work rights to long-term refugees, easing some deportation fears. However, the prediction on funding was accurate as severe cuts by major donors like USAID and Sweden forced many CSOs and media outlets to downsize.

Some of these 2025 predictions will continue in 2026. The military's so-called "election", due to start on 31 December 2025 and continue through the middle of January 2026, will also lead to further developments. The following analysis forecasts human rights implications for 2026 if the military installs a proxy civilian government similar to the transitions of 1974 and 2010.

Prediction 1 for 2026: From martial law to "lawfare"

The inauguration of a proxy civilian government will mark a shift from emergency decrees to "lawfare", where the judicial system is used more systematically against opponents.

Mirroring the 1974 reforms, the government will move away from more obvious violence to primarily enforcing laws like the Counter Terrorism Law (2014) and Penal Code (1861) through highly dependent courts. This strategy projects due process and a sort of normalcy while criminalising dissent. It will replace arbitrary detention with politicised criminal convictions that carry the weight of legal finality, undermining rights to fair trial and liberty. It will also give proxy civilian leaders the excuse that they do not want to "interfere with judicial independence".

2. The Thai model of repression

Seeking international legitimacy, the proxy government will likely shift from mass incarceration to strategic targeting and disproportionate sentencing.

Tactics will mirror Thailand, where specific targets receive massively disproportionate sentences instead of filling prisons with thousands of protesters. Courts will hand out decades-long sentences for minor offences like social media posts, creating a chilling effect that limits dissent without the logistical cost of mass detention. Furthermore, while detaining thousands shows an illegitimate government, imprisoning a few "only" shows an authoritarian government.

3. Automated warfare and sustained conflict

The post-election landscape will not see de-escalation but an intensification of automated warfare fuelled by renewed foreign support.

Resembling the 2010 resumption of Kachin fighting, the 2026 election will embolden military campaigns rather than seek compromise. A disputed election victory allows the military to normalise relations with China, facilitating transfers of more weapons, advanced drones, and loitering munitions. This technological escalation threatens the right to life by increasing the likelihood of indiscriminate attacks and removing humans from the killing process.

4. Technical enclosure of the digital space

To maintain economic legitimacy, the incoming proxy government will replace crude internet shutdowns with advanced surgical censorship.

Unlike blunt shutdowns, the government will utilise the Cybersecurity Law (2025) and new Deep Packet Inspection technology to block encrypted traffic and VPNs while keeping other digital tech operational. People's attempts to access blocked mass platforms like Facebook will reduce as the public splinters into different spaces. This mimics the Chinese model, where access to independent information is throttled while the digital economy functions, severely infringing upon privacy and access to information.

5. Integrated online and offline surveillance

The 2025 election and census provided data to upgrade legacy control mechanisms into a comprehensive surveillance network.

Authorities will integrate the Person Scrutiny and Monitoring System with biometric SIM registration, effectively digitising the SPDC-era guest registration system. Local officials and police will cross-reference physical checks against central digital records to screen people and conduct targeted raids based on data discrepancies, negating privacy and restricting movement for anyone wishing to reside anonymously.

6. Division of civil society

A proxy government will trigger some return of international aid, forcing a split in civil society similar to the post-2010 transition.

Strict enforcement of the Organisation Registration Law (2022) will compel groups to register as service providers or face prosecution. Some civil society organisations will choose to register and change their work to do so, while others will choose their independence and remain excluded. As in 2010, donors engaging with the government will likely, intentionally or otherwise, compel civil society to sanitise development

work, stripping rights-based approaches. This policy undermines freedom of association and excludes organisations that refuse to remove rights from their work.

7. Declining voices due to aid withdrawal

The simultaneous withdrawal of major donors threatens to dismantle the independent media and civil society infrastructure.

With USAID funding having ceased and Sweden phasing out assistance by June 2026, the pillars of support for exile media and independent civil society groups are collapsing. This loss of funding will drive a sharp decline in independent reporting and information flows about what is happening in Myanmar, particularly outside the mainstream. The impact is concrete, with women's groups losing safe houses and rights defenders losing digital security, infringing upon freedom of expression and ceding narrative space to state propaganda.

8. Diplomatic normalisation and transnational repression

An "elected" proxy government will provide regional neighbours with diplomatic cover to re-engage, treating opposition members as criminals rather than political actors.

Mirroring 2010, this shift facilitates informal transnational repression where neighbours hand over dissidents without due process. The Myanmar government will demand the return of individuals, treating them not as refugees fleeing a coup but as criminals fleeing a democracy threatening the right to asylum and violating non-refoulement principles.

9. Entrenchment of nationalist supremacy

As violent control dissipates, it will be replaced by administrative systems prioritising Bamar Buddhist male interests once again, while undermining women and minorities.

Shifting to social engineering, the proxy government will strengthen the Bamar Buddhist man as the central figure of national identity. Revitalising Thein Sein-era approach seen in the Race and Religion Protection Laws and using the Constitution to exclude women from high office, the regime will upgrade its newly digitally-powered citizenship scrutiny to marginalise non-Bamar groups, stripping them of legal status without physical force.

10. Platform fatigue and algorithmic surrender

Major technology platforms are expected to reduce their crisis response resources as the conflict drags on and the regime presents a civilian face to the world.

Companies like Meta and Google may treat the new administration as a legitimate government, which could lead to a rollback of the special policies put in place after the 2017 Rohingya genocide and the 2021 coup. This platform fatigue, combined with the removal of ban designations for military entities now rebranded as civilian ministries, will likely reopen the digital space to coordinated attacks, doxxing, and propaganda unchecked by algorithmic safeguards, threatening the right to safety and non-discrimination.

Recommendations

The international community must move beyond condemnation and take specific action to counter these trends.

- For ASEAN and UN Member States: Refuse to recognise the 2025 elections or the resulting government as legitimate. Do not use the transition to a nominal civilian administration to normalise relations or ease sanctions. Diplomatic engagement must be conditional on verifiable progressive policy changes rather than procedural milestones.
- For arms-supplying States: Do not use non-credible elections to justify resuming or expanding military transfers. The installation of a proxy government does not alter regime illegitimacy or absolve suppliers of complicity. Halt transfers of lethal aid surveillance infrastructure and advanced weaponry enabling automated targeting of civilians.
- For international donors: Maintain funding for rights-based approaches despite restrictions. Resist pressure to "depoliticise" aid or strip human rights language from proposals, as this abandons civil society. Ensure support reaches organisations refusing to register with the regime.
- For technology companies: Sustain resources to remove military propaganda and coordinated attacks. Do not scale down content moderation under the false assumption of stability. Continue protecting at-risk users and resisting regime censorship attempts.



Photo: AFP

CHINA START-UPS LOSE GLOBAL CAPITAL AMID U.S.-CHINA TENSIONS

SUN LEE

China today is getting a taste of its own medicine. For years, the West has grown increasingly uncomfortable with Beijing's assertiveness both in the actions of its government and in the sharp rhetoric of its diplomats. Alongside this, allegations of Chinese hackers stealing technologies from Western companies have only deepened mistrust. Yet, paradoxically, China's booming start-up ecosystem had long benefited from heavy foreign investments, drawing billions in capital and expertise from overseas.

Now, that very lifeline has backfired. As geopolitical tensions escalate, foreign investors are pulling back, leaving Chinese start-ups starved of dollars and struggling to survive.

The story of China's start-ups is one of meteoric rise followed by a sharp fall. In 2018, nearly 50% of start-up funding came from overseas investors, providing

not just capital but also access to global expertise, networks, and advanced technologies. Fast forward to 2025, and the picture is starkly different: foreign funding has collapsed to just 10% of total investment, amounting to \$6.6 billion in the first eight months of the year. This decline is not merely financial; it represents a fundamental shift in China's innovation landscape.

The deterioration of relations between Washington and Beijing has created a hostile environment for cross-border investment. American venture capital firms, once eager to back Chinese unicorns, have retreated under pressure from sanctions, export controls, and political scrutiny. Restrictions on technology transfer, especially in sensitive fields like semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology have left Chinese start-ups unable to access cutting-edge tools essential for scaling their projects.

For instance, AI companies such as Z.ai (formerly Zhipu AI), a spinoff from Tsinghua University, are preparing for IPOs with domestic backing rather than foreign capital. While this ensures survival, it deprives them of the global partnerships that once fuelled their growth.

Beijing has stepped in to fill the funding vacuum, but this comes at a cost. Local governments and state-owned banks are now major financiers of start-ups. This state-led model prioritizes political loyalty and strategic alignment over market efficiency, often steering companies toward projects that serve national goals rather than commercial viability. The result is inefficiency, reduced competitiveness, and a chilling effect on entrepreneurial risk-taking.

Strict policies such as heavy-handed regulation of data, censorship of online platforms, and restrictions on cross-border collaboration further stifle innovation. Instead of empowering start-ups, these measures trap them in a bureaucratic maze, limiting their ability to experiment and expand globally.

The numbers tell a sobering story of how deeply the U.S.-China rift has damaged the country's start-up ecosystem. Foreign venture capital funding, which once accounted for nearly half of all investment in 2018, has plummeted to less than 10% by 2025. According to PitchBook, overall venture capital investment in China fell by 36.7% in 2024 compared to the previous year, amounting to just \$40.2 billion. At the same time, domestic demand remains weak, with oversupply and sluggish consumption compounding the crisis. This sharp contraction has left many start-ups cash-starved, forcing them to scale back their ambitions or shut down entirely. Unicorns that once symbolized China's technological prowess are now struggling to survive in a closed ecosystem, deprived of the global capital and collaboration that once fuelled their rise.

Perhaps the most damaging consequence of the U.S.-China rift is the loss of access to advanced technology. Export controls on high-end semiconductors, AI chips, and biotech equipment mean that Chinese start-ups cannot compete on equal footing with their global peers. Even with domestic funding, they lack the tools to innovate at the frontier. This technological isolation threatens to slow China's progress in industries that are critical to its future competitiveness.

China's start-up ecosystem is becoming self-contained, but not in a way that fosters resilience. Instead, it risks stagnation. Without foreign capital and collaboration, start-ups lose the diversity of ideas and global exposure that drive innovation. Government-led funding may keep them afloat, but it cannot replicate the dynamism of open markets.

The irony is that Beijing's strict policies, intended to shield domestic companies from foreign influence, are harming the very start-ups they aim to protect. By tightening control, the government is undermining the entrepreneurial spirit that once made China a hub of innovation.

Chinese start-ups are caught in a paradox: they are too important for Beijing to let fail, yet too constrained by policy and geopolitics to thrive. The collapse of foreign funding and the loss of access to advanced technology have created a survival crisis. Unless China reopens its ecosystem to global collaboration and loosens its grip on start-ups, its unicorns may remain dollar-starved and innovation-starved for years to come.

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



RSF SAYS ISRAEL KILLED HIGHEST NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS AGAIN THIS YEAR

Reporters Without Borders said on 9 December that Israel was responsible for nearly half of all journalists killed this year worldwide, with 29 Palestinian reporters slain by its forces in Gaza.

In its annual report, the Paris-based media freedom group said the total number of journalists killed reached 67 globally this year, up from 66 killed in 2024.

Israeli forces accounted for 43 percent of the total, making them "the worst enemy of journalists", RSF said in its report, which documented deaths over 12 months from December 2024.

The most deadly single attack was a so-called "double-tap" strike on a hospital in south Gaza on August 25, which killed five journalists, including two contributors to international news agencies Reuters and the Associated Press.

In total, since the start of the Gaza war in October 2023, after the Hamas attack on Israel, nearly 220 journalists have died, making Israel the biggest killer of journalists worldwide for three years running, RSF data shows.

In response to the accusation, the Israeli military told AFP that it "does not deliberately target journalists" and noted that "being in an active combat zone carries inherent risks."

It also said that there have been "dozens of examples of journalists who are active in terrorist organisations in the Gaza Strip."

'Not stray bullets'

Foreign reporters are still unable to enter Gaza --

unless they are in tightly controlled tours organised by the Israeli military -- despite calls from media groups and press freedom organisations for access.

The RSF annual report also said that 2025 was the deadliest year in Mexico in at least three years, with nine journalists killed, despite pledges from left-wing President Claudia Sheinbaum to protect them.

War-racked Ukraine (three journalists killed) and Sudan (four journalists killed) are the other most dangerous countries for reporters, according to RSF.

The overall number of deaths last year is down from the peak of 142 journalists killed in 2012, linked largely to the Syrian civil war. It is also below the average since 2003 of around 80 killed per year.

RSF editorial director Anne Bocande noted a growing tendency to "smear" journalists as a way to "justify" the crime of targeting them.

"These are not stray bullets. This is a deliberate targeting of journalists because they inform the world about what's happening on the ground," she told AFP.

The RSF annual report also counts the number of journalists imprisoned for their work, with China (121), Russia (48) and Myanmar (47) the most repressive countries, RSF figures showed.

As of December 1, 2025, 503 journalists were detained in 47 countries, the report said.

Other organisations use different qualifiers to calculate journalist deaths. According to UNESCO, 91 journalists were killed in 2025.

AFP



GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

"Myanmar is in the age of digital and technology," says researcher Myat Su Thwe, speaking to the Insight Myanmar Podcast, "and we resist mainly by using digital tools."

She speaks as a young social scientist trained in human rights, joined by her co-author Kyaw Lwin, a socio-legal scholar specializing in digital policy. Their conversation centers on their joint study, "Digital Governance in Exile," which examines how the National Unity Government (NUG), operating underground after the 2021 military coup, delivers state functions through technology. Both identify the NUG as a legitimate authority born of elected representatives, yet they analyze it critically through what they call a "socio-technical framework," asking whether its online ministries truly meet people's needs in a society fragmented by war.

Myat Su Thwe begins by explaining why digital solutions become essential. After the coup, civil servants joined the Civil Disobedience Movement, offices closed, and travel between regions became dangerous. In this vacuum the NUG attempted to sustain basic services, like health, education, and finance, through the internet. "Governments around the world are transforming into e-governments," she says, "so we must also do so, but

within our capacity." The researchers therefore focus on three ministries: Education, Health, and Planning, Finance and Investment. These agencies, she notes, represent both humanitarian lifelines and experiments in governance.

Kyaw Lwin expands on the theoretical lens. Their study views every platform through social inclusion, language accessibility, and digital literacy. "We want to be sure all are included and no one is left behind," he says. Technical design alone cannot guarantee success; systems must integrate Myanmar's cultural and linguistic diversity while protecting users from surveillance. To explore these dimensions, the authors interviewed CDM civil servants, volunteer engineers, and residents inside and outside the country.

Both recall that Myanmar's journey toward digital government predates the coup, but the record remains incomplete. Myat Su Thwe traces the real beginning to the COVID-19 lockdowns when ministries first experimented with home-based learning and remote work. Kyaw Lwin situates it deeper in history: the liberalization of telecommunications in 2013 opened the market to Telenor and Ooredoo; the Ministry of Communications drafted ICT master plans; e-government indices briefly improved. Yet these reforms coexisted with the 2004 Electronic Transactions Law and the Telecommunications Act, which the state continues to use to criminalize online speech. He remembers proposing in parliament that these laws be amended to protect expression rather than punish criticism. "We need to reform the law comprehensively," he insists, "to link legal modernization with digital advancement." All progress abruptly halted, he adds, when the military seized power and divided the country into conflict zones.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/11/22/episode-437-ghosts-in-the-machine>



Election campaign billboards.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER SIGNALS ENDURING MILITARY ROLE IN POLITICS AFTER ELECTIONS

Myanmar junta leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing in a speech to Tatmadaw personnel under the Yangon Regional Command and their families, reaffirmed the military's central role in national politics, signalling that the armed forces intend to retain power even after the December-January elections.

The remarks, reported in the junta-controlled *Global New Light of Myanmar*, outline a vision of continued military oversight over the country's political institutions and legislative process.

In the address, Min Aung Hlaing asserted that military's central role in Myanmar's post-independence history. He went on to emphasise that "if Tatmadaw members and families know this history correctly," they would understand the military's "role and position" within Myanmar's political landscape.

He emphasised the military's decades-long self-defined mandate to safeguard "non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty," known in the military's propaganda as the Three Main National Causes. With this, he framed military intervention as a stabilising force across successive eras and governments.

The junta leader also linked the upcoming elections to the need for parliamentarians who can "cooperate closely with Tatmadaw," explicitly urging voters to choose candidates aligned with military priorities and supportive of the Three Main National Causes.

He underscored that members of parliament must possess the "appropriate level of education" and sufficient legal knowledge to amend or repeal laws in ways that protect national interests. Statements such as this are widely seen as meaning the military's interests and as mechanisms to restrict opposition participation.

Min Aung Hlaing framed the polls as the completion of the "second page of the State," establishing continuity between the junta's current transitional claims and a future political order still anchored in military authority.

He reiterated the military's enduring responsibility for national defence and insisted it must remain "fit for fight," signalling no retreat from militarised governance despite international pressure.

The speech comes as the junta seeks legitimacy in the face of armed resistance, economic decline, and global condemnation. It serves to reinforce expectations that the elections will not diminish the military's entrenched political dominance.



People mourn the deaths of their family members.
Photo: AFP

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS EXPLODE OVER HORRIFIC DEADLY HOSPITAL ATTACK

The most emotionally charged topic on Myanmar social media last week was the Myanmar junta airstrike on Mrauk-U General Hospital in Rakhine State on the night of 10 December.

Posts describing heavy damage to the hospital spread rapidly across Facebook, Telegram and X, with users sharing photos, videos and eyewitness accounts. Many said almost the entire hospital compound was affected, forcing patients, doctors and civilians to flee.

The fact that the incident occurred on International Human Rights Day intensified public outrage and made the topic trend widely among human rights groups and activist networks.

Typical user-style comments include:

"A hospital is not a battlefield. This is a crime."

"Patients, children, doctors where can they be safe now?"

"December 10 is Human Rights Day. This shows how little rights matter here."

"The world must pay attention to this."

Many users also shared calls for international action, accountability and independent investigations. Some posts linked the airstrike to broader patterns of attacks on civilian infrastructure, while others expressed deep concern about access to medical care in conflict areas. Rakhine-based pages reported fear among residents that health services may collapse completely if such attacks continue.

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.