

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

A photograph of a woman and a young girl standing in front of a tented settlement, likely a refugee camp. The woman is holding a baby wrapped in a yellow cloth and a plastic bag of green vegetables. The girl is wearing a blue and floral dress. The background shows a hazy landscape with tents and a flagpole.

**Gambia accuses  
Myanmar military of  
targeted genocide  
against Rohingya**

**International Court of  
Justice Hearing**

**ELECTION UPDATE**

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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.



# BAD TIMING

As the Philippines assumes the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2026, the bloc's handling of the crisis in Myanmar remains a challenge – and already there have been missteps. Since the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, which ousted the country's elected government and unleashed widespread violence and humanitarian suffering, ASEAN has struggled to craft an effective response that balances its core principles with the urgency of the crisis. The region-wide association's longstanding norms of non-interference and consensus decision-making have constrained its ability to take decisive action against the junta's repression, leaving the crisis to fester and exposing deep divisions among member states about how far ASEAN should go in addressing it.

ASEAN's official roadmap for addressing Myanmar, the so-called Five-Point Consensus agreed in 2021, outlines steps including an immediate halt to violence, constructive dialogue among all parties, the appointment of a special envoy, humanitarian assistance, and visits to Myanmar by the envoy and delegations. While ASEAN has repeatedly reaffirmed this consensus and maintained Myanmar's representation in a non-political capacity at regional meetings, its implementation has yielded little progress on the ground, with the junta continuing to wield power, escalate attacks on civilians, and plan elections widely seen as illegitimate.

Under Philippine leadership, ASEAN will have to confront the reality that the existing framework has not delivered peace or meaningful dialogue, and critics both inside and outside the region argue that sticking to weak, declaratory diplomacy risks undermining the bloc's credibility.

There has been outcry by 99 CSOs who recently signed a letter expressing dismay at the visit of Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro's to Naypyidaw on 6 January and her meeting with the coup leader of Myanmar's military junta in the midst of their "sham" election (See our story in this issue of Mizzima Weekly).

There are mounting calls for ASEAN to go beyond symbolic statements and

consider more robust measures such as tighter diplomatic pressure on the junta, expanded humanitarian access that bypasses military control, and inclusion of democratic forces and civil society voices in any negotiation process. These proposals reflect a deepening frustration with the junta's intransigence and a recognition that ASEAN's traditional mechanisms have been inadequate.

Yet the Philippines' approach must carefully navigate ASEAN's internal dynamics. Member states vary in their strategic interests and relations with Myanmar's military regime, meaning strong punitive steps could strain consensus or risk fracturing regional unity. Manila has publicly signaled its intent to pursue a "constructive, principled, and inclusive" approach to supporting peace, stability, and reconciliation, anchored in the existing Five-Point Consensus, and to sustain ASEAN's role as a facilitator of dialogue rather than an enforcer of outcomes.

Main concerns for ASEAN under the Philippines' chairmanship revolve around balancing respect for sovereignty with the pressing humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Myanmar and preserving ASEAN's centrality as a regional actor. There are fears that if ASEAN fails to demonstrate meaningful progress on Myanmar, its legitimacy both within Southeast Asia and on the global stage could suffer, weakening its ability to manage other geopolitical tensions such as the South China Sea disputes and great-power competition. Moreover, the ongoing conflict fuels transnational problems - including human trafficking, drug smuggling, and displacement - that directly affect neighbouring states, making the crisis not just a bilateral issue but a regional security concern.

Ultimately, how the Philippines steers ASEAN's response to Myanmar will test its diplomatic acumen and the bloc's capacity to adapt its consensus-based model to crises that demand both principled leadership and pragmatic solutions. Judging by the Philippine delegation visit to Myanmar at the beginning of this month, they have got off on the wrong foot.

## EDITORIAL

**mizzima**  
WEEKLY

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

**Managing Editor**  
Thaw Zin Tun

**Network Engineer**  
Wai Min Han

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

**General Manager**  
No No Lin

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

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

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

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

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Cover photo of Rohingya children in a refugee camp in Bangladesh by AFP





Rohingya refugees flee the Myanmar military onslaught in 2017.  
Photo: AFP

# GAMBIA ACCUSES MYANMAR MILITARY OF TARGETED GENOCIDE AGAINST ROHINGYA

**F**ormal hearings on the merits of the Rohingya genocide case opened at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) 12 January, with Gambia's Justice Minister Dawda Jallow detailing how Myanmar's military intentionally targeted the minority group for destruction.

The minister added that Myanmar's original representative in the case, former State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, has since been detained by the military junta that seized power and remains deprived of her freedom.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who commanded the army during the genocide, has since assumed power as head of the Military Commission, claiming that violence and atrocities were widespread nationwide and affected all ethnic groups.

"It is deeply tragic that Myanmar remains caught in a vicious cycle of atrocities and impunity. To this day, no one has been held accountable for crimes committed against the Rohingya," Gambia's Justice Minister Dawda Jallow said.

"This is not merely a question of international law; it concerns real people, real events and an entire community. The Rohingya in Myanmar were targeted for destruction," Jallow told the judges.

Gambia brought the case alleging that Myanmar breached the 1948 Convention on the Prevention of Genocide during the 2017 atrocities against the Rohingya.

Today, an estimated 1.17 million Rohingya live in camps across 8,000 acres in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district.

A final decision in the case could take months or even years. While the International Court of Justice (ICJ) cannot enforce its rulings, a victory for Gambia could increase political pressure on Myanmar.

The West African nation of Gambia filed the case with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2019, a court that adjudicates disputes between states.



Ko Ko Hlaing, left, leader the Myanmar delegation at the ICJ. Photo: AFP

## ANALYSIS &amp; INSIGHT



Photo: Supplied

## FOUNDING OF 'REPUBLIC OF KAWTHOOLEI' SPARKS CRITICISM IN KAREN CIRCLES

**T**he leader of the Kawthoolei Army (KTLA), General Saw Nerdah Bomya, declared the establishment of the "Republic of Kawthoolei" and the formation of a Government of Kawthoolei on Karen National Day, 5 January 2026, appointing himself as president.

The announcement has drawn sharp criticism and rejection from the Karen National Union (KNU), one of Myanmar's oldest ethnic resistance organizations, highlighting growing fragmentation within Karen armed movements.

Saw Nerdah Bomya is the son of the late Saw Bo Mya, a prominent and long-time leader of the KNU. He previously served as chief commander of the Karen National Defence Organization (KNDO), the KNU's armed wing. However, his relationship with the KNU deteriorated after KNDO troops under his command were accused of killing Myanmar military road workers in 2022. The KNU dismissed him after he failed to attend internal disciplinary proceedings, according to KNU sources.



Following his split from the KNU, Saw Nerdah Bomya formed the Kawthoolei Army (KTLA) on 16 July 2022. The group is primarily based in the southern part of Myawaddy Township, near the Thai-Myanmar border, an area marked by competing armed actors and strategic trade routes.

Reacting to the declaration, a KNU official at the ground level told BBC Burmese that the KTLA lacks both territorial control and popular support. "Their group is about one village, and most of them are abroad. People will not recognize it, including Karen people," the official said, adding that the KTLA has limited activity inside Myanmar and minimal participation in operations against the military junta.

The KNU formally distanced itself from the declaration in a statement issued on 8 January, denying any involvement and emphasizing the distinction between the two organizations. The statement said

the KTLA's actions do not reflect the objectives of the Karen national revolution or the realities on the ground. It added that the move contradicts the values and norms guiding the KNU's vision of nation-building and warned that the misuse of the name "Kawthoolei" could undermine Karen national dignity and the broader revolutionary struggle.

The KNU reiterated that it is pursuing the establishment of a representative Kawthoolei State - or federal unit - based on national equality, autonomy, and democratic governance, with inclusive representation across gender and religious lines. According to the organization, this vision has already been shared with diplomats, the public, and the media. The KNU has also reaffirmed its commitment to working alongside other ethnic revolutionary forces to build a federal union through a bottom-up federalism model, emphasizing strong and autonomous states.



ARSA fighters. Photo: ARSA

## Uptick in fighting between ARSA and AA in Rakhine State

Armed clashes between the Rohingya armed group Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Arakan Army (AA) have intensified in Maungdaw Township, a border area adjacent to Bangladesh, according to local sources and regional media. The fighting marks a further escalation of instability in northern Rakhine State, where multiple armed actors are operating amid the Myanmar military's ongoing conflict with ethnic armed organizations.

On 10 January, at least 53 ARSA fighters crossed into Bangladeshi territory following an AA offensive. Bangladeshi authorities arrested the group for illegal entry and transferred them to detention facilities. One injured fighter was taken to the hospital for medical

treatment, officials said.

Despite the clashes being primarily between ARSA and the AA, junta airstrikes and drone attacks were reported in and around Maungdaw during the fighting. Military analysts have suggested that the Myanmar military may be encouraging Rohingya armed groups to resist the AA as part of a broader strategy to weaken the ethnic armed organization's control in northern Rakhine.

Photographs released by the AA show weapons allegedly seized from ARSA fighters, including Myanmar military-issued MA-series rifles and BA-63 firearms. The presence of such weapons has raised questions, as BA-63 rifles are typically distributed to junta-aligned militias, known locally as Pyithu Sit. While no direct clashes between junta troops and Rohingya



The International Court of Justice in the Hague.



armed groups have been reported, analysts say the appearance of standard-issue military weapons in ARSA's possession suggests possible indirect support or supply links.

The AA also announced that it had seized the uniform of ARSA leader Nobi Hossain, along with assault rifles believed to include his personal weapon, most of which were identified as junta-manufactured arms.

The fighting has had cross-border consequences. One day before the ARSA fighters fled into Bangladesh, an 11-year-old Bangladeshi girl was wounded by artillery fire originating from Myanmar. Projectiles reportedly landed in residential wards, prawn farms, and areas along the Naf River in Teknaf Township. In response, the Bangladeshi government summoned Myanmar's ambassador in Dhaka to formally protest the shelling that crossed into its territory.

## **Myanmar junta officials present their case at the International Court of Justice**

Myanmar's military-appointed officials left the country on 10 January to attend hearings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague over allegations of genocide against the Rohingya. The delegation was led by Union Minister at the President's Office No. (2) Ko Ko Hlaing and Legal Affairs Minister Dr. Thidar Oo. According to the court schedule, Myanmar is set to present its arguments in two phases, from 16 to 20 January and again on 28 and 29 January, responding to the case brought by The Gambia under the Genocide Convention.

However, the National Unity Government (NUG), Myanmar's parallel civilian administration formed after the 2021 military coup, rejected the legitimacy of the junta-led delegation. In a statement issued on 9 January, the NUG said the representatives "do not represent or reflect the will of the people of Myanmar." The statement

called for the withdrawal of all preliminary objections previously submitted by the military government and reaffirmed the NUG's acceptance of the ICJ's jurisdiction in the case.

The NUG also acknowledged Myanmar's past failures to protect the Rohingya, Rakhine, and other ethnic minorities, admitting that serious crimes had been committed. It pledged that such abuses would not be repeated, stating that future constitutional reforms would aim to guarantee peaceful coexistence and equal rights for all people in Myanmar. The statement echoed the NUG's earlier efforts in 2021 to have Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun - appointed during the National League for Democracy (NLD) government and still recognized by many in the international community - represent Myanmar at the ICJ.

During the hearings, Ko Ko Hlaing argued that the ICJ would objectively assess the evidence and reach an independent and impartial decision. He claimed that Myanmar's 2008 Constitution guarantees equality for all citizens and asserted that the state does not engage in political or religious discrimination. He also cited alleged shortcomings in The Gambia's submissions while attempting to justify Myanmar's incomplete compliance with earlier provisional measures ordered by the court.

The Gambia, meanwhile, maintained that the situation in Myanmar has worsened since the initial genocide allegations. At the 12 January hearing, Gambian representatives argued that the same military accused of committing genocide against the Rohingya later overthrew the country's elected civilian government. Gambia's Justice Minister Dawda A. Jallow highlighted that Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who commanded the military during the Rohingya atrocities, now leads a regime responsible for widespread violence and abuses against multiple ethnic communities across Myanmar.





Prominent Buddhist monk U Wirathu, whose name has come up during the ICJ genocide court hearing. Photo: AFP

## ICJ HEARING HIGHLIGHT ROLE OF RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA IN ROHINGYA GENOCIDE

A Gambian lawyer has told the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that two Buddhist monks, U Wirathu and Sitagu Sayadaw U Nyanissara, both closely linked to military leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, played a role in supporting the Rohingya genocide, according to U Nay San Lwin, who attended the hearing and spoke to Mizzima.

"Especially in terms of propaganda, there are two monks, U Wirathu and Sitagu Sayadaw. How did they promote and encourage killings? For instance, Sitagu Sayadaw recounted a story in which a king killed 500,000 non-Buddhists, claiming they were not human because they were not Buddhists. How did the Patriotic Association of Myanmar (known as Ma Ba Tha) also spread propaganda and incite violence?" said U Nay San Lwin, co-chairman of the Arakan Rohingya National Council (ARNC).

Sitagu Sayadaw stated in a speech at the Interfaith Marriages Law Victory Ceremony at Thuwunna Stadium in Yangon on 4 October 2015, that killing non-Buddhists is not a sin. In addition, Sayadaw U Wirathu visited conflict zones in 2016, met with military officials, and frequently used derogatory language against the Rohingya to incite violence.

The Gambia filed a lawsuit against Myanmar at the ICJ in 2019 over the Rohingya genocide. The ICJ, the United Nations' highest judicial body based in The

Hague, will hold hearings on the Myanmar military's genocide against the Rohingya minority from 12 to 29 January 2026.

On the first day of the hearing, 12 January, Gambian lawyer Arsalan Suleman argued that the Rohingya are an indigenous people of Myanmar since ancient times, detailed the military's human rights violations and killings against them, and highlighted how propaganda about the Rohingya was spread to the public, including the involvement of U Wirathu, Sitagu Sayadaw, and other Buddhist monks in the violence.

"This hearing has become particularly significant. We will be presenting submissions from witnesses, experts, and the military until Thursday, and if the proceedings conclude by the 29th, we could receive a court ruling this year. That makes this session especially noteworthy," said U Nay San Lwin.

The hearings will be attended by U Ko Ko Hlaing, Minister for the President's Office, and Dr. Thida Oo, Minister of Legal Affairs and Union Attorney-General of Myanmar, representing Myanmar's junta.

The Gambia will present its case from 12 to 15 January, while Myanmar is scheduled to respond on 16, 19, and 20 January. Witness testimony will be conducted behind closed doors from 21 to 23 January, with the hearings resuming from 24 to 29 January.



Rohingya refugee camp. Photo: AFP

# MYANMAR TELLS ICJ ROHINGYA GENOCIDE CLAIMS 'UNSUBSTANTIATED'

**M**yanmar on 16 January dismissed as "unsubstantiated" allegations that it committed genocide against its Rohingya minority, telling the International Court of Justice that its brutal crackdown was a "counter-terrorism operation."

Myanmar is defending itself at the United Nations top court from accusations brought by The Gambia that its actions against the Rohingya breached the 1948 UN Genocide Convention.

"This case will be decided on the basis of proven facts, not unsubstantiated allegations. Emotional language and blurry factual pictures are not a substitute for a rigorous presentation of facts," Ko Ko Hlaing, a minister in the president's office, told the court.

Myanmar has always maintained the 2017 crackdown by its armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, was justified to root out Rohingya insurgents after a series of attacks left a dozen security personnel dead.

"Myanmar was not obliged to remain idle and allow terrorists to have free reign of northern Rakhine states," Hlaing told the judges.

"These attacks were the reasons for the clearance operations, which is a military term referring to counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism operations," added Hlaing.

Judges are hearing three weeks of evidence before deciding whether Myanmar was in breach of the Genocide Convention with its violent actions against the Rohingya.

Under this convention, any state can drag any other before the ICJ, which settles disputes between countries, if it believes a breach has occurred.

A final decision could take months or even years, and while the ICJ has no means of enforcing its decisions, a ruling in favour of The Gambia would heap more political pressure on Myanmar.

"A finding of genocide would place an indelible stain on my country and its people," said Hlaing.

"These proceedings are of the fundamental importance for my country's reputation and future."

- 'Genocidal intent'

Before Myanmar took the stand, representatives from The Gambia laid bare days of harrowing evidence about the crackdown, including mass rape, indiscriminate murder, and torture.

The Rohingya were "targeted for destruction", The Gambia's justice minister told the judges.

"When the court considers... all of the evidence taken together, the only reasonable conclusion to reach is that a genocidal intent permeated and informed Myanmar's myriad of state-led actions against the Rohingya," said Philippe Sands, arguing for The Gambia.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims fled violence by the Myanmar army and Buddhist militias, escaping to neighbouring Bangladesh and bringing harrowing accounts of mass atrocities.

Today, 1.17 million Rohingya live crammed into dilapidated camps spread over 8,000 acres in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.

"Let me also clear that Myanmar is committed to achieving the repatriation to Myanmar of persons from Rakhine State currently living in camps in Bangladesh," said Hlaing.

Legal experts are watching proceedings closely as it may give clues for how the court will handle similar accusations against Israel over its military campaign in Gaza, in a case brought to the ICJ by South Africa.

The ICJ hearings wrap up on January 29. Judges will hear evidence from victims in a closed session before both sides make final statements.

The ICJ is not the only court looking into possible genocide against the Rohingya -- other cases are underway at the International Criminal Court and in Argentina under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

AFP



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.  
Photo: AFP

## NEW HUMAN RIGHTS CASE AGAINST MYANMAR JUNTA BROUGHT BEFORE COURT IN TIMOR-LESTE

**A**s the International Court of Justice (ICJ) begins hearings on the Rohingya genocide in the Hague brought by The Gambia against Myanmar, a new case alleging war crimes and crimes against humanity is being levelled against the junta in Timor-Leste. The new case presents criminal charges against members of the Myanmar junta.

The text of the press release concerning this case by the Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO) and the Myanmar Accountability Project (MAP) is presented below.

A group representing survivors of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Myanmar junta have presented a criminal complaint to the Public Prosecutor's Office in Timor-Leste, requesting the opening of an investigation.

According to the head of the delegation, Salai Za Uk, Executive Director of the Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO), the criminal file includes "evidence of the gang rape of a pregnant woman; the massacre of ten people, including a journalist and a 13-year-old boy, who was among eight people who had their throats slit; the deliberate killing of one Christian Pastor and three Deacons; a disproportionate and indiscriminate aerial attack on a hospital which killed four medical staff and four patients, and a series of attacks on Christian churches".

Accountability for these crimes is permissible in Timor-Leste under the principle of universal jurisdiction, which allows state authorities to take action regardless of where the crimes took place or the nationality of the victims and perpetrators.



Jose Teixeira, who together with his colleague Nuno Marrazes are the lead lawyers in the case, from the Timorese law firm Da Silva Teixeira & Associados Lda, said "the case will place minimal pressure on Timor-Leste's judicial system. All the evidence we presented has been meticulously documented and reconfirmed by CHRO. In addition, the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) established by the UN, has a large body of verified evidence which can be made available to the Timorese authorities as part of their investigation".

The crimes in the Timor-Leste complaint were committed in Myanmar's predominantly Christian Chin State, which according to Salai Za Uk has seen "a deliberate, systematic, widespread, disproportionate and indiscriminate campaign of violence against civilians".

Since July 2022, the military junta had carried out around 1,000 documented air strikes in the state. More than 4,600 homes have been destroyed by airstrikes or deliberately burnt down. 478 civilians have been killed, including 91 women and 79 children. At least 19 medical facilities, 25 schools and 127 religious buildings, including 78 churches, have been damaged or destroyed, according to CHRO figures.

The situation in Chin State is reflected across the country. According to the latest data from the UN and other credible sources, as of 31 March 2025, at least 6,473 civilians were killed by junta forces, including 1,487 women and 748 children. Over 30,000 have been detained and over 22,000 remain in detention. Nearly 2,000 people have died in military detention, with well documented cases of dozens being tortured to death. 172 people have been sentenced to death by military-controlled courts.

The UN estimates that violence in Myanmar has displaced more than 3.5 million people - over 5 per cent of the population - and although nearly 20 million are in need of assistance, according to the UN, the military has consistently blocked humanitarian access, even after natural disasters, including the earthquake in March 2025. Best estimates indicate that more than 1.5 million Myanmar people have crossed international borders by land or sea in search of safety, through

regular and irregular channels, which has created a regional refugee crisis with dire human rights and humanitarian challenges.

The complainants hope that the case will resonate powerfully with the Timorese people, given Myanmar and Timor-Leste's similar modern histories. Like Timor-Leste, says Salai Za Uk, "Myanmar was ruled for generations by Western colonials and, like Timor-Leste, Myanmar's post-independence period saw vicious atrocity crimes perpetrated against innocent people. Since the coup there have been numerous attacks by the Myanmar junta on unarmed demonstrators in which thousands have been killed. They bring to mind the infamous Santa Cruz Massacre in Dili in 1991 in which over 250 demonstrators were murdered in cold blood".

The Timor-Leste case is supported by the Myanmar Accountability Project, whose director, Chris Gunness, argues that "if the authorities in Timor-Leste took the simple step of opening an investigation it would send a powerful message, widely accepted across the ASEAN, that the situation in Myanmar is unsustainable and must change. The legal case in Dili offers an opportunity for solidarity with some of the most marginalized and isolated people in the ASEAN region".

Salai Za Uk appealed for support to Timorese civil society, the Catholic Church and all Timorese people of conscience. "Given the position on human rights and accountability taken by leading politicians and other influential voices in Timor-Leste, the Chin People earnestly believe that our call for accountability will be heard. And we fervently hope that as Christians, our prayers for justice, peace and dignity, on behalf of the people of Myanmar, will be answered".



## SAC-M CALLS ON ASEAN TO REJECT MYANMAR JUNTA'S FAKE ELECTIONS

The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) issued a statement on 13 January, urging ASEAN to clearly reject the Myanmar military junta's fake elections, after the second phase concluded amid widespread boycotts and ongoing violence against civilians.

The text of the statement is as follows.

The second phase of the Myanmar military junta's fake elections concluded on Sunday, once again marked by widespread voter boycotts and public rejection.

Refusing to be cowed by junta threats, intimidation and violence, the Myanmar people's brave boycott of the junta's sham elections continued across phase two constituencies. Polling stations in Myanmar's most populous city, Yangon, and elsewhere remained largely deserted for much of the day—scenes almost identical to those observed two weeks earlier during phase one.

"Phase two of these confected elections has been another humiliation for the junta," said Ben Lee, Executive Director of the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M). "This charade was engineered by the junta and its backers in a desperate bid for legitimacy. By refusing to vote, the Myanmar people have in fact cast a clear vote against the junta. Phase by phase, they are exposing the junta's lie."

Vast segments of the population were excluded from voting in both phases, and polling was confined only to limited areas under the junta's territorial control. Myanmar's most popular political parties were barred from participating, while many of Myanmar's democratic leaders languish in junta arbitrary detention.

The junta's sham elections are also a cynical ploy to distract the international community from its escalating

atrocities. They are being conducted at the end of a barrel of a gun and under a hail of missiles.

The junta is using vague and draconian "laws" to silence free expression and to coerce people to vote. Hundreds have already been arrested for opposing the elections. At least 22,705 people remain in junta arbitrary detention where they face torture, sexual violence and other grave violations.

And in December alone, the junta launched 119 airstrikes, killed at least 176 civilians, and wounded 325 others, according to independent research organisation the Myanmar Defense and Security Institute.

Even under the standards articulated by ASEAN, the sham elections lack all credibility and are entirely illegitimate. ASEAN leaders must now outright condemn this façade and take action against the junta for its atrocities and abuses.

Ben Lee, in an interview with Channel News Asia on Sunday, called on ASEAN to initiate a series of graduating punitive steps against the junta for its continued rejection of the Five-Point Consensus.

"We need to see ASEAN say: we utterly reject this outcome, and we will not recognise or engage with the military junta," he said. "We also need to think about the message that an ASEAN failure sends to the region – what does this say to every military strongman with ambitions and an autocratic streak about what happens if they attempt a military coup?"

"But most importantly, ASEAN needs to double down in its support for legitimate pro-democracy actors—ethnic organisations, minority communities, the National Unity Government and Myanmar civil society."



Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR PRO-MILITARY USDP CLAIMS MOST SEATS IN JUNTA-RUN ELECTION

Myanmar's dominant pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) on Tuesday claimed a majority of elected lower house seats in the country's junta-run polls, which democracy watchdogs say will prolong the armed forces' grip.

The military has ruled Myanmar by force for almost all of its post-independence history, before a decade-long democratic experiment gave civilian politicians tentative control.

But the generals took back power in a 2021 coup deposing the government of Aung San Suu Kyi, detaining the democratic figurehead and plunging the country into civil war.

The junta is overseeing a staggered election it pledges will return power to the people after the third and final phase of voting on January 25.

With Suu Kyi detained and her party dissolved, democracy advocates say it has been rigged by a dissent purge and a ballot stacked with military allies in the USDP.

A USDP official -- speaking anonymously because they were not authorised to disclose results -- told AFP they "won 87 seats out of 100" in Sunday's second

phase of the vote.

Combined with confirmed overwhelming wins in the first phase, the official's figures give the party 176 lower house seats so far -- just over half the 330 elected positions, even before the third phase has taken place.

The UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews said in a statement last week "the junta engineered the polls to ensure victory for its proxy, entrench military domination in Myanmar, and manufacture a facade of legitimacy".

There are 440 seats in Myanmar's lower house, but 110 are reserved for the armed forces under the military-drafted constitution.

And analysts describe the USDP, many of whose officials are retired officers, as the military's prime political proxy.

Parliament is due to convene in March, when MPs from the combined lower and upper houses will choose the president, and junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has not ruled out resigning as top general to take over the civilian role.

AFP





Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR PRO-MILITARY USDP CLAIMS AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S SEAT IN JUNTA- RUN POLL

**M**yanmar's main pro-military party on 12 January claimed victory in the parliamentary seat of sidelined democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi in elections being derided as a ploy to prolong junta rule.

The armed forces have ruled Myanmar for most of the nation's post-independence history before a decade-long democratic thaw saw civilians assume control.

But the military snatched back power with a 2021 coup, deposing and detaining Suu Kyi after claiming she won a landslide election win over pro-military party by means of massive voter fraud.

The junta says the current month-long vote -- which has its final phase scheduled for January 25 -- will return power to the people.

With Suu Kyi still held in seclusion and her hugely popular party dissolved, democracy advocates say the vote has been rigged by a crackdown on dissent and a ballot stacked with military allies.

An official from the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), speaking anonymously because they were unauthorised to share results, said they "won in Kawhmu" -- Suu Kyi's former seat in Yangon region.

"We won 15 lower house seats out of 16 places in Yangon region," they added, after Kawhmu and dozens of other constituencies voted in the election's second stage on Sunday.

The official did not say by what margin the party claimed its win and official results of the second round have yet to be posted by the junta-stacked election commission.

But the USDP -- described by many analysts as the military's prime proxy -- won nearly 90 percent of lower house seats in the first phase, official results say.

"It should surprise no one that the military-backed party has claimed a landslide victory," UN rights expert Tom Andrews said in a statement last week.

"The junta engineered the polls to ensure victory for its proxy, entrench military domination, and manufacture a facade of legitimacy while violence and repression continue unabated."

Regardless of the vote, a quarter of parliamentary seats will be reserved for the armed forces under a constitution drafted during a previous period of military rule.

The coup plunged Myanmar into civil war and voting is not taking place in huge territories controlled by rebel factions running parallel administrations in defiance of military rule.

There is no official toll for Myanmar's civil war but monitoring group ACLED, which tallies media reports of violence, estimates that 90,000 people have been killed on all sides.

The day of the election's first phase, December 28, saw 52 incidents -- more than any other day for eight months -- with a total of 68 people killed, according to its figures.

Meanwhile more than 330 people are being pursued under new junta-enacted laws, including clauses that punish protest or criticism of the poll with up to 10 years in prison.

There are more than 22,000 political prisoners languishing alongside Suu Kyi in junta detention, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners advocacy group.

AFP



Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF MIN AUNG HLAING VISITS EMBATTLED PANDAUNG TOWNSHIP TO RALLY SUPPORT FOR PRO-MILITARY CANDIDATES

**A**midst a backdrop of escalating conflict near the Rakhine-Bago border, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visited Pandaung Township on 8 January 2026, to lobby residents and local officials ahead of the second phase of the junta's general election.

Speaking at a meeting with township-level elders and departmental personnel, the junta leader urged voters to support candidates who "can work with the military" and called for a concerted effort to ensure high voter turnout for the upcoming polls on 11 January.

The high-profile visit comes as Pandaung Township becomes a central battleground between the military and a coalition led by the Arakan Army (AA).

Fighting has recently intensified for control of the strategic Point-666 hill camp, a vital outpost along the route to the Rakhine Yoma. On 4 January, AA commandos reportedly ambushed a military convoy in the Nyaung Gyo area, killing over a dozen soldiers, including Colonel Han Lin Aung, the commander of Military Operations Command 10 (MOC 10).

Local defence groups report that the junta forces at Point-666 are currently under siege and facing severe

shortages of food and water, relying almost entirely on air support for survival.

Pandaung Township, which hosts weapons manufacturing facilities known as Ka Pa Sa including Ka Pa Sa 5, Ka Pa Sa 6, Ka Pa Sa 9 and Ka Pa Sa 16, remains a fiercely contested area as the military seeks to retain control, and is among the townships set to participate in the second round of elections scheduled for 11 January.

Fighting is continuing in neighbouring parts of Bago Region, including Nattalin, Zee Kone and Min Hla townships, where local revolutionary forces launched coordinated attacks on military bases on 7 January.

The junta has announced that elections will take place in 100 townships, including 12 in Bago Region, on 11 January. The phased polls will skip 65 of the country's 330 townships, leaving nearly 4,000 wards and village tracts outside the areas where voting will occur.



Thet Thet Khaing. Photo: AFP

## PPP LEADER QUESTIONED BY MYANMAR JUNTA FOLLOWING ELECTION DEFEAT

**T**het Thet Khaing, leader of the People's Pioneer Party (PPP), which contested the election but has so far failed to win any seats, is currently being questioned by the Military Commission, according to the party's Vice Chairman (2) Saw Han Aye. He told MT News, a media outlet that supports the Military Commission, on 14 January.

Reports had earlier emerged that Thet Thet Khaing and a member of the party's central committee were arrested by the Military Commission on the evening of 13 January.

Responding to these reports, Saw Han Aye told MT News, "They were not arrested or detained. People are exaggerating the situation. They were only called in for questioning." However, he did not explain the reason for the questioning or confirm whether she had been released.

A PPP official told the media later in the afternoon that she had not been released at that time.

Mizzima made repeated attempts to contact Vice Chairman (2) Saw Han Aye to clarify the matter, but he did not respond.

Similarly, when contacted, Party Vice Chairman (1) Myint Maung Tun said he was campaigning in villages and did not have access to detailed information.

"I don't know anything specific about Daw Thet Thet Khaing's case," he said. "We have also only heard rumours from outside. We do not know what is really happening."

The People's Pioneer Party (PPP) contested 145 National Assembly seats, 193 Pyithu Hluttaw seats, 320 Region Hluttaw seats, and 14 Ethnic Hluttaw seats in the 2025 election organized by the Military Commission, but failed to secure a single seat.

Daw Thet Thet Khaing had planned to contest the election in Yangon Region National Assembly Constituency No. 2, but was removed from the candidate list over allegations that she had failed to repay loans from KBZ Bank related to the 68 Residents Housing Project.

She subsequently filed an appeal with the Military Commission's Union Election Commission (UEC) to be reinstated as a candidate, but her appeal was rejected.

In an interview with a military-aligned news agency last December, Thet Thet Khaing stated that she could not guarantee the Military Commission's election would be free and fair. She criticized the military for acting as both organizer and referee in the election process.

She also pointed out that senior military figures had entered politics through the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), while others were placed in the National Unity Party (NUP), creating an uneven playing field in which parties were competing against the ruling authorities rather than on equal terms.

There is speculation that her questioning or possible detention may be linked to these remarks. However, the PPP has not yet released an official statement regarding Thet Thet Khaing's situation.





Photo: AFP

## VOTER INTIMIDATION ESCALATES IN YANGON AHEAD OF FINAL ELECTION PHASE

Residents in several Yangon townships are reporting intensified pressure from military-appointed officials to participate in the upcoming third phase of the national election, scheduled for 25 January.

The final round of the junta's three-phase voting process will cover 63 townships nationwide, including 17 key areas across Yangon such as Dagon, Lanmadaw, North Okkalapa, Hlaing Tharyar, and Thaketa.

According to local reports, ward administrators and street leaders began conducting door-to-door visits on 13 January, using guest-list checks and population data collection as a pretext for voter intimidation.

In Thaketa's No. 3 Yanpyae Ward, residents identified a specific street leader, Daw Nyunt Shwe whose family members hold high-ranking military positions as a primary source of coercion.

Local sources state her unchecked influence has allowed her to exert "intense control" over the neighbourhood to ensure high turnout.

The methods of pressure vary by township but often involve threats to essential civil services. A Rangoon Scout Network official noted that some residents are being told their household guest-list registrations will

be revoked if they do not vote.

In other areas, officials are using loudspeakers to demand participation or suggesting that those who abstain may face increased scrutiny regarding military conscription drives.

Despite these efforts, 80 percent of residents in townships like Khayan remain indifferent or actively opposed to the polls.

A Khayan resident noted that many who do vote intend to choose any candidate except those from the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), though there is a widespread belief that the final results will inevitably favour the junta proxy party regardless of the actual ballots cast.

The junta held Phase 1 of its elections on 28 December and Phase 2 on 11 January. In both rounds, the USDP claimed a sweeping majority, a result the international community and domestic revolutionary groups have labelled a "theatrical performance" designed to legitimize military rule.

As the 25 January deadline approaches, observers expect the coercive tactics used by local officials to intensify across the commercial capital.

## RESISTANCE ATTACKS DISRUPT MYANMAR JUNTA'S PHASE TWO ELECTIONS, MULTIPLE CASUALTIES REPORTED

Violence flared across Myanmar on 11 January during the second phase of the military junta's election, with at least 10 townships targeted by resistance forces.

According to reports from junta-controlled media and local officials, the attacks involved grenades, rockets, and drones, resulting in the deaths of at least two staff members.

The most lethal incident occurred in Htantabin, Bago Region, where a drone strike targeted the Township General Administration Department (GAD) office as staff prepared for vote counting. U Htay Win, Chairman of the Taungoo District Election Commission, confirmed that two staff members were killed, identified by other sources as a Union Election Commission assistant director and a colleague while two others and one civilian were injured.

Other significant disruptions in Bago Region included an explosion that rocked Minhla early on election morning near a polling station on Lanmadaw Road. The Minhla Township People's Defence Organization claimed responsibility for the blast.

In Ye Township, Mon State, a drone attack targeted Light Infantry Battalion 591, and a separate explosion occurred near a polling station shortly after it opened.

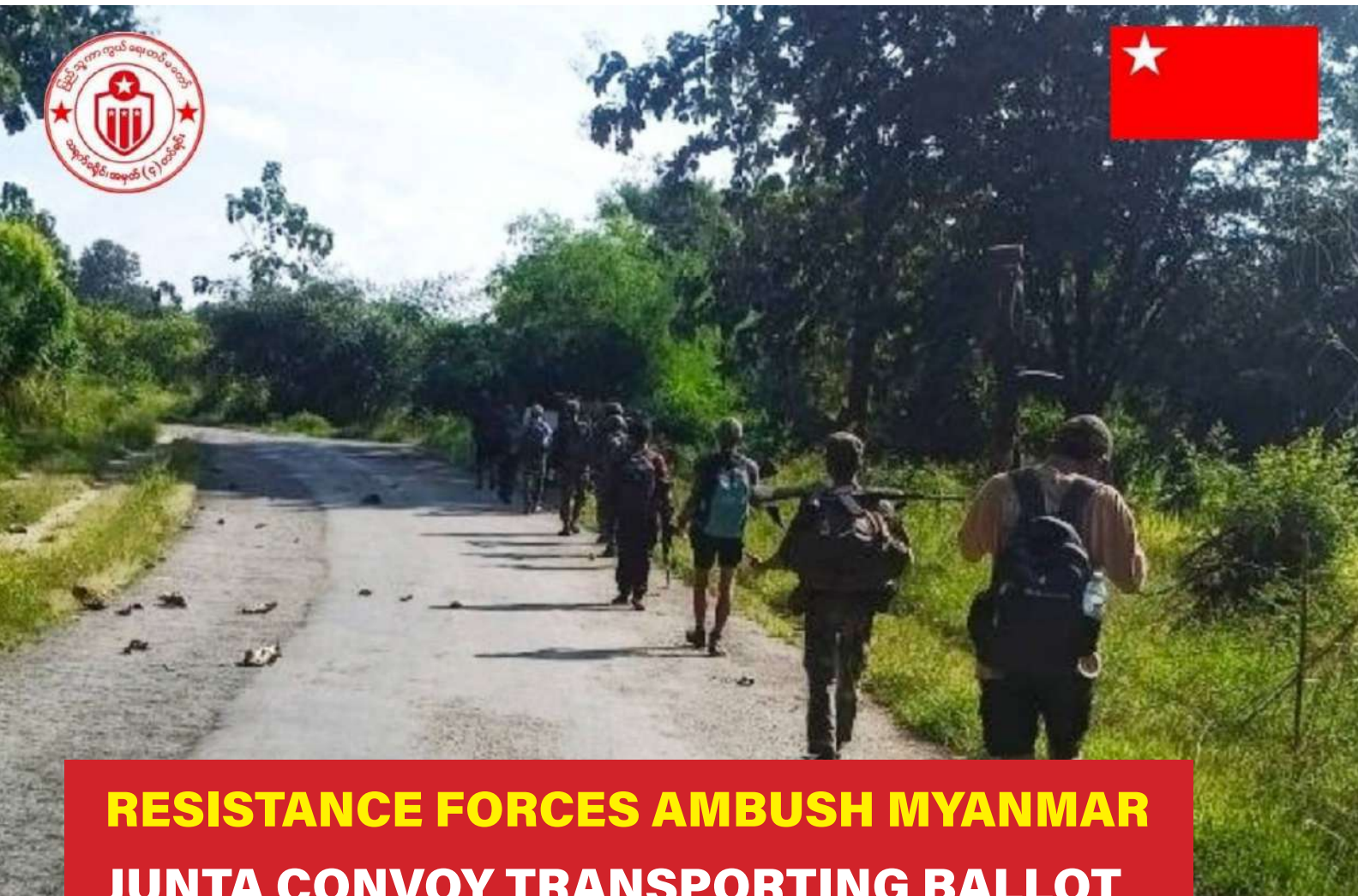
In Magway Region, ambushes and bombings were reported in Gangaw, Seikphyu, Salin, and Kamma. In Kamma, a junta-appointed administrator was killed in an ambush while inspecting polling stations.

Attacks were also confirmed in Chaung-U, Budalin, Myinmu in Sagaing Region and Hpruso in Karenni State, where fighting forced 80 percent of the local population to flee. These townships are largely situated in conflict zones where the military lacks full territorial control.

Despite heavy security and the use of mobile patrols to pressure residents into voting, turnout remained low as revolutionary forces continue "Operation Aung Myin" to disrupt the three-phase election process.

The junta is conducting the election in three phases – Phase 1 was held on 28 December, Phase 2 on 11 January, and the final phase is currently scheduled for 25 January.





## RESISTANCE FORCES AMBUSH MYANMAR JUNTA CONVOY TRANSPORTING BALLOT BOXES IN MAGWAY REGION

**A** Myanmar junta security convoy transporting ballot boxes was ambushed in Mindon Township, Magway Region, on 12 January, leaving four soldiers dead and several others wounded.

The attack was carried out by the People's Defence Force (PDF) Thayet District Battalion 4 near Thaphankai village.

The engagement occurred at approximately 11:10 am as an estimated 250 military personnel were escorting the ballot boxes from Mindon to Thayet following the second phase of the military-led elections.

Resistance fighters, who had anticipated the transfer, used a combination of landmines and small arms fire for 15 minutes to disrupt the column.

Ko Myat, the news and information officer for Thayet District Battalion 4, provided a summary of the operation to Mizzima.

"We had received reports about the convoy and anticipated that the ballot boxes would be transported

under heavy security after the election, so we launched the attack in advance. The deaths of the Military Commission soldiers were confirmed by our troops who opened fire at the scene."

Although the military returned fire with heavy weaponry and small arms, no revolutionary fighters were injured in the clash. Following the ambush, the military column halted its advance and took up positions at a monastery in Thaphankai village.

Mizzima was unable to independently verify the number of casualties among the junta troops.

The status of the ballot boxes remains uncertain. It is currently unclear if the documents and votes were destroyed or if they eventually reached their destination in Thayet.

This attack is part of a broader wave of resistance efforts to reject what the revolutionary community has labelled a "sham election" designed to legitimize the junta's power.





Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary  
Ma Theresa Lazaro. Photo: AFP

## 99 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS STRONGLY CONDEMN PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT'S DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT WITH MYANMAR JUNTA

**O**n 14 January, 99 civil society organizations issued a joint statement strongly condemning the Philippine government's diplomatic engagement with Myanmar's military junta, saying such contact is not in line with ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus.

In the statement, the groups said they were deeply concerned and disappointed over Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro's visit to Naypyidaw on 6 January and her meeting with the coup leader of Myanmar's military junta.

The statement continues as follows.

This engagement confers false legitimacy on a military junta—rebranded as the so-called State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC)—that has no democratic mandate and remains responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and systematic repression since the February 2021 coup. Treating the junta as Myanmar's "central government," whether its leaders appear in military uniforms or disguised as civilian ministers or parliamentarians following a staged electoral farce, rewards mass atrocities and normalizes criminal rule.

This visit raises grave concerns:

- Normalizing a Fabricated Political Order Outside the ASEAN Mandate: By engaging the junta as a governing authority and entertaining its staged three-phase "election" plan, the Philippines risks

institutionalizing a dangerous and illegitimate pattern: the military junta in Nay Pyi Taw is treated as a state actor, while Myanmar's genuinely representative democratic forces—including the National Unity Government (NUG), ethnic revolutionary organizations, and civil society—are reduced to non-state actors to be merely "facilitated" into dialogue with an imposed, junta-controlled structure.

This approach is not authorized by ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus (5PC). It constitutes interference in Myanmar's political legitimacy, takes sides in an unresolved conflict, bestows undeserved recognition on a criminal and war-making actor, and simultaneously undermines the legitimacy of stakeholders who genuinely represent the will of the Myanmar people.

- Legitimizing a Sham Election in Direct Violation of ASEAN Decisions: Referring to the junta's election plans as a subject of "warm and constructive" dialogue contradicts ASEAN's own agreed position. The October 2025 ASEAN Leaders' Review and Decision on the Implementation of the Five-Point Consensus clearly states: "We emphasise that the cessation of violence and inclusive political dialogue must precede elections."

In Myanmar today, violence has not ceased; it has intensified. Millions are displaced, aerial bombardments continue, legitimate political leaders are imprisoned, and over 40 genuine political parties have been dissolved or excluded. Any election conducted under these conditions is inherently fraudulent and cannot

be recognized as free, fair, or credible. Endorsing or engaging such a process undermines ASEAN's coherence, continuity, and credibility.

- **Undermining ASEAN Centrality and Collective Leadership:** As ASEAN Chair in 2026, the Philippines bears a special responsibility to uphold ASEAN centrality and act strictly within collectively agreed frameworks. Bilateral political engagement with the junta outside the 5PC weakens ASEAN unity, erodes the authority of ASEAN decisions, and sets a precedent that individual member states may unilaterally redefine regional commitments. At a time of intensifying geopolitical competition, safeguarding ASEAN centrality also requires resisting—not enabling—external interference. Normalizing Myanmar's junta, a regime now deeply dependent on China and Russia, risks further weakening ASEAN's collective autonomy.

- **Excluding Legitimate Democratic Stakeholders:** Prioritizing high-level engagement with the perpetrators of mass violence, while failing to meaningfully engage Myanmar's legitimate democratic representatives—including the NUG, ethnic nationalities, and civil society—disregards the overwhelming majority of Myanmar's population, which has consistently rejected military rule and resisted it at immense cost for nearly five years.

- **Enabling Transnational Cybercrime and Human Trafficking:** Engagement with Min Aung Hlaing rewards a regime that presides over, protects, and profits from transnational criminal networks. Under the junta's rule, cyber-scam hubs have proliferated across Myanmar, trapping thousands—including Filipino citizens—into forced criminality, human trafficking, physical abuse, and large-scale fraud. While the junta stages highly publicized handovers of trafficking victims and selective raids for photo opportunities, its allied militias continue to open new scam centers elsewhere in Myanmar, often in coordination with transnational criminal groups. The junta must be recognized as a central enabler of these crimes—not as a credible partner in addressing them.

- **Encouraging Further Escalation of Violence:** Accepting or normalizing fabricated election outcomes will not de-escalate Myanmar's conflict; it will intensify it. For junta hardliners, elections are not a step toward compromise but a tool to secure legitimacy, resources, and time to escalate military campaigns. Recognition of such processes emboldens a strategy aimed at total military domination rather than peace.

- **Endangering Philippine and ASEAN Strategic and Security Interests:** Treating the junta as Myanmar's

legitimate government also endangers the Philippines' national interests and broader ASEAN security. The current junta is deeply dependent on China and Russia for military, political, and economic survival. A regime so constrained cannot be trusted to act in Myanmar's national interest, let alone ASEAN's collective interest—including regional stability and security dynamics affecting the South China Sea.

We therefore call on the Government of the Philippines to:

- Reaffirm its commitment to democracy by ensuring that no high-level engagement grants political legitimacy or recognition to Myanmar's military junta in any form.

- Publicly reject the results of the junta's sham election and refuse to recognize any institutions or authorities formed through this fraudulent process.

- Uphold ASEAN's agreed sequencing under the Five-Point Consensus, affirming that violence reduction must come first, followed by inclusive political dialogue, and that genuinely free and fair elections can only occur later, in a secure environment with the full participation of all political actors and leaders.

- Formally and consistently engage Myanmar's democratic forces, including the National Unity Government, ethnic nationalities, and civil society, as the rightful stakeholders in shaping Myanmar's federal democratic future.

- Affirm that the military junta is not the government of Myanmar, whether operating as the SSPC or through generals masquerading as civilian officials or parliamentarians, and ensure that it is not permitted to represent Myanmar at ASEAN meetings or events.

- Place accountability at the center of its ASEAN Chairship, ensuring that regional stability is not pursued at the expense of justice, human rights, and the lives of the Myanmar people.

A coordinated, principled, and people-centered response is essential to prevent this dangerous diplomatic trajectory from becoming entrenched during the Philippines' ASEAN Chairship. We stand in unwavering solidarity with the people of Myanmar in their struggle for democracy, justice, and lasting peace.

This joint statement is signed by 99 organizations, including 6 organizations that cannot be named for security reasons.





Photo: Timor Leste government

## EAST TIMOR PRESIDENT RECEIVES MYANMAR HUMAN RIGHTS DELEGATION

The President of the Republic, J. Ramos-Horta, received a delegation from the Chin Human Rights Organization on 14 January at the Nicolau Lobato Presidential Palace for an extensive meeting dedicated to analyzing the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Myanmar and promoting justice and accountability at the regional level.

During the meeting, the delegation briefed the Head of State on the systematic abuses and the so-called “reign of terror” perpetrated by the Myanmar military junta against the civilian population, according to a press release.

Both parties also reflected on their shared history of struggle for self-determination, underscoring the deep bonds of solidarity between Timor-Leste and Myanmar in the defense of democracy, freedom, and human dignity.

The meeting further addressed the legal proceedings recently initiated in Dili against several members of the Myanmar armed forces accused of

alleged crimes against humanity. President Ramos-Horta and the organization’s representatives reaffirmed the fundamental importance of an independent judicial system, agreeing that judicial processes must follow their normal course, free from any political interference.

In this context, the delegation highlighted the role of international bodies, such as the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), in providing verified evidence to support the Timorese judicial system, ensuring a rigorous, transparent, and fair process.

The meeting concluded with the delegation praising Timor-Leste as the “moral voice of ASEAN,” highlighting the country’s successful transition to democracy as a source of hope and inspiration for the region. For his part, the President of the Republic expressed his gratitude for the trust shown and reiterated Timor-Leste’s firm commitment to regional stability, the rule of law, and the protection of universal human rights.



Photo: Supplied

## JOINT MYANMAR RESISTANCE OFFENSIVE INTENSIFIES ACROSS BAGO REGION AS MULTIPLE FRONTS COLLAPSE

A massive, coordinated offensive by joint resistance forces has expanded into 26 townships across the eastern and western districts of Bago Region, according to high-level military sources.

The operation, which began in early January 2026, has seen six consecutive days of intense clashes that have fundamentally shifted the frontline, forcing the Military Commission to yield significant ground.

The conflict is currently centred along three critical axes: the primary Yangon-Pyay highway, the

historic old Yangon-Mandalay Road leading toward the administrative capital of Naypyidaw, and the strategically sensitive border region between Rakhine and Bago.

This escalation is part of a broader campaign orchestrated by the National Unity Government (NUG) known as the 'Sittaung River Valley Victory Operation,' which falls under the direct command of the Bago Region Military Command of the People's Defense Force's Military Region 2.

Ko Aung Hein, Acting Battalion Commander of

the Royal Peacock Battalion (P-29913) under Division 26, told Mizzima that fighting intensified from 9 to 15 January, ahead of the Military Commission's planned election Phase 2.

"The fighting intensified from 9 January, mainly toward Tawkyweinn Town. Military checkpoints are positioned around Penwagon. A total of 14 coordinated attacks were carried out, and we have confirmed that an additional 26 attacks took place as of 16 January," he said.

According to geographical assessments, clashes have occurred in Phyu, Kanyutkwin, Penwagon, Kyaukdaga, Nyaung Chay Htauk, Nyaung Lay Pin, Oktwin, Nattalin, Zeegon, Minhla, and Htantabin townships in western Bago Region. In addition, People's Defense Force units along the Yangon-Pyay Road, together with local defense forces and People's Defense Organizations, are operating in coordination. On the Rakhine-Bago border, the Arakan Army (AA) is leading joint resistance forces in Padaung Township.

### **The Battle of Tawkyweinn: A Strategically Significant Conflict**

Since 9 January, the People's Defense Force (PDF) and its allied forces have been conducting an urban capture offensive in Tawkyweinn. This strategic operation is centred between Kanyutkwinn, where Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 439 is based, and Penwagon, the site of Light Infantry Battalion 307.

On the morning of 9 January, the People's Defense Force (PDF) launched coordinated attacks on a total of 14 military outposts. These targets included Tawkyweinn (Aung Myay Town) in the Sittaung River Valley under the PDF's Bago Region Military Command,

Military Region 2, as well as a military checkpoint stationed in Si Pin Thar Village, Oaktwin Township, and a bridge guard post at the railway bridge in Thar Yar Kone, Kyauktaga Township, all situated along the old Yangon-Mandalay Road.

During the operation to capture Tawkyweinn, the Royal Peacock Battalion conducted joint operations with allied forces in Hteintapin and Kaleinkhin villages in Nyaung Lay Pin Township. According to the battalion, police outposts along the railway in Hteintapin Village were completely destroyed.

The Royal Peacock Battalion carried out these operations together with the TawKyeekan (Raven) Battalion, the Fire Dragon Battalion (3703), the Drone Battalion (1805), and other allied units.

Various battalions and units are taking part in the military operations across the Bago Region fronts. Under the Bago Region Military Command, Military Region 2, these include the Alawaka Battalion (P27803), White Peacock Battalion (P23503), and Red Dragon Battalion (P29903) from Strategy 24; Battalion 3702 and the Special Commando Battalion (P29914) from Strategy 25; joint forces from Strategy 26; and units from Strategy 22.

Additionally, local People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and Local People's Defense Organizations (Pa Ka Pha) from Bago District, the Asho Chin Defense Force (ACDF), and various drone units are also actively engaged in their respective operational areas.

"The exact number is still being confirmed, but we know that more than 50 enemy soldiers were killed. Weapons and ammunition were also seized. In Kyein Khar Gon Village, east of Penwagon, a major-level

platoon commander from the Military Commission was killed, and his body was recovered. Around 20 soldiers were killed there, and approximately 20 weapons were seized," Ko Aung Hein said.

According to Captain Zin Yaw, a CDM officer, the ongoing intense fighting in Tawkyweinn, Kyauktaga Township located in eastern Bago Region, has shaken the junta's Southern Military Command. He said that the revolutionary forces are meticulously applying military principles, leaving no stone unturned in their execution of 'Stop, Cut, Kill, Defend, and Recon' tactics.

"The military's humiliating defeat in Tawkyweinn is a direct result of the revolutionary forces' successful targeting of the town as a strategic military objective. The clashes on the eastern side of the Bago Yoma are now posing a direct threat to the Naypyidaw Council Territory, while the offensives along the Yangon-Pyay Road have sent chills through Yangon's Taikkyi area," he said.

Captain Zin Yaw further analyzed that the offensives launched in both eastern and western Bago Region since the beginning of this year reveal a significant weakness in the junta's Southern Regional Military Command. He states that the command lacks sufficient combat-ready troops, forcing the military to rely on a limited number of personnel from support and administrative corps to maintain their positions.

"We can hear artillery fire from Bago City. Fighting is ongoing around Penwagon and Tawkyweinn, and villages were repeatedly bombed yesterday (15 January)," a Penwagon resident told Mizzima.

Bago Region, which hosts four defense industry weapons factories, has also seen new fronts opened

by the Arakan Army (AA), particularly in Padaung Township.

Clashes at strategic locations known as Point 666 and Nyaungkyo in Padaung Township reportedly resulted in the deaths of Colonel Han Lin Aung and Major Wai Yan Lin, along with other Military Commission personnel. Fighting in the area remains ongoing.

"Airstrikes, especially by jet fighters, have caused civilian casualties, and some of our fighters have also been injured. In the Bago Region operation, our battalion is working closely with People's Defense Organizations and ethnic resistance organizations. I believe the operation demonstrates strong unity and coordination among the forces," Ko Aung Hein from Royal Peacock Battalion said.

The Bago Region offensive began with raids on Pyu Saw Htee camps in Minhla, Zeegon, and Nattalin townships on 6 and 7 January.

Following this, the Nattalin PDF advanced toward Nattalin, while battalions from Thayarawaddy District, People's Defense Organizations (Pa Ka Pha) units from Zeekone and Thayarawaddy districts, and Thayarawaddy District drone units jointly advanced toward Zeekone.

Subsequently, battalions under the NUG launched a coordinated and successful operation in the Sittaung River Basin under PDF No. (2) Operation Area on 9 January. Since then, military tensions have continued to escalate, and fighting has remained ongoing through 15 January.





Photo: Supplied

## MYANMAR REVOLUTIONARY FORCES IN SOUTHERN CHIN STATE UNIFY UNDER NEW CPU-CPA COMMAND

In a significant consolidation of resistance power, four major Myanmar revolutionary forces in southern Chin State have officially disbanded to form a unified political and military body, the Chin People's Union and the Chin People's Army (CPU/CPA).

Announced during a press conference on 16 January, 2026, the merger integrates the Chin Defense Forces from Mindat, Kanpetlet, Matupi, and the Daai region into a single umbrella organization aimed at strengthening regional governance and military coordination.

"With all organizations brought under a single structure, we aim to expand administrative, judicial and public services, with the primary objective of carrying out the revolution more effectively," said CPU/CPA News and Information Secretary Salai Yaw Man.

He said the merger would strengthen coordination in establishing checkpoints, accelerate the movement of goods, and make it easier to address cross-township crimes by operating under a single command.

The merger marks the first step toward forming a unified army under a decision of the Chin Brotherhood (CB) and will continue to operate under the leadership

of the CB and the Interim National Consultative Council (ICNCC).

"We have operated as separate organizations for five years, but today we have come together as a unified body to more effectively confront and dismantle the military dictatorship. Our goal is to lead both military and political affairs in the region," said CPU/CPA Information Chairman Salai Aung Min.

He said that southern Chin State also includes Chinland Council (CC) members such as CDF-Paletwa, CDF-Matupi (Brigade 2) and CDF-Zotung, adding that relations have been established with some groups and that there is hope of moving forward together under a shared policy direction.

The Chin People's Union/Chin People's Army (CPU/CPA) was officially established on 15 November, 2025.

The Central Committee, the organization's highest authority, comprises 10 central executives, including four chairmen, four secretaries, the Commander-in-Chief, and the Deputy Commander-in-Chief.

# CHIN BROTHERHOOD CAPTURES STRATEGIC KENNEDY HILL AND APPREHENDS 32 MYANMAR JUNTA PERSONNEL

The Chin Brotherhood Alliance successfully recaptured the strategically vital military base on Kennedy Hill in Tedim Township on 4 January 2026, following a decisive 10-day offensive.

The operation resulted in the capture of 20 prisoners of war (POWs), including Major Kyaw Thu Htike of Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 87. Ten junta soldiers were killed in the fighting.

An additional 12 junta personnel were apprehended in Khonli village, Falam Township, bringing the total number of recently captured personnel to 32.

"They didn't surrender voluntarily. They were captured during the heat of battle or while being pursued during their retreat. They will face action under the POW law," the Chief of Staff of PDF-Zoland, a Tedim-based member of the Chin Brotherhood, told Mizzima.

During the battle to retake the strategically vital Kennedy Hill, ten junta soldiers were killed, and Major Kyaw Thu Htike from LIB 87 was captured alive. In the ongoing struggle for control of the 8,800-foot summit, Chin Brotherhood forces have now seized the hill for the third time following previous captures in November 2023 and 18 November 2025.

Salai Tin Mi Htut, spokesperson for the Chin National Defence Force (CNDP), which is also a member of the Chin Brotherhood, based in Falam added: "We will take action according to our POW

law. For those who surrendered voluntarily, there are two potential paths: release or being sent back to their families after a monitoring period. These actions will be implemented once the military situation stabilizes."

Citing prisoner testimonies, Salai Tin Mi Htut noted that two-thirds of the column consisted of forcibly recruited militia members who lacked the will to fight. Many expressed a desire to desert if given the chance, due to the harsh winter weather, food shortages, and internal oppression within the military.

It is reported that one comrade from CDF-CDM Siyin (a member of the Chinland Council) and two comrades from the Brotherhood's own forces were killed during these battles.

While at least another 14 junta personnel have recently surrendered, Chin forces continue to track down others fleeing into the mountains. In retaliation, the junta carried out a drone strike on a neighbourhood in Tedim on 8 January, destroying two residential houses.

A PDF-Zoland official stated that the military situation is currently calm, and the Tedim-Thaingngin-Kalay Road has been reopened for public use.

According to military sources, clashes broke out near Khonli village in Falam Township on the morning of 9 January. The junta conducted four airstrikes and deployed a transport plane to airdrop 12 supply packages to its troops on the ground.



Photo: KIA

## KIA FORCES SEIZE MYANMAR JUNTA OUTPOST IN BHAMO, 20 SOLDIERS SURRENDER

**T**he Kachin Independence Army (KIA) captured a junta guard post in Bhamo on 14 January, marking a significant advancement in the months-long battle for Kachin State's second-largest city. During the operation, 20 soldiers from the military's Light Infantry Division (LID) 88 surrendered to resistance forces.

"They took control of the base located in front of Battalion 933. The prisoners were taken there. Battalion 933 itself hasn't fallen yet. The captured areas include the surrounding guard posts," said a Kachin local source.

The KIA took control of an outpost and other junta guard posts on 14 January in front of the junta's Supply and Transport Battalion 933 (also known as 933 Logistics Battalion), according to another source. Twenty junta soldiers from the LID 88 surrendered during this battle.

Colonel Naw Bu, the KIA's Press and Information Officer, responded to a request for additional information about the base's seizure and the surrender of 20 junta personnel by stating that he only knew of the fighting and was unable to confirm specifics at this time due to communication issues.

"In Bhamo, fighting is occurring practically every day. I've heard that it was a bit more intense yesterday and the day before. However, I haven't gotten enough details to confirm exactly where and how it happened. We are still looking into this," Colonel Naw Bu told Mizzima.

On 26 December, there were reports that the KIA had seized the camps of Infantry Battalion (IB) 47 and Ordnance Depot 641 in Bhamo. However, the IB 47 camp has not been fully seized yet, and the battle is ongoing, according to the source.

"They (KIA) entered and attacked the battalion (IB 47) camp. The outcome is still unknown. We just know they managed to enter more than half of the camp," the source said.

The battle to capture Bhamo began in late 2024, and by early 2025, the KIA had captured the camps of Artillery Battalion 366, Armoured Battalion 7006, and a tank battalion, as well as Bhamo Airport. As the battle for Bhamo continued, the junta had to rely on air support to replenish its troops and ammunition.

Heavy fighting resumed in August 2025 after the junta dispatched 11 river vessels carrying troops to Bhamo along the Ayeyarwady River from Mandalay's Gaw Wein Jetty.

The junta was able to retake the Artillery Battalion 366 camp in September after these ships arrived.

Military Operations Command 21 (MOC-21), IB 47, Artillery Battalion 366, Field Medical Battalion 11, Military Engineer Battalion 914, Supply and Transport Battalion 933, and a battalion under LID 88 are among the junta forces in Bhamo. Fighting is currently ongoing around their bases.





Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES TORCH VILLAGES AND ARREST CIVILIANS IN MAGWAY REGION FOLLOWING ELECTION AMBUSH

Troops from the military junta have launched a series of violent raids across villages at the borders of Mindon, Thayet, and Kamma townships, reportedly arresting residents and burning homes in a self-described "clearance operation."

According to Ko Myat, the information officer for Thayet District Battalion 4, a military column exceeding 250 personnel stormed Pazinkhar village in Mindon Township at 11:00 am on 13 January.

During the raid, soldiers forcibly gathered residents in the village centre before setting fire to unoccupied houses, destroying 16 homes in the blaze.

Later that same day, the troops advanced to nearby Thaphankaing village, where they torched three additional houses before continuing their march toward Thayet Township. The column is now reportedly heading toward the villages of Aukmamint, Sele, Sinkaw, and Pontarr.

"They entered the village, arrested the people, and forced them to gather in the centre of the village. Then,

they set fire to the unoccupied houses in the village," Ko Myat told Mizzima.

He added that the military's advance appears to be focused on areas near Defence Equipment Factories.

The escalation follows a deadly ambush on 12 January near Thaphankaing village, where revolutionary forces targeted a military convoy transporting ballot boxes from Mindon to Thayet.

That attack, which killed four junta soldiers, occurred just a day after the completion of Phase 2 of the military-led elections in Mindon and Kamma.

While the military has reinforced its presence in the region since 5 January to secure the election process, local resistance groups maintain that the current raids are a retaliatory measure for the recent ambush.

While most residents are believed to have fled into nearby forests, specific details regarding civilian casualties or the total number of detainees remain unavailable due to the ongoing military operations.

## MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE DESTROYS FOURTH HOSPITAL IN FALAM TOWNSHIP AS ATTACKS ON HEALTHCARE ESCALATE

The Myanmar junta launched an airstrike on the night of 11 January, completely destroying Thibaul Station Hospital in Falam Township, Chin State. The facility, located on the India-Myanmar border trade road, is the fourth hospital to be levelled by the military in the township during the ongoing conflict, according to the Chin National Organization/Chin National Defence Force (CNO/CNDF).

The airstrike targeted Thibaul Station Hospital, approximately 40 miles from Falam, at around 9:20 pm on 11 January.

"Targeting a hospital, which is not a military target, constitutes a war crime under the Geneva Conventions. The junta's repeated attacks on hospitals elsewhere further demonstrate their brutality," Salai Timmy Htut, spokesperson for the CNO/CNDF, told Mizzima.

Thibaul Station Hospital, built in 2014-15 at a cost of 500 million kyats (US\$238,000), was reportedly completely destroyed in the bombing.

While no casualties were reported in the attack, several nearby residential houses were damaged, according to Salai Timmy Htut.

During the battle for Falam, the junta bombed and destroyed Falam General Hospital, Lumte Station Hospital, and Khaunglwun Station Hospital. Thibaul Station Hospital is the fourth to be destroyed, Salai Timmy Htut added.

Prior to the military coup, Thibaul village hosted a military camp and police checkpoint. The CNDF captured and occupied the site on 15 November 2023, however, there have been no military deployments or activities at the location since the battle for Falam began.

The junta has been launching attacks in Falam Township with two columns. Last night, a minor clash occurred near Khunli village, 10 miles from Falam, where the junta also conducted aerial bombings, the CNDF spokesperson said.

The military junta has been targeting and bombing other hospitals across the country, including Wammathu Hospital and Matupi Hospital in Mindat, in Chin State, and Mrauk-U Hospital in Rakhine State.





Bangladesh border guard.  
Photo: AFP

## BANGLADESH SUMMONS MYANMAR ENVOY AFTER BORDER CLASHES

**B**angladesh on 13 January summoned the ambassador of Myanmar after civil war gun battles in the neighbouring country spilled over the border, wounding a Bangladeshi girl.

Heavy fighting in Myanmar's Rakhine state this month has involved junta soldiers, Arakan Army fighters and Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) militia guerrillas.

Authorities said around a dozen villages in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district have been affected by the violence.

Twelve-year-old Huzaifa Afnan was struck by a bullet, while a Bangladeshi fisherman had his leg ripped off after stepping on a landmine near the frontier.

"Bangladesh reminded that the unprovoked firing towards Bangladesh is a blatant violation of international law and a hindrance to good neighbourly relations," a foreign ministry press statement said.

Myanmar's ambassador to Bangladesh, U Kyaw Soe Moe, was summoned to the foreign ministry on Tuesday, where he expressed sincere sympathy to the injured victims and their families.

"My daughter was supposed to go to school, but she is on a ventilator," Afnan's father Jasim Uddin said. "My heart is bleeding for my baby girl."

More than a million Rohingya have fled their homes in Myanmar, many after a 2017 military crackdown, and now eke out a living in sprawling refugee camps just across the border in Bangladesh.

ARSA, a Rohingya armed group formed to defend the persecuted Muslim minority, has been fighting the Myanmar military, as well as rival Arakan Army guerrillas.

On Monday, Bangladeshi border forces detained 53 ARSA fighters who had crossed the frontier.

Bangladeshi police officer Saiful Islam, commander of the local Teknaf station, said all detainees were being held in jail, except one fighter who was receiving hospital treatment for bullet wounds.

"These individuals have a history of living in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar and crossing into Myanmar," Islam told AFP.

AFP



## BANGLADESH DETAINS 53 ARSA REBELS, ISSUES MYANMAR BORDER ALERT

**B**angladesh issued a "high alert" along its Myanmar border after detaining 53 members of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) militant group for crossing into its territory, Dhaka paramilitary officials said 12 January.

At least two people have been injured since Sunday, including a 12-year-old girl who suffered a gunshot, in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, home to more than a million Rohingya refugees.

"We are on high alert and have already detained 53 people for trespassing," Colonel Moinuddin Ahmed of paramilitary Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) told AFP.

Local witnesses said ARSA fighters were detained on Sunday after crossing into Bangladeshi territory.

"One of them (detained persons) has been sent to hospital while the rest are in police custody (and) legal procedures are ongoing," Saiful Islam from Teknaf police station told AFP.

ARSA was formed to wage an insurgency against the stateless Muslim minority's persecution in Myanmar

and is also fighting rival Arakan Army guerrillas.

Bangladesh military officials say heavy fighting is ongoing across the border in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

Around a dozen border villages in Myanmar have been affected because of heavy gunfire, mortar shelling and bombardment, according to Bangladesh villagers and paramilitary officials, with plumes of smoke visible from the Bangladesh side.

There is fear in Bangladesh border villages, with most people not stepping out of their homes and many donning helmets when they do.

"There is now a three-way conflict: ARSA is fighting the Arakan Army on the ground, while the military junta is conducting air strikes," a senior paramilitary official told AFP.

Dhaka says it has deployed its law enforcement agencies in villages close to the border to keep a tab on the situation and possible illegal crossings.

AFP



Yangon International Airport.  
Photo: Supplied

## STRANDED MYANMAR MIGRANT WORKERS GRANTED ONE-DAY DEPARTURE WINDOW BEFORE STRICT NEW OWIC RULES TOOK EFFECT

In a brief reprieve following widespread chaos at Yangon International Airport, holders of the Overseas Worker Identification Card (OWIC) who were barred from leaving Myanmar on 12 January were permitted to depart on 13 January.

Myanmar Ministry of Labour officials reportedly contacted the stranded travellers by phone, granting them a final 24-hour window to secure new flight tickets and exit the country under the previous regulations.

The temporary suspension occurred after the military junta's Department of Labour issued a sudden directive at 9 pm on 11 January, immediately invalidating the existing email-based application process. More than 70 workers were reportedly forced to retrieve their checked luggage and return home on Monday, facing significant financial losses and the risk of losing their employment abroad.

One worker who managed to secure a last-minute departure described the high cost of the delay said, "Those of us who were unable to depart yesterday and had to return from the airport were informed over the phone to board any flight that was available today. They said they would give us a window of one day. I had to hurry to get a ticket today since they will resume

using the new format they issued after that. I had to pay 1.65 million Kyats (US\$785) for a new round-trip ticket today, even though I had already purchased one from the other side. The challenges with food and lodging in Yangon are beyond words, including car rental fees and the fact that I've travelled from the countryside."

Beginning 14 January, the Department of Labour will strictly enforce its new procedures. The previous system, which allowed for document submission via email, has been replaced with a requirement for in-person submissions through postal mail, express couriers, or authorized agents.

Furthermore, workers are now prohibited from departing until their specific names are approved and published on the "Safe Immigration" Telegram channel.

The Ministry of Labour defended the move, claiming it had issued public notices since last year regarding a five-day advance application requirement. However, workers argue that the sudden enforcement and shift in submission methods have caused undue hardship.

Under the new regulations, if a worker fails to depart on the exact date listed on the official Telegram announcement, they must restart the entire application process.



Photo: AFP

## WOMEN BEAR HEAVY TOLL IN MYANMAR JUNTA ATTACKS IN 2025, SAYS RIGHTS GROUP

**N**early 800 women were killed and more than 800 injured in Myanmar last year as the military stepped up airstrikes and artillery attacks on civilian areas, according to a report released in January by the Burmese Women's Union (BWU).

The women's rights group recorded that at least 792 women were killed and 815 wounded nationwide in 2025 as a result of air attacks, shelling, landmines and other forms of violence linked to the Myanmar junta.

Airstrikes accounted for the vast majority of deaths, with 621 women killed in aerial bombardments. The second highest recorded number of deaths was 102 from artillery attacks. Another 39 were victims of extrajudicial killings. Other women were killed by landmines, crossfire, lack of access to medical care and conflict-related sexual violence.

Among the dead were 154 girls under the age of 18, as well as five pregnant women, the group reported. They warned that the true toll is likely higher due to limited access to conflict areas and reporting obstacles.

The deadliest single incident occurred on 18 January 2025, when a junta airstrike near Yan Chaung village in Rakhine State killed 21 women, according to the report.

Geographically, Sagaing Region recorded the highest number of women killed, with 217 deaths, followed by Mandalay Region (123) and Rakhine State (119). Shan State also saw a heavy toll, with 81 women killed.

The BWU said the attacks amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, calling on ASEAN and the international community to hold Myanmar's military leadership accountable. They also called for the imposition of targeted sanctions and a block on the supply of arms and aviation fuel to the junta.

Myanmar's military has denied targeting civilians, despite mounting evidence from rights groups and independent monitors.





## INSIDE THE 'SHWE PADAUK MYAING' SCAM HUB: TORTURE AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING UNCOVERED IN MYAWADDY

**MIZZIMA SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HAN HTOO ZAW**

*"There is daily torture. They punch, slap, force people to kneel on the ground, and beat them until they vomit. Those who say they want to go home are beaten nearly to death. They are kept in dark rooms, detained in the local army (KNA) cells, and threatened," a Chinese survivor told Mizzima.*

A Chinese survivor who recently escaped the Yulong Bay (also known as Shwe Padauk Myaing) online scam compound near Thae Pone village, Myawaddy Township, has exposed a brutal system of daily torture, extortion, and forced labour involving over 5,000 trafficked foreigners.

The facility is reportedly owned by Colonel Saw Htoo Eh Moo, commander of the Karen National Army (KNA) 777 Tactical Command and son of KNA leader Colonel Saw Chit Thu, according to a Chinese national who escaped from the compound.

on the KK Park scam compound near Ingynn Myaing village in Myawaddy Township, the "Hton Shin Group" from Shwe Jin Site-5 (A5) within KK Park relocated to Yulong Bay near Thae Pone village.

As the Myanmar junta continued conducting raids of scam buildings in the Shwe Kokko area, gang members from those facilities fled. They subsequently secretly continuing their online scam operations in the staff housing area of Yulong Bay, specifically on the third floor of row 2 in the 19-unit building row.

In October 2025, when the crackdown occurred "There is daily torture. They punch, slap, force people to kneel on the ground, and beat them until

they vomit. Those who say they want to go home are beaten nearly to death. They are kept in dark rooms, detained in the local army (KNA) cells, and threatened," a Chinese survivor told Mizzima.

Scam workers from the Hton Shin Group merged with Yulong Bay after the collapse of KK Park. It is reported that one Chinese national suffered severe eye injuries requiring 15 stitches and permanent disfigurement after being beaten by Chinese mafia members.

Once the injured Chinese man's eye had healed, he was taken out of the detention cell, handed over to the KNA forces, and subsequently sent back to China.

The survivor said, "He was only allowed to leave and be sent back to China because his former boss personally called to apologize and came to pick him up. If he hadn't come, the man might have died."

The current employer responsible for the beatings is identified as "Ah Sin," who uses the online alias "Jin Zeling." His subordinates include managers named Tan San, Shan Tianxue, and Mo Wan.

It is alleged that the Human Resources (HR) department, staff, and security personnel under them commit extremely cruel acts on a daily basis. Trafficked workers who wish to return home are extorted for sums of \$10,000 USD or more. Even after paying, they are often not released and continue to be detained.

Over 5,000 foreigners are reportedly trapped there and forced to work in the scam industry. Yulong Bay is located nearly 10 miles from Myawaddy, along the Moei River on the Thai-Myanmar border.

Yulong Bay is also referred to as "Shwe Padauk Myaing," while locals call the area "Wang Kha."





Construction of the scam compound began in 2020, and it is operated by Yulong Bay Resort Tourism Development Company Limited (Yulong Bay Park).

According to reports released by Justice For Myanmar, Saw Htoo Eh Moo, Saw Soe Hlaing Oo, Saw Min Min Oo, and Singaporean national Aw Ziyang hold shares in Yulong Bay Park.

Saw Htoo Eh Moo is a Colonel in the KNU commanding the 777 Tactical Command of its Military Region 3. He is the eldest son of KNA leader Colonel Saw Chit Thu, previously a senior commander in the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF).

Records from Myanmar's Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA) show that Yulong Bay Resort Tourism Development Company Limited has been an officially registered company in Myanmar since 2020.

Furthermore, Mizzima has learned through investigation that online scam operations continue in the nearby Royal Dragon Bay (107 Acres) and Apollo Park.

NASA satellite imagery of night-time activity shows bright lights at Yulong Bay Park, Royal Dragon Bay, and Apollo Park, indicating ongoing operations.

Apollo Park is operated by Myanmar Apollo International Investment Company Limited, involving Saw Htoo Eh Moo, Saw Soe Hlaing Oo, Chinese national Li Chunhuan, Htin Aung, and Win Naing, as detailed in Justice For Myanmar reports.

On 5 May, 2025, the United States imposed economic sanctions on KNA leader Saw Chit Thu and his two sons, Colonel Saw Htoo Eh Moo and Lt. Col. Saw Chit Chit. The KNA itself was also designated as a transnational criminal organization.







Tom Andrews. Photo: AFP

## UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR'S LETTER STRONGLY CRITICISES US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY'S REVOCATION OF TPS STATUS FOR MYANMAR NATIONALS

A letter from UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Thomas Andrews, to US Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem written on 12 January 2026 has been made public. The letter sharply criticises the department's actions in ending the Temporary Protected Status previously offered by the US government for Myanmar nationals.

The text of the letter is as follows.

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 58/20. In line with the communications procedure for comments on legislation and policy, I wish to provide observations regarding your decision taken on 25 November 2025 to terminate the Temporary Protected Status for nationals of Burma (Myanmar) and to seek clarifications of facts cited and the compatibility of the termination with international human rights standards.

### Background

According to the public notice announcing the termination, your Department has concluded that conditions in Myanmar no longer hinder the safe return of its nationals and cited improvements in governance and stability as the basis for ending TPS. While recognising domestic prerogatives governing TPS, I am concerned about conditions on the ground that appear inconsistent with those conclusions and about the implications of this decision for individuals who, upon return, may face serious harm as I have documented in my various reports.

Formal steps (e.g., ending a nationwide state of emergency or moving toward electoral processes) do not, by themselves, demonstrate reduced human rights risk for potential returnees. Persistent fighting in several regions, restrictions on participation, and constraints on civic space undermine assumptions of stability or safe return. Assessments of safety must be

grounded in protection indicators (cessation of attacks on civilians, release of political detainees, meaningful civic space), rather than solely on institutional changes or electoral timetables.

I respectfully note that recent official U.S. positions appear to recognise ongoing, serious risks in Myanmar: the national emergency regarding Burma (Myanmar) was continued on 4 February 2025, citing continued detentions of government leaders, politicians, human rights defenders, journalists, and religious leaders; targeted sanctions were announced on 25–26 September 2025 against actors facilitating arms for the junta; and remarks at the UN General Assembly on 30 September 2025 described violence and instability as worsening, with the regime continuing to oppress minorities and bomb civilians.

I would be grateful for clarification on how the TPS termination assessment aligns with these positions.

Compliance of the decision with international human rights norms and standards.

As a State party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, the United States is bound to ensure that any policy decision affecting removal or return of Myanmar nationals complies with the applicable international protections—above all the prohibition of refoulement. These obligations apply to all persons under U.S. jurisdiction and must guide the assessment and implementation of measures that could foreseeably expose individuals to irreparable harm upon return.

Under CAT article 3, States must not expel, return (refouler) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing they would be in danger of torture. The Committee against Torture's general comment No. 4 (2017) clarifies that this is an absolute obligation and requires individualised assessment by competent administrative and/or judicial authorities. In addition, article 3(2) provides that, to determine whether such grounds exist, the competent authorities shall take into account all

relevant considerations, including, where applicable, the existence in the State concerned of a consistent pattern of gross, flagrant or mass violations of human rights.

The Committee also explains that authorities should consider non exhaustive indicators of risk when deciding on removal. In paragraph 29 of General Comment No. 4, it points to human rights situations that may indicate a danger of torture and therefore trigger non refoulement, and advises that such indicators be given due weight in removal decisions (for example, generalised or widespread violence, patterns of arbitrary detention, torture or ill treatment, persecution of particular groups, and other serious human rights violations).

The Committee further highlights the procedural safeguards and preventive guarantees required to ensure that removal does not proceed where a credible risk is raised: an objective and individual examination, the guarantee of a prompt and transparent process, review of any deportation decision, and an appeal with suspensive effect, together with access to legal assistance, interpretation, and, where relevant, medical evaluation. Any person found to be at risk of torture if deported should be allowed to remain in the territory so long as the risk persists; and must never be removed to another State from which they may subsequently face removal to a third State where substantial grounds exist to believe they would be in danger of torture (i.e., indirect/chain refoulement). These standards are the benchmark against which any decision affecting potential returns must be measured.

The ICCPR further requires States to respect and ensure Covenant rights to all individuals within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction. This entails an obligation not to return a person to a real risk of irreparable harm, such as arbitrary deprivation of life (article 6) or torture/cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (article 7), either in the country to which removal is to be effected or in any country to which the person may subsequently be removed. The decision to terminate protection must therefore be assessed against these duties to prevent, not facilitate, exposure to grave violations.

In refugee law, the United States' accession to the 1967 Protocol entails application of articles 2–34 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, including article 33 of the 1951 Refugee Convention which codifies the core principle of non-refoulement: no State shall “expel or return (‘refouler’) a refugee in any manner whatsoever” to territories where their life or freedom would be threatened. The obligation is engaged by direct and indirect (chain) refoulement, and it requires decision makers to look beyond formal developments to actual protection outcomes - whether risks of lethal violence, persecution or serious harm have materially abated. Consistent with UNHCR's Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Myanmar (May 2024), which issues a non-return advisory and calls on States to suspend forced returns of Myanmar nationals and habitual residents until conditions permit safe, dignified and sustainable return (paras. 21–22), references to elections or ceasefire announcements must be corroborated by evidence of sustained reductions in attacks on civilians, release of political detainees, and unimpeded humanitarian access, before any conclusion can be drawn that return is safe.

Finally, the broader framework of international protection situates these duties within the right to seek and enjoy asylum (UDHR article 14) and reflected in the architecture of refugee and human rights treaties. While the UDHR is not itself binding, it informs interpretation of the above-mentioned treaty commitments and underscores the imperative that removal measures do not defeat the very purpose of international protection where a real risk persists.

As it is my responsibility, under the mandates provided to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to my attention, I would be grateful if you would address the following:

1. Please explain the evidentiary basis and risk assessment methodology underlying the conclusion that conditions “no longer hinder the safe return” of Myanmar nationals— including sources, timeframes, and how generalised risks and individual protection needs were weighed—consistent with the prohibition of refoulement under international law and the obligation to assess real risk of persecution, torture/ill treatment, and other irreparable harm prior to removal and to respect and ensure Covenant rights to all persons

under jurisdiction (CAT art. 3; CAT general comment No. 4; ICCPR art. 2 read with arts. 6, 7; HRC general comment No. 31, 1951 Refugee Convention).

2. Please provide additional information on safeguards to prevent direct/indirect refoulement where a “foreseeable, personal, present and real” risk of torture/ill-treatment, arbitrary deprivation of life, or other irreparable harm exists, including: objective individualised risk assessment; prompt and transparent procedure; review of the removal decision with suspensive-effect appeal; access to counsel/interpretation; and timely notification—applicable to all forms of transfer (CAT art. 3; CAT GC 4 (paras.12–13); 1951 Refugee Convention art.33, and ICCPR arts. 6–7).

3. Please provide additional information on the evaluation of high-risk profiles (e.g., activists, human rights defenders, journalists, members of minorities) and how ongoing conflict dynamics are factored into return risk determinations, in light of the right to life, prohibition of torture/ill treatment, and security of person (ICCPR arts. 6, 7, 9; HRC GC No. 31, applicability to all persons under jurisdiction/effective control).

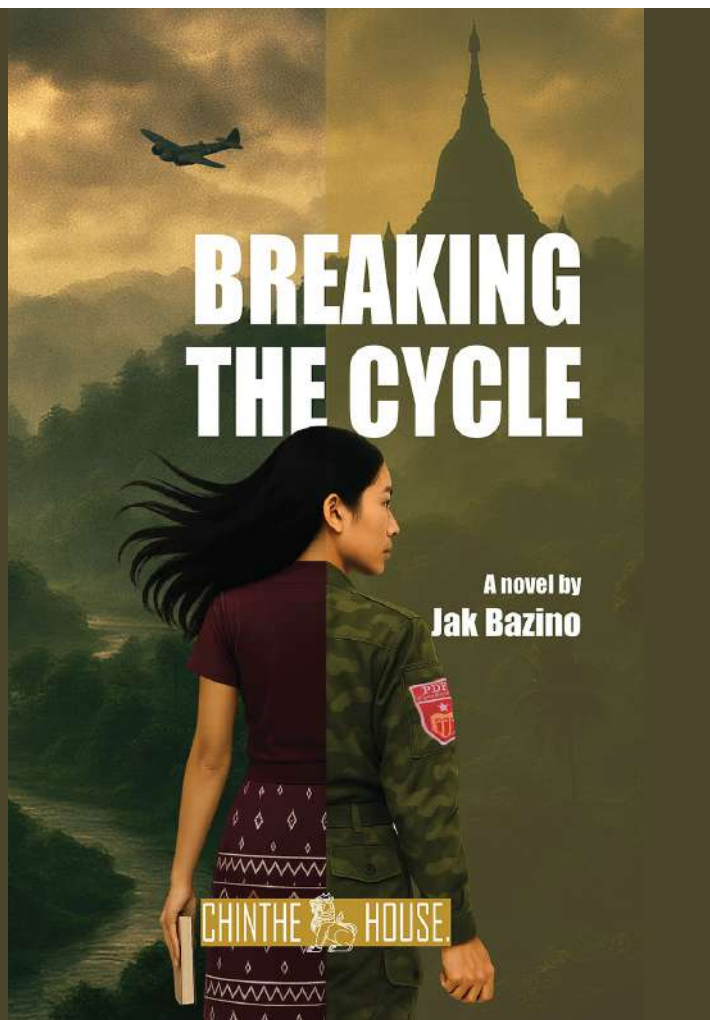
In light of conditions inside of Myanmar, non-refoulement obligations and the risks documented, I respectfully invite your Department to reexamine the TPS termination decision and, in the meantime, to ensure that no removal occurs in violation of international obligations. I remain available for constructive dialogue and technical engagement, including on screening procedures and protection safeguards.

This communication, as a comment on pending or recently adopted legislation, regulations or policies, and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting website after 48 hours. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

Sincerely,

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar





## NEW NOVEL SEEKS TO BRING INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION BACK TO MYANMAR'S CRISIS

**W**ith Myanmar's political crisis and civil war grinding into its fifth year, a new novel seeks to thrust the country's devastating struggle back into international view.

Written by French author Jak Bazino, *Breaking the Cycle* is billed as the first work of fiction to chronicle Myanmar's Spring Revolution, weaving it into a dual-timeline narrative that spans the Japanese invasion of Burma in 1942 and the present-day conflict following the 2021 military coup.

Set for publication on 1 February 2026 – the five-year anniversary of the military's coup – the novel

follows two protagonists separated by eight decades but bound by a shared quest. As Japan invades Burma in 1942, a young British archaeologist uncovers a tablet pointing to sacred Buddhist relics the discover of which could reshape the country's political future. In 2024, amid air strikes and repression, a doctor fighting with Chin resistance forces finds the same artefact in the wreckage of a downed aircraft and sets out across a fractured nation to complete the mission.

Bazino, who lived in Myanmar for more than a decade and witnessed the 2021 coup firsthand, said the book was driven by frustration at the world's fading attention. "The world has largely forgotten Myanmar's ongoing crisis," he wrote in an author's statement. He describes the novel as an attempt to render the country's complexity through individual human experience.

Advance reviewers with deep ties to the country have praised the book's ambition. Esther Htusan, a former Associated Press correspondent and Pulitzer Prize winner, called it "more than a war novel," highlighting its exploration of legacy, resistance and hope amid recurring cycles of violence.

Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) news director Khin Maung Soe described it as a rare work for its blending of fiction with documented historical reality, while fostering empathy for Myanmar's people through the placing of their struggle within the broader human condition.

Published by Chinthe House, *Breaking the Cycle* addresses themes ranging from colonial legacies and nearly forgotten World War II campaigns to women's roles in resistance movements and the psychological toll of conflict.

Through his novel, Bazino makes the argument that Myanmar's fate is not isolated but echoes other global struggles against authoritarianism, but this time, the cycle might finally be broken.

FLASHBACK - The Burma Campaign in 1942. Photo: Wikipedia

**AUTHOR OF 'BREAKING THE CYCLE' NOVEL EXPLAINS HIS REASONS FOR DELVING INTO THE MYANMAR CRISIS**

**'B**reaking the Cycle' is the first novel to chronicle Myanmar's Spring Revolution, a dual-timeline epic spanning 1942 World War II Burma and 2024 and the ongoing and evolving crisis. The book is due for publication by Chinthe House on February 1, 2026 – the fifth anniversary of the Myanmar military coup d'état.

In the following interview with French author Jak Bazino, Mizzima asks about the inspiration for this fascinating human tale of mystery and struggle in a country still trying to find itself after decades of military misrule.

**What inspired you to write this novel?**

Growing up, my grandparents' accounts of German occupation and the French Resistance sparked an obsession with history. Not the grand sweep of events, but the human stories within them. I learned early that we understand the past through individuals, not statistics. How else could we truly grasp the Holocaust's horror, for example, except through survivors like Elie Wiesel?

When I met my wife in Myanmar, she shared her grandmother's stories of Japanese occupation, echoing my own family's experiences but on another continent. I became determined to interview both grandmothers about their lives during WWII and write a book about it, but time ran out. Both passed before I could capture their voices. Yet Myanmar, and the war that shaped it, never left my mind.

Then, fifteen years ago, I read about MIA Recovery discovering a WWII aircraft in the Hukawng Valley jungle. That story, a real-life adventure that seemed pulled from fiction, gripped me. So did the legend of Spitfires buried beneath Mingaladon Airfield. I interviewed Clayton Kuhles, who hunts for lost aircraft in the Burmese jungle like a modern Indiana Jones. He spoke of "metal ghosts" waiting to be unearthed, and suddenly I understood: history doesn't vanish, it just lies hidden. A novel began forming: two eras in Burma, connected by a crashed plane.

Then, traveling in southern Myanmar, I had the privilege of seeing an ancient, ruined laterite wall dating

from the Mon kingdom, carved with vivid sculptures emerging from stone. Standing before those half-erased faces, I felt how deeply the past speaks if we listen. At that point it was still an adventure novel in my mind, in 1942 Burma and in modern Myanmar, about a secret artefact, unearthed in the ruins of legendary Suvannabhumi, "the Golden Land", and the hunt for the sacred relics of the Buddha.

And then came 2021. I was living in Yangon when the military seized power; I saw the repression, the fear, the extraordinary courage of young people who refused to go back to dictatorship. That was the true catalyst. At that point, the story stopped being an abstract historical idea and became an urgent need: to show, through fiction, how the unfinished dreams of the 1940s echo in the Spring Revolution of today, and how a new generation is finally trying to break that cycle.

### **Why is the subject of the novel so important at this time?**

Myanmar is experiencing one of the world's most intense conflicts, the third most severe globally, yet it barely registers in international consciousness. That silence is infuriating, and dangerous.

Since the February 2021 coup, millions have been displaced, thousands of civilians killed, and an entire generation has faced an impossible choice: exile, armed resistance, or submission. But this isn't an isolated crisis in a distant country. Myanmar stands on the frontline of democracy itself, alongside Ukraine, in a defining struggle against authoritarianism. The geopolitical stakes couldn't be higher: Russia and China backing the junta, pro-democracy movements resisting across continents. What unfolds in Yangon and Kyiv shapes the future of democratic freedom worldwide.

That's why the dual timeline matters: 1942 and 2024. By connecting them, the novel reveals a crucial truth: history not only rimes. It repeats when conditions repeat. And there's something equally urgent happening closer to home. The patterns we see in Myanmar's post-coup chaos - the erosion of institutions, the weaponization of fear, the fracturing of civil society, the repression and limitation of freedom - these aren't alien to Western democracies. Americans especially should pay attention. The Spring Revolution's lessons about how quickly democracy can unravel, and how fiercely ordinary people fight to reclaim it, feel uncomfortably relevant to what's unfolding today in the United States. And Europe is not immune to it with the rise of far right and populism. It's déjà vu, and we ignore it at our peril.

Western populations tend to look down on less developed nations with a patronizing gaze, assuming we have nothing to learn and everything to teach. That assumption is dangerously wrong. Today, Myanmar should be a master class for all Western democracies, especially the United States. Not merely as a cautionary tale about authoritarianism's brutality, but as a living demonstration of how ordinary people organize, find courage, and fight back when freedom is threatened. The Spring Revolution shows what civic resistance looks like when it truly matters.

I genuinely believe the Myanmar Spring Revolution will occupy the same historical significance as the American and French revolutions. It deserves to be studied with that seriousness. Because the lessons it teaches are not abstract historical points. They're urgent warnings and inspiration for democracies everywhere that are beginning to fray.

This novel insists on something essential: what happens in Myanmar concerns all of us. By offering readers a human entry point into this complexity, rendering both the tragedy and the extraordinary hope through individual lives, it argues that the fight for freedom anywhere is connected to the fight for freedom everywhere. We're living through a decisive moment, and the outcome will define what kind of world we leave behind. We in the West need to stop assuming we are the teachers. Myanmar is teaching us. The question is whether we're willing to listen.

### **It is five years since the Myanmar military launched their coup. How do you view the situation in Myanmar?**

The situation in Myanmar is devastating, but it is no longer hopeless, and that distinction is everything.

The humanitarian toll is staggering: millions internally displaced, villages incinerated, widespread poverty and medical collapse, a population living under bombardment and arbitrary arrest. What outsiders often don't realize is that this brutality isn't new. Ethnic minorities have endured systematic violence for decades. The junta is merely escalating a familiar brutality.

It may sound insensitive for someone like me, safe and comfortable outside Myanmar, to speak of hope amid such suffering, especially given the ultimate sacrifices made by courageous young fighters for freedom. But I believe the evidence warrants optimism.



The coup unleashed something the generals never anticipated: unprecedented unity. The Bamar majority and ethnic minorities are working together. Youth and older generations are aligned. The PDF and ethnic armed organizations are coordinating more effectively than in any previous uprising. More than half the country now operates beyond junta control. And critically, the myth of the Tatmadaw's inevitability has shattered.

What's missing isn't courage on the ground, there's no shortage of that. It's sustained international attention and material support. Myanmar has been eclipsed by other crises, but five years in, we must remember: this isn't a frozen conflict. It's a living, evolving revolution whose outcome reverberates globally.

So yes, I remain cautious. But I'm cautiously hopeful because the conditions for victory exist, and because I cannot imagine Myanmar reverting to what came before 2015. It's simply impossible now. This is the lesson other nations must grasp, not just Western democracies which support matters, but China and Myanmar's neighbors. By backing the Tatmadaw, they're backing the losing side. History is moving against them, and they're choosing to be on the wrong side of it.

### **Can you tell us about your experience of living and working in Myanmar?**

I first came to Myanmar as a student in 1998. I returned in the 2000s and stayed for over a decade across two distinct periods: under the junta, and then during the democratic opening after 2015. Living through both versions of the country fundamentally shaped how I see it.

Under the military regime, the atmosphere was suffocating. Surveillance and fear were physical forces. I witnessed crippling poverty, forced labour, the Saffron Revolution, and the junta's brutal response to Cyclone Nargis. Gatherings of more than five people were forbidden. Power cuts meant two days without electricity for every one day with it. I never believed I'd see this change in my lifetime. Then 2011 happened, and everything shifted.

I'd just finished my first novel, *Zawgyi, l'Alchimiste de Birmanie*, about the Saffron Revolution, a work I thought captured the reality of Myanmar at that moment. When it was published in 2012, it became a historical document about "the past" overnight.

When I returned in 2015, I stepped into a transformed country. The fear had lifted. Internet arrived. Social media exploded. Young people found their political voices. Ethnic and gender issues were finally debated

openly. I genuinely believed Myanmar was becoming a democracy. Yes, it would take time to consolidate, but the trajectory seemed irreversible. The Friday before the coup, a French official called asking about rumors of a military takeover. I dismissed it outright, Myanmar was on track. The generals couldn't be foolish enough to stage a coup during a pandemic, after a decade of freedom. The population, especially the youth, would never accept it.

I learned my lesson on February 1st: never underestimate the military's capacity for acting stupid.

My wife and I left a few months after the coup, but not before witnessing the daily escalation of repression in our Sanchaung neighborhood. I saw the early protests, the barricades, the pot-banging at 8 pm each night, voices singing *Kaba Ma Kyay Buu* in darkness, the sudden arrests. Leaving was devastating. Myanmar was my wife's country but had become mine too - we were planning to retire there. But we were fortunate. We escaped. So many of our friends, family, and colleagues couldn't say the same.

The novel draws directly from these experiences, though always through fictional characters. This isn't memoir; it's about capturing the emotional and moral truth of what people endured. I'm convinced that stories, with their emotional weight, generate understanding far more powerfully than statistics ever could. People need to feel injustice in their hearts and flesh, not just comprehend it intellectually. Art provides that vector. After all, my own passion for Burma began watching *Beyond Rangoon* as a student. I hope my novel can do the same for readers: move them to truly see Myanmar and what's at stake.

### **What is your fascination with contemporary Burmese history?**

For someone with a background in political science, Myanmar's modern history is a compressed laboratory of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: empire, war, decolonization, Cold War, socialism, nationalism, ethnic insurgencies, fragile democratization, digital revolution, and now the decisive confrontation between authoritarianism and democracy in a globalized world.

But what truly fascinates me are two "hinge moments" that mirror each other across eight decades. The first is the Burma Campaign of 1942: the Japanese invasion, the collapse of British Empire, and the emergence of Burmese independence. The second is the Spring Revolution of 2021, where a new generation is literally fighting to complete an unfinished independence story, and to reimagine the state on

federal, multi-ethnic, democratic lines.

What's remarkable is watching federalism resurface as a unifying political vision. This idea emerged during the independence movement in the 1930s, lay dormant for decades, but has now become the shared project binding the entire pro-democracy movement together. After decades of state propaganda portraying ethnic minorities as threats to national unity, Bamar citizens are finally understanding what those minorities have endured. The revelation is powerful: the fragmentation of Myanmar was never caused by the periphery. It was caused by the nationalist army at the center, imposing uniformity through force.

Watching federalism gain ground in real time, seeing Bamar and ethnic minorities unite around this vision, is genuinely encouraging. It suggests that Myanmar's future could genuinely be different.

Contemporary Burmese history also forces us to confront uncomfortable truths about colonial legacies. How did British policies around ethnicity, land, and citizenship plant seeds that still poison politics today? How do unresolved traumas, from World War II to post-independence conflicts, continue to haunt individual and collective psychology? These aren't uniquely Burmese questions; they echo across many societies, including France's colonial past and others. But Myanmar brings them into sharp, undeniable relief. That's what makes it so compelling to write about, and so devastating.

### **Who would you say is the audience for your novel?**

There are several overlapping circles of readers for *Breaking the Cycle*.

First, anyone interested in Myanmar –, whether they already know the country well, or are coming to it for the first time, will find in the novel a way to enter its recent history through human stories rather than just through geopolitics or NGO reports.

Second, readers of historical and political fiction who appreciated books like *The English Patient*, *The Nightingale*, *Between Shades of Gray*, *The Glass Palace* or *The Last Reunion* are, in many ways, the natural audience. The book is an adventure and war novel, with mystery elements around an archaeological artefact, but it is also a love story, and a meditation on trauma, resistance, and moral courage. It will speak to readers who enjoy being immersed in another time and place while also being invited to reflect on their own.

Finally, the novel is written for people who care

about democracy, human rights, and the way ordinary individuals navigate authoritarian systems, whether in Myanmar, Ukraine or now in the United States. You do not need prior knowledge of Burmese history to connect with Anthony Preston, Nandar Aye or Khin Yadanar; their dilemmas are universal: how to act when the world around you collapses, what you are willing to sacrifice for freedom, and whether it is possible, at last, to break a destructive historical cycle.

### **Is there anything else you would like to add?**

Perhaps two things.

First, despite its darkness - war, massacres, betrayals, torture, the intimate cost of resistance - *Breaking the Cycle* is fundamentally not a pessimistic book. It's dedicated to Myanmar's youth, "who sacrifice their lives and their today to make way for a better tomorrow." Even in the bleakest moments, there are acts of solidarity, humor, tenderness, and love. These aren't sentimental flourishes. They're the threads that prevent history from collapsing entirely into despair. They're what make survival possible. I genuinely believe there is light ahead, and that these sacrifices will not be in vain.

Second, fiction isn't a substitute for action, but it can ignite the empathy without which action rarely begins. If readers finish this book moved to learn more about Myanmar, to support organizations working on the ground, or simply to hold the country in their moral consciousness rather than letting it fade into obscurity, then the novel will have succeeded beyond its pages. There is a better future for Burma within reach, and the world should recognize it as both a worthy cause and a realistically achievable outcome.

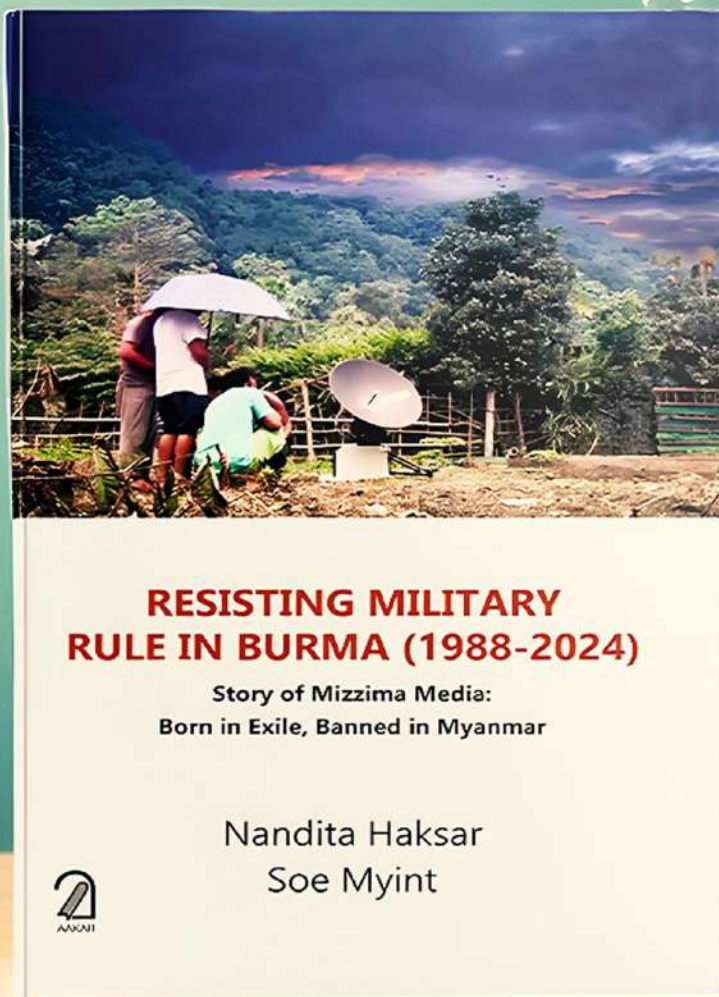
To paraphrase Hemingway: Myanmar is "a fine place and worth the fighting for." The Spring Revolution proves it. The world should stand with those who are.



RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

*by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint*



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## MIZZIMA AWARDED GLOBAL JTI CERTIFICATE FOR RELIABLE NEWS ON MYANMAR

**M**izzima, one of Myanmar's most prominent news outlets and a press freedom advocate, obtained the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) certification from global audit firm Bureau Veritas, JTI says in a press statement 5 January.

Operating in clandestine mode within Myanmar and supported by an exiled team, Mizzima strives to fulfil its role as reliable source of news and information for the Myanmar public.

"Your Journalism Trust Initiative certification affirms what audiences already know: that principled, transparent journalism matters. Congratulations on this achievement and on your continued contribution to informing citizens about Myanmar," says Benjamin Sabbah, director of Journalism Trust Initiative

"Myanmar's ongoing conflict has created an

intensely contested media landscape, where mis- and disinformation are increasingly deployed to reinforce state propaganda and the prevailing "official" narrative. Although Mizzima is already regarded as one of the most trusted news sources among the people of Myanmar, the organization anticipates that JTI certification will further strengthen its reputation and credibility in the eyes of its target audience. Such recognition would help solidify Mizzima's role as a primary and reliable source of news and information for the Myanmar public," says Soe Myint, Managing Director and Editor-in-chief of Mizzima.

### Elevating standards of news media

JTI was developed in 2019 as an ISO-type international standard by roughly 130 experts from media outlets, regulatory bodies, associations and digital platforms. They worked to define the criteria of transparency, independence and ethics necessary for

rigorous information publishing. The idea of designing a self-regulatory mechanism applicable to all news sources worldwide was the initiative of the Paris-headquartered media freedom watchdog RSF. It is used by more than 2 400 media outlets in 127 countries. 1 460 are currently undergoing self-assessment, 830 published their transparency report, and 135 obtained JTI certification following an audit.

The JTI certification process consists of three stages: an introduction to the standard through JTI's portals, a self-evaluation conducted by the media organization, and a certifying audit. "The external audit phase of the certification process allowed us to review our operational structure and address areas for improvement identified by the auditor, for instance regarding editorial policies, said Myint. Following the auditor's recommendations, we drafted policies on transparency in externally facilitated location reports and on the constraints of location reporting."

## Context of ongoing repression of independent media

Following the military coup of 1 February 2021 in Myanmar, the military junta — listed by RSF as one of the 2025 Press Freedom Predators — has steadily intensified its crackdown on the media.

Mizzima was stripped of all licenses permitting it to operate legally inside the country. As a result, the outlet shifted to a clandestine mode of operation within Myanmar, supported by teams working in exile. Under these conditions, every Mizzima journalist and staff member working inside the country faces the risk of arrest if their identity or location becomes known to government authorities. This reality makes secure communication channels indispensable to their daily work.

Before the coup, Mizzima functioned as a financially self-sustaining media organization. The upheaval,

however, dismantled its business model and forced the outlet to rely heavily on donor funding to keep its operations alive.

"For more than two years, available funding for independent media in Myanmar has steadily dwindled, a trend Mizzima expects to continue and to further impact its own operations," Soe Myint says.

## Pillar among Reporters Without Borders' support to press freedom in Myanmar

Since the coup, Myanmar's military junta has unleashed a brutal crackdown on the media: 7 journalists have been executed, more than 150 imprisoned, and at least 50 remain behind bars. This violence has triggered a massive exodus: more than 60 Myanmar-based media outlets are now operating from abroad, mainly from Thailand.

It is in this context that RSF launched the Myanmar Press Freedom Project (MPFP), in October 2024, a support mechanism for exiled Burmese journalists. Initially deployed in Chiang Mai, in northwestern Thailand, the programme expanded its activities to Mae Sot in July 2025, a border town with Myanmar, with the assistance of its partner Docu Athan. This extension enables RSF to remain close to Burmese journalists in exile or in transit, and to strengthen a strategic border hub dedicated to press freedom in the region.

Since its launch, the MPFP has supported more than 400 journalists by providing essential assistance through the donation of professional and technical equipment (laptops, phones, solar batteries, etc.), the provision of VPNs and satellite connections, and the delivery of training sessions tailored to their needs in the field. This support is directed both at journalists working in exile and those still active in Myanmar, often under precarious and dangerous conditions.





Photo: AFP

# BEHIND THE CURTAIN: CHINA'S 2025 GROWTH REALITY FALLS FAR BELOW OFFICIAL CLAIMS

SUN LEE

**C**hina's economic performance in 2025 has sharply diverged from the optimistic official narrative, with credible independent estimates suggesting growth was at best just 2.5–3 percent — roughly half of the government's stated target of "around 5 percent."

This stark contrast raises critical questions about the true health of the world's second-largest economy, the reliability of official statistics, and the structural weaknesses that continue to burden its long-term trajectory.

## Official targets vs. independent estimates

At the outset of 2025, Beijing reaffirmed an ambitious GDP growth target of around 5 percent, a figure accompanied by assurances of resilient domestic demand and robust policy support.

Official data released through the first three quarters showed a 5.2 percent year-on-year expansion, a statistic presented as evidence of economic stability and progress.

However, a comprehensive report by the U.S.-based Rhodium Group — titled *China's Economy: Rightsizing 2025, Looking Ahead to 2026* — paints a dramatically different picture.

According to this analysis, China's real GDP growth for the full year likely ranged only between 2.5–3.0 percent after a marked slowdown in the latter half of the year.

This estimate sharply contradicts Beijing's official

narrative, suggesting that investment — especially fixed-asset investment — collapsed rather than merely softened.

Rhodium's methodology adjusts for discrepancies in reported investment figures and broader economic activity — areas where official data appear inconsistent or incomplete.

The gap between the official and independent estimates reflects not just a statistical divergence but deeper structural issues within the Chinese economy.

## Investment collapse and structural drag

Rhodium's findings point to a dramatic contraction in fixed-asset investment — spending on factories, infrastructure, real estate, and other long-term assets — as a central factor in China's subdued growth.

While investment showed moderate increases in early 2025, it entered negative territory by mid-year and continued to deteriorate, undermining one of the traditional pillars of China's growth model.

Official figures show fixed-asset investment shrinking year-on-year, compounded by a collapse in property sector investment, which fell sharply and dragged down broader capital formation statistics.

These trends are emblematic of long-standing structural challenges: excess capacity in key sectors, a prolonged real estate downturn, and a reliance on credit-intensive growth that has lost traction.

The Rhodium Group report emphasises that history offers no example of an economy sustaining official-like growth rates while enduring persistent deflation, a pattern China has witnessed for multiple quarters.

This underscores the argument that official figures may overstate underlying momentum.

## Deflationary pressures and weak domestic demand

While headline inflation in China showed a modest rise toward the end of the year, broader price data reflect enduring weakness in domestic demand and continued deflationary pressure at the producer level.

Producer prices have remained in decline for more than three years, signalling weak demand for goods and services throughout the economy.

Consumer spending — a key driver of growth — posted only marginal gains in late 2025, with retail sales expanding at a slower pace than earlier in the year.

Combined with shrinking investment, these trends suggest that households and firms are increasingly cautious, an indicator of broader malaise beneath the surface.

This weak domestic demand complicates the official story of “stable growth,” particularly when balanced against the outsized role exports have played in propping up activity.

While foreign trade has helped sustain the headline numbers, reliance on external demand exposes domestic vulnerabilities and raises questions about the sustainability of growth.

### Transparency and data reliability concerns

Analysts and independent economists have long raised concerns about the reliability of China's official economic data.

The Rhodium Group analysis reinforces this scepticism by highlighting methodological inconsistencies — for example, between declining fixed-asset investment and reported contributions of gross capital formation to GDP.

Critics argue that the official narrative may gloss over these gaps, particularly during periods when leaders are under pressure to maintain confidence and project economic stability.

The remarkable divergence between independent estimates and official figures has amplified calls for greater transparency and more robust statistical methodologies.

Although Chinese authorities rarely address these discrepancies publicly, the widening gap suggests a deeper disconnect between reported performance and real economic conditions.

## Implications for 2026 and beyond

The Rhodium Group report does not confine its critique to 2025 alone; it also projects a subdued outlook for 2026, with growth expected to slip to between 1.0–2.5 percent, well below international projections such as those from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which estimates around 4.5 percent growth next year.

This potential slowdown reflects not only lingering structural headwinds — weak domestic demand, investment shortfalls, and demographic pressures — but also the limited efficacy of stimulus measures that rely heavily on credit and fiscal support.

The anticipated slowdown has important implications for global markets and supply chains, given China's significant role as both a producer and consumer in the world economy.

## The broader narrative: Figures versus reality

China's economic story in 2025 is emblematic of a broader tension between official narratives and independent assessments.

On the one hand, state statistics and global financial institutions — including the World Bank and IMF — emphasise resilience and stability, often citing policy support and external demand.

On the other hand, independent analyses such as those from Rhodium Group paint a picture of an economy constrained by fading structural drivers, deflationary pressures, and weakened investment dynamics.

The resulting divergence highlights not only different methodologies but also fundamentally different interpretations of economic health.

As China moves into 2026 and begins its next five-year planning period, the gap between these narratives will likely shape both domestic policy debates and global economic expectations.

What remains clear is that the official celebration of 5 percent growth does not fully capture the strains and uneven performance within the broader economy.

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





Iranian protestors in Greece. Photo: AFP

## IRAN'S LEADER DEMANDS CRACKDOWN ON 'SEDITIONISTS' AFTER PROTESTS

Iran's supreme leader on 17 January said authorities "must break the back of the seditionists", blaming US President Donald Trump for "casualties" after a deadly crackdown on protests against the country's clerical leadership.

Iran was rocked by weeks of demonstrations sparked by anger over economic hardship that exploded into the biggest protests against the Islamic republic in more than three years.

But demonstrations have subsided after the

crackdown that rights groups say left thousands dead under an internet blackout that lasted more than a week.

Authorities have said demonstrations they condemn as "riots" are under control, with state-aligned media reporting thousands of arrests and officials vowing swift punishment for those detained.

"By God's grace, the Iranian nation must break the back of the seditionists just as it broke the back of the sedition," Khamenei told supporters during an



address marking a religious holiday commemorating the Prophet Mohammed's ascension to heaven aired by state television.

"We do not intend to lead the country to war, but we will not spare domestic criminals," he added, saying that "international criminals" were "worse" and would also not be spared punishment.

Iranian authorities have blamed the United States for fuelling a "terrorist operation" that they say hijacked peaceful protests over the economy.

Trump, who backed and joined Israel's 12-day war against Iran in June, had repeatedly threatened new military action against Tehran if protesters were killed.

### 'American conspiracy'

Khamenei on Saturday lashed out at Trump, accusing him of being "guilty for the casualties, damages and accusations he has levelled against the Iranian nation".

"This was an American conspiracy," he said, adding that "America's goal is to swallow Iran... the goal is to put Iran back under military, political and economic domination".

While Washington has appeared to have stepped back, Trump has said he has not ruled out military options and made clear he was keeping a close eye on whether any protesters were executed.

Alarm has mounted over the reported death toll during the crackdown, as verifying cases remains difficult under severe internet restrictions.

Monitor Netblocks said on Saturday that internet connectivity in Iran rose "very" slightly, more than 200 hours into the nationwide internet shutdown.

Rights groups have warned that the blackout has been aimed at concealing the extent of the violence during the crackdown.

Norway-based rights group Iran Human Rights (IHR) says 3,428 protesters have been verified to have been killed by security forces, but warns the actual toll could be several times higher.

Other estimates place the death toll at more than 5,000 -- and possibly as high as 20,000, IHR said.

The opposition Iran International channel based outside the country has said at least 12,000 people were killed during the protests, citing senior government and security sources.

AFP



# TOWARDS CONFEDERATION

**"T**his is not only my interest—it is also my duty," says Khay, a research fellow now based in Berlin, about his work in unraveling and better understanding Myanmar's complex crises.

Khay's personal story has embodied his research. Raised in Karen State during an era of armed conflict, he first became politically engaged as an engineering student at university, volunteering to document constitutional dialogues at KNU headquarters. A pivotal moment came during a flag-raising ceremony. Khay recalls a leader saying they had been struggling to raise the flag for many years, even for their lives. Hearing this, he felt reminded of his duty to his ethnic people and resolved to continue their struggle through research rather than arms. Soon after, he shifted from engineering to political research. He worked as a senior researcher for an organization in Myanmar, where he studied ethnic politics and security issues. This experience eventually led to his move to Germany.

After the 2021 coup, he returned temporarily to Karen State to document the impact of the military's violence on local communities, researching the displacement, flow of refugee, and rise of informal governance structures in resistance-held areas. Conducting this work required caution. "I had to pass the military checkpoints using

many strategies," he recalls, underscoring the personal risk involved in even basic fieldwork. Yet it also gave him an intimate view of how ethnic organizations adapted in the face of state collapse and how grassroots governance became a crucial pillar of survival.

Central to Khay's research is the Karen National Union (KNU), one of Myanmar's most prominent ethnic resistance organizations. For decades, the KNU had balanced armed struggle with participation in national peace negotiations. But the coup convinced KNU leaders that dialogue alone was futile. Since then, it has pursued a multifaceted approach: continuing military resistance, forging alliances with other anti-junta forces, engaging in diplomacy, and— perhaps most significantly— investing in local administration. The organization has provided extensive training to township-level officials and prioritized "bottom-up federalism," an alternative to the country's historically centralized state model.

Yet the Karen movement is not without its internal debates. For example, Khay identifies a widening generational divide. While KNU leaders remain committed to a federal union, many younger Karen activists, particularly those in the diaspora, demand even greater autonomy, sometimes envisioning confederation-like arrangements inspired by political movements in Rakhine State. This gap, Khay argues, reflects not disunity but a dynamic political awakening. "Youth now expect more than just federalism," he says, noting that this same ambition extends to the broader resistance movement, including Bamar-majority youth who have begun to question long-standing power hierarchies.

## CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/12/30/episode-460-towards-confederation>



# MYANMAR INVESTMENT UP IN FIRST NINE MONTHS OF 2025-226 FISCAL YEAR, SAYS DICA

Myanmar attracted nearly US\$338 million in foreign investment during the first nine months of the 2025–2026 fiscal year, according to official data released by the Myanmar junta’s investment authorities.

The Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA) said inflows totalled US\$337.9 million between April and December. Manufacturing accounted for the largest share of investment at about US\$190.5 million.

Other investment sectors saw investment including transport and communications at US\$81.4 million, energy at US\$35.3 million, oil and natural gas at US\$25 million, livestock and fisheries at US\$2.5 million and services with US\$3.1 million, DICA said.

The figures were released as Myanmar’s junta seeks to revive foreign investment amid the ongoing political crisis, armed conflict, international sanctions and economic disruption following the military’s 2021 coup.

The Myanmar Investment Commission continues to review and approve proposals from domestic and foreign investors under the country’s investment law, the statement said.





Rohingya refugees stare at a mobile phone. Photo: AFP

## VOTING PLANS VS MILITARY FACING ICJ CASE OVER ROHINGYA

**A**s the Myanmar military continues to promote its election process, social media users are increasingly connecting voting calls with the ongoing case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over crimes against the Rohingya.

Public sentiment is largely critical and distrustful. Many users argue that voting cannot bring legitimacy or stability when accountability for past crimes remains unresolved. Some say the ICJ case has made the election look disconnected from reality, while others describe the voting process as an attempt to distract from international pressure.

Common user-style comments include:

"They ask us to vote while defending genocide charges abroad."

"How can an election be normal when Rohingya justice is still pending?"

"The real court is in The Hague, not the polling station."

Some users say the ICJ case has reinforced their decision not to participate, viewing non-voting as a form of silent resistance. Others point out that Rohingya communities themselves remain excluded from political rights, making the election process appear selective and unfair.

The factual background to this discussion is the ongoing ICJ case related to alleged genocide against the Rohingya, alongside continued efforts by the military to organise elections without broad public consent or inclusive participation.



# 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.