

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

ELECTION SPECIAL

Myanmar's 'sham' poll seeks to cement brutal military rule

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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.

AN UNPOPULAR PUBLIC POLL

The first round of the national election conducted by Myanmar's military junta under tight security was not well received by the Myanmar public. The poll has been met with widespread skepticism, quiet defiance, and outright rejection by much of the Myanmar public.

Far from being seen as a step toward political normalization, the polls – on 28 December, 11 January and 25 January – are broadly perceived as an attempt by the military to manufacture legitimacy after years of violent repression, economic collapse, and political exclusion. For many citizens, the election is not a choice but a performance staged under coercive conditions that bear little resemblance to democratic participation.

Public reaction has been shaped by the circumstances in which the vote is taking place. Since the 2021 coup, the military has dismantled the country's electoral institutions, imprisoned or exiled opposition leaders, and dissolved or banned parties associated with the National League for Democracy, which overwhelmingly won the last credible national election in 2020.

Against this backdrop, the junta-run polls are widely regarded as predetermined. Voters understand that key political actors are absent, entire regions remain under martial law or active conflict, and millions of people have been displaced and are unable to participate even if they wished to. As a result, the election is seen less as a national exercise and more as an administrative ritual limited to areas firmly under military control.

Among urban populations, particularly youth and former civil servants aligned with the civil disobedience movement, the dominant response has been boycott. Calls to refuse participation have circulated quietly through social networks and word of mouth, despite the risks of surveillance and punishment. For these groups, abstention is a moral

stance – voting is viewed as complicity in a process designed to entrench military rule. Even where polling stations are accessible, indifference and low turnout are widely expected, reflecting a deep erosion of trust in state institutions.

In rural and conflict-affected areas, the response is shaped by fear rather than ideology. Some residents may vote simply to avoid harassment, while others are unable to do so because polling cannot be safely conducted. This coerced participation, or enforced absence, further undermines any claim that the election reflects popular will. Ethnic minority communities, many of whom have long experienced marginalization under military governments, are particularly cynical, seeing the process as yet another centralizing move that ignores their political aspirations.

Public discourse, though constrained, reflects a shared understanding that the election is aimed primarily at an external audience. Many Myanmar citizens believe the junta hopes to use the vote to divide the opposition, weaken international pressure, and justify continued military dominance under a nominally civilian façade. This perception has fueled resentment rather than reconciliation, reinforcing the belief that meaningful political change will not come through junta-controlled institutions.

Ultimately, the public response to the December-January elections is defined not by excitement or hope, but by resignation and resistance. Whether expressed through boycott, silence, or reluctant compliance, the prevailing sentiment is that the process does not offer a path out of crisis. Instead of healing Myanmar's deep political wounds, the junta-run election risks further alienating a population that has already made clear, at great cost, that it does not accept military rule as legitimate.

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Cover photo of political party campaigners in Yangon by AFP



Collecting and counting the vote at a polling station in Yangon. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S 'SHAM' POLL SEEKS TO CEMENT BRUTAL MILITARY RULE

Mizzima Commentary

It could be considered a joke if it wasn't so serious. As democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi continues to rot in jail, Myanmar is going to the polls in a trumped up and skewed election that critics claim is a "sham" rather than a legitimate democratic process.

The ballot, which began on 28 December and is running to the end of January 2026, is taking place as Myanmar suffers from brutal armed conflict that was sparked by the February 2021 coup and the military's desire to hold power.

Nobel Laureate Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) party won the 2020 election with a resounding majority, but had the rug pulled from under them as the Myanmar military put an end to their democratic experiment which was not going the way they had hoped.

Now the military is running a tightly-rigged election – initially promised in the immediate wake of the coup close to five years ago – that is aimed to put a "civilian veneer" on continued military control with the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) likely to win.

With fighting between the military and ethnic armed groups and pro-democracy forces making large parts of the country inaccessible and unstable, voter turnout is likely to be low, and the resulting poll – set to be announced at the end of January or slightly later – will in no way represent the will of the Myanmar people.

With the people's favourite party and its leader Suu Kyi blocked from participating, the military will have a hard job convincing Myanmar's populace and the international community that the poll is a serious democratic process. The poor turnout in Phase One of the poll is testimony to that.

The Myanmar military, under the leadership of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, appears to be bulldozing ahead with their "disciplined democracy" under the mi-

litary-written 2028 Constitution, tossing off criticism by Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and many in the international community that the process is not "free and fair".

Min Aung Hlaing is relying on his smooze-fest with Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping to provide him with the backing to continue to stomp on the Myanmar people, as he continues to bomb civilians and push back against the Spring Revolution resistance forces. Shortly after the poll results are announced, Myanmar will fall under the leadership of "men in white" rather than the "men in green" but it will be a sham with the generals continuing to pull the strings.

This development is disastrous for the Golden Land.

National hero General Aung San's vision for Burma is in tatters. The country has suffered for decades under the boots of the military and the generals' experiments in democracy in the 1980s, 1990s and from 2010 have been trashed by the egos of the generals who it has been proved did not want to let go.

Now military leader Min Aung Hlaing is pursuing a civil war and cracking down harshly on dissent. Over half the country is not covered by the election, and many parties, including the NLD, are blocked and/or unwilling to take part. Those who publicly protest against the election are being thrown in jail – with sentences even worse than those publicly supporting the Spring Revolution.

Myanmar is now a basket case. Its leader is an embarrassment for ASEAN, who don't know what to do with him and the now discredited "Five-point Consensus", signed but not acted upon. Whoever steps in to head the "democratically-elected" administration will sit at the top of a military-run regime bent on continuing to crush the will of the Myanmar people.



International election observers in Naypyidaw. Photo: AFP

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



A soldier outside a polling station in Yangon.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA HAS TIGHT SECURITY FOR PHASE 1 OF ELECTION

The Myanmar junta has introduced special security procedures for political parties during the campaign period, as resistance forces strongly oppose the planned election across the country. Under the procedure, political parties are required to notify junta authorities in advance in order to receive security protection for their campaign trips, according to party officials and election-related announcements.

The junta's Union Election Commission has issued five statements outlining phased polling schedules and listing townships where elections will not be held. In addition, the commission released two further statements specifying wards and village tracts from phases one, two, and three where polling has been cancelled. Despite these announcements, political parties say they have been unable to campaign as planned due to widespread security concerns.

Both independent and pro-junta media outlets report that canvassing activities have been conducted almost fully only in areas under firm junta control, such as Yangon, Naypyidaw, and the Ayeyarwady Region. In most other regions and states, campaigning

has been severely restricted, affecting not only the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) but also other political parties, including the People's Party led by former 88 Generation leader Ko Ko Gyi, which is often regarded as closer to the democratic camp despite its participation in the junta-organized election.

Ye Kyaw Swar, a lower house candidate from the People's Party, said armed conflict in Sagaing Region has made even candidate recruitment difficult. "In Sagaing, it is hard to find candidates because of the fighting. Party members do not dare to reveal their status, and campaigns cannot be carried out in areas with a high risk of clashes," he said.

Saw Aye Han, vice president of the People Pioneer Party led by Dr. Thet Thet Khine, a former National League for Democracy lawmaker, told Voice of Myanmar media that campaigning was limited to relatively secure areas. "We can campaign in places with good security such as Naypyidaw, Yangon, and Ayeyarwady. Some areas in Bago and Magway are not safe for campaigns. Some candidates from other parties were arrested by

PDFs. In some places, polls cannot be held. That means people lose their right to vote," he said.

Meanwhile, resistance forces have intensified attacks against junta security operations linked to the election. On 27 December, revolutionary forces from Nyaung-U Township, a major tourist destination known for its ancient pagodas, attacked junta troops providing security for polling stations in Natpalin and Kanzaunt villages, according to local sources.

In Sagaing Region, resistance forces launched attacks on junta positions in Budalin town in the early hours of election day. They reportedly seized most areas of the town, although junta troops continue to hold out inside fortified bunkers.

In Magway Region, considered part of Myanmar's central heartland, resistance forces have been fighting junta troops in six townships - Salin, Sinphyukyun, Pauk, Pwintphyu, Seikphyu, and Chauk - since 23 December. Resistance groups have reportedly encircled Sinphyukyun town, forcing most residents, except for some elderly people, to flee due to ongoing clashes.



KIA fighter. Photo: AFP

Urban guerrilla activity was also reported in Yangon. The Yangon Army claimed responsibility for an attack on the township election office in Kamaryut Township in the early hours of election day. A member of the group told Mizzima that two grenades were thrown at the building before the attackers withdrew. "Due to heavy security, we retreated immediately after the attack. Both grenades exploded, and the mission was completed," the source said.

Separately, the junta's Central Command headquarters in Mandalay was attacked with five rockets at around 1:00 a.m., according to local sources. Four rockets reportedly landed inside the compound, killing two soldiers and injuring others. Junta troops responded with counter-artillery fire, which struck residential areas in Aungmyaytharzan Township, injuring two civilians.

Kachin Independence Army resumes attacks in Bhamo

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and its allied resistance forces resumed their offensive in Bhamo town, the second-largest city in Kachin State, on Christmas Day, according to local sources.

The KIA first launched its offensive against Bhamo in December 2024, with the most recent major fighting prior to this occurring in September 2025. During the early months of 2025, KIA and allied forces captured multiple junta regiments and auxiliary battalions in and around the town. At that time, junta troops were reportedly holding out only at No. (47) Regiment, the headquarters of No. (21) Military Operations Command, and Bhamo University. However, the junta managed to regain control of several lost positions and much of the town in August, after successfully transporting



Military conscription continues. Photo: Supplied

reinforcements and ammunition along the Irrawaddy River.

Fighting resumed on 25 December, the first day of the renewed offensive, with reports indicating that the junta suffered significant losses among senior battlefield personnel. Sources on the ground said those killed included a strategic commander based at No. (47) Regiment, as well as the commander of No. (641) Ordnance Battalion and his deputy. Local sources further claimed that resistance forces seized both No. (47) Regiment and No. (641) Ordnance Battalion, although this has not been officially confirmed.

KIO spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu told Mizzima that he was unable to verify those claims. "We received reports of heavy fighting and bombardment around No. (47) Regiment, as well as the 3-mile and 4-mile areas. I have seen the reports circulating online, but I cannot confirm them," he said.

On the same day, the KIA carried out drone attacks targeting the junta's airbase in Myitkyina, aiming to disrupt its aerial firepower. According to resistance sources, the attacks destroyed one fighter jet and one Mi-17 helicopter. Drone strikes reportedly continued on 27 December, resulting in the destruction of another fighter jet. If confirmed, the junta would have lost three military aircraft in Kachin State within three days.

Separately, on the afternoon of election day, KIA and allied People's Defense Force units launched an offensive in Katha town. As of 30 December, resistance forces had seized five junta positions, taken control of around half of the town, and captured more than 50 prisoners of war, along with weapons.

Resistance sources said they are facing junta forces from No. (309) Battalion, Katha-based units, No. (106) Infantry Battalion, and Shanni militias, with an estimated 600 personnel. Resistance forces reportedly field more than 1,000 fighters. Local residents reported that the junta carried out airstrikes around the town, allegedly to prevent civilians from fleeing, raising concerns that civilians may be used as human shields.

Myanmar junta conscription drive continues

The Myanmar junta continues to expand its conscription drive, holding opening ceremonies for Batch No. 20 of military training at various training schools across the country on 15 December, according to junta-controlled media.

Each batch reportedly aims to train at least 5,000 conscripts. With the launch of the 20th batch, the junta has forcibly recruited an estimated minimum of 100,000 conscripts since the enforcement of the conscription law in April 2024, based on available figures.

Meanwhile, Batch No. (17) has completed its training at respective military schools, with completion ceremonies held on 29 December, according to junta-controlled media. This means the junta has recently added around 85,000 newly-trained soldiers to its forces.

Monitoring by the Mizzima research team shows that conscription training periods are significantly shortened, lasting less than 10 weeks, with some batches receiving just over eight weeks of training. Analysts warn that such brief training raises serious concerns over combat readiness and the safety of conscripts.

Although the junta claims that conscripts are required to serve only 24 months, defected soldiers report that some conscripts have already been promoted in rank and selected for potential officer-level training. While the conscription law allows recruits to be posted to their native towns or preferred areas, defectors say most conscripts are instead sent directly to frontline battalions after only minimal battalion-level training, and many have never been deployed to their designated mother units or original regiments.

Currently, newly-trained conscripts are being deployed to active conflict zones, including Nyaunggyo on the border of Rakhine State and Bago Region, the Kyaukphyu battlefield, and Natyekan, located on the border between Rakhine State and Magway Region, where fighting against the Arakan Army (AA) continues.



Aung San Suu Kyi, with Win Myint, during their trial. Photo: AFP

SEQUESTERED SUU KYI OVERSHADOWS MILITARY-RUN MYANMAR ELECTION

Ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been siloed in military detention since a 2021 coup, but her absence looms large over junta-run polls the generals are touting as a return to democracy.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate was once the darling of foreign diplomats, with legions of starry-eyed supporters at home and a reputation for redeeming Myanmar from a history of iron-fisted martial rule.

Her followers swept a landslide victory in Myanmar's last elections in 2020 but the military voided the vote, dissolved her National League for Democracy (NLD) party and has jailed her in total seclusion.

As she disappeared and a decade-long democratic experiment was halted, activists rose up -- first as street protesters and then as guerilla rebels battling the

military in an all-consuming civil war.

The octogenarian - known in Myanmar as "The Lady" and famed for wearing flowers in her hair - is set to remain under lock and key as her junta jailers hold polls to overwrite the 2020 vote.

Suu Kyi's reputation abroad is heavily tarnished over her government's handling of the Rohingya crisis. But for her many followers in Myanmar her name is still a byword for democracy, her absence on the ballot an indictment it will be neither free nor fair.

Accidental icon

Suu Kyi has spent around two decades of her life in military detention - but in a striking contradiction, she is the daughter of the founder of Myanmar's armed forces.

She was born on June 19, 1945, in Japanese-occupied Yangon during the final weeks of World War II.

Her father, Aung San, fought for and against both the British and the Japanese colonisers as he sought to secure independence for his country.

He was assassinated in 1947, months before the goal was achieved, and Suu Kyi spent most of her early years outside Myanmar - first in India, where her mother was an ambassador, and later at Oxford University, where she met her British husband.

After General Ne Win seized full power in 1962, he forced his brand of socialism on Myanmar, turning what was once Asia's rice bowl into one of the world's poorest and most isolated countries.

Suu Kyi's elevation to a champion of democracy happened almost by accident when she returned home in 1988 to nurse her dying mother.

Soon afterwards, at least 3,000 people were killed when the military crushed protests against its authoritarian rule - a catalyst moment for Suu Kyi.

A charismatic orator, the then-43-year-old found herself helming a burgeoning democracy movement, but was put under house arrest in 1989.

Her NLD nonetheless surged to a landslide election victory in 1990. But the generals were not prepared to give up power.

Suu Kyi spent around 15 of the following 20 years in detention, largely at her Yangon home where she often roused crowds with speeches over her boundary wall.

The junta offered to end her imprisonment at any time if she left the country permanently, but Suu Kyi refused and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize while detained in 1991.

Her campaign took a heavy toll -- she missed her husband's death from cancer in 1999 and much of her two sons' childhoods.

Rank and file

The military eventually granted her freedom in 2010, just days after elections her party boycotted, but which brought in a nominally civilian government. She became an MP in a 2012 by-election.

Her movement swept the next poll three years later prompting jubilant celebrations by massive crowds, a flurry of visits from long-absent foreign leaders and a striking mood of public optimism.

But there was global revulsion at a 2017 army crackdown that forced roughly 750,000 members of the Rohingya minority to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh.

Her government appeared in lockstep with the military - denying claims the Rohingya suffered rape, extrajudicial killings and arson attacks.

Suu Kyi travelled to The Hague to rebut charges of genocide against them at the UN's top court in 2019 - tanking her reputation on the international circuit.

But her relationship with the powerful military establishment remained fraught and they snatched back power after the 2020 vote, claiming fraud had marred the poll.

AFP



Photo: AFP

KEY POINTS OF THE MYANMAR ELECTION

Analysts and observers point to a number of issues that should be highlighted about the Myanmar junta election that critics widely call a “sham” rather than a legitimate democratic process:

1) Election Occurring Under Ongoing Civil War

The ballot — slated to begin on 28 December 2025 and run into early 2026 — is set amid a protracted armed conflict that began with the February 2021 coup. Fighting between the military and ethnic armed groups and pro-democracy forces has made large parts of the country inaccessible and unstable.

2) Limited Territorial Control and Exclusion of Large Areas

The junta does not control the whole country. Independent reporting indicates the military lacks authority in roughly half the townships, meaning voting will not take place in many opposition-held or contested regions.

3) Dissolution or Banning of Opposition Parties

The National League for Democracy (NLD) — the party that won in 2020 — was dissolved earlier, and many pro-democracy figures remain arrested or in exile, including party leader Aung San Suu Kyi and

former president Win Myint. Critics point out that with key opponents barred, the electoral field is stacked in favour of the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and allied groups.

4) Severe Repression and Restrictive Laws

The junta has enacted draconian laws criminalizing critique or opposition to the election process, with harsh penalties. Activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens have been charged, detained, or imprisoned under these laws.

5) Lack of Free and Fair Conditions

The United Nations, international election watchdogs, and human rights organizations have warned the environment is deeply repressive, with limited freedom of movement, speech, and campaigning. Many observers judge that voters cannot express their true preferences without fear of retaliation.

6) Questionable Legitimacy and International Response

Major Western governments and bodies like the European Union have said they will not send observers and do not consider the election free or fair. ASEAN has also faced pressure not to “legitimise” the polls — and some members are declining to participate in observer missions.

7) Junta’s Motives: Seeking Legitimacy

Analysts and critics argue the junta’s main aim is political legitimacy rather than genuine democratic transition — using elections to consolidate power, placate international pressure, and maintain control despite military setbacks on the battlefield.

8) Potential for Violence and Humanitarian Impact

Holding an election in these conditions does not relieve conflict pressures; instead, the process has been linked to intensified airstrikes and displacement, with observers warning it could deepen insecurity and polarisation.



MYANMAR'S LONG MARCH OF MILITARY RULE

Myanmar's military has ruled the country for most of its post-independence history, presenting itself as the only force capable of guarding the fractious Southeast Asian nation from rupture and ruin.

A decade-long democratic thaw saw martial rulers loosen their grip and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi lead, before a junta snatched back power in a 2021 coup triggering a ferocious civil war.

The military has organised elections starting Sunday but the vote is being shunned at home and abroad, and the generals have pledged to preserve their role in politics.

Here is a brief history of military rule in Myanmar:

Founding force

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, won its independence in 1948 as Britain dissolved its empire after World War II.

The autonomy struggle was led by Aung San, the father of Aung San Suu Kyi. He first fought with the invading Japanese to oust Britain, before swapping sides as the tide of war changed and currying favour with London for the cause of independence.

The fledgling democracy had a thriving press and cinema scene, and promising economic potential as the world's leading rice exporter.

But as the civilian government battled rebellions and internal divisions, it handed power to the military in 1958 for a two-year caretaker spell.

'Bamboo curtain'

Elections followed, but the voluntary relinquishing of power had emboldened the military to make a takeover by force in 1962.

Aung San's wartime comrade Ne Win, who had taken the helm of the armed forces after the leader's assassination in murky circumstances, swooped in in

a putsch he justified as protection against Myanmar's disintegration.

He later said the military "took over power against its cherished beliefs", promising to "transfer power to the people in due course".

But he ruled for 26 years, enforcing a nominally socialist one-party state that pulled a "bamboo curtain" around Myanmar making it a hermit nation, crashing the economy and crushing dissent.

Protests, coup, protests

Massive student-led pro-democracy protests that began on August 8, 1988 forced Ne Win to step down.

But a rebranded leadership swiftly staged a fresh coup, crushing demonstrations in a bloody crackdown that saw more than 3,000 people killed and many more spirited away to prison.

Than Shwe became the top general, facing his own uprising in 2007 when the "Saffron Revolution" led by robed monks took up the pro-democracy mantle.

He, too, used military might to quell the resistance.

The 1988 protests were a proving ground for activists, some still challenging military rule today. At the forefront was Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 during one of many stints in detention.

Military makes the rules

Than Shwe retired in 2011, handing power to a civilian government, which was however led by an ex-general and reined in by a military-drafted constitution privileging the armed forces with a central role in parliament and cabinet.

Critics initially dismissed it as military rule wearing a civilian sash, but president Thein Sein proved a cautious reformist.

He released Suu Kyi, who surged to electoral victory in 2015 and assumed a leadership position carved out to sidestep military-drafted rules that barred her from the presidency.

The democratic figurehead opened the country up, often sparring with military chief Min Aung Hlaing.

Civil war

Her second landslide in 2020 polls proved a step too far, and Min Aung Hlaing snatched back power, making unsubstantiated allegations of voter fraud, re-jailing Suu Kyi and dissolving her party.

The coup triggered a full-blown civil war as long-active ethnic minority armies were joined on the battlefield by pro-democracy partisans.

The junta is touting the upcoming phased elections as a step towards reconciliation.

But Suu Kyi remains under junta lock and key, generals are managing the vote, rebels are set to block it from territory they control, and international monitors have dismissed it as a pretext for continuing military rule.

Results are expected around the end of January 2026.

AFP



Min Aung Hlaing's China connection.
Photo: AFP

DISPUTED MYANMAR ELECTION WINS CHINA'S VOTE OF CONFIDENCE

Myanmar's military-run elections are being pilloried abroad and shunned at home, but neighbouring China has emerged as an enthusiastic backer of the pariah poll.

International monitors have dismissed the vote starting Sunday as a charade to rebrand Myanmar's military rule since a 2021 coup, which triggered a civil war.

But Beijing's brokerage has secured watershed truces and retreats by rebel groups -- turning the tide of the conflict and strengthening the junta's hand ahead of the weeks-long vote.

Once backing opposition factions, analysts say China now throws its weight behind the military and its polls as Beijing pursues its own private interests in Myanmar -- and even the reordering of its leadership.

"It's as if an outsider were involved in our family issues," complained a resident of northern Lashio city, once the rebels' biggest war prize but returned to the

junta via Beijing's intervention in April.

"I want to sort out my family matters by ourselves," said the 30-year-old woman, declining to be named for security reasons. "I don't like other people involved."

'No state collapse'

Myanmar's military cancelled democracy nearly five years ago, detaining civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and alleging her electoral victory was secured by massive voter fraud.

The country plunged into civil war as pro-democracy activists took up arms as rag-tag guerrillas, fighting alongside formidable ethnic minority armies that have long resisted central rule.

China's reaction to the military takeover was initially muted, but the explosion of internet scam centres along the China-Myanmar border threw a lever.

The massively profitable online fraud factories ensnared legions of Chinese citizens -- both as trafficked, unwilling workers and as targets in elaborate romance and business cryptocurrency cons.

Irked by the junta's failure to crack down, Beijing abandoned its agnosticism, giving at least its tacit backing to a combined rebel offensive, monitors say.

The "Three Brotherhood Alliance" trio of ethnic minority armies won stunning advances, including Lashio in the summer of 2024 -- the first capture of a state capital and a regional military command.

"What I've seen is that China can control outside organisations," said another 30-year-old Lashio resident, also speaking anonymously for security reasons.

The rebels marched on to the brink of Myanmar's second city, Mandalay, before Beijing pumped the brakes, said Morgan Michaels, a research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank.

"Beijing's policy is no state collapse," he told AFP. "When it looked like the military was going to collapse, it equated that with state collapse and so it stepped in to prevent that."

Reshuffling ranks

China may have settled on backing the military, but Michaels says there are terminal doubts about military chief Min Aung Hlaing, who plunged the country into an intractable crisis.

"I think there's a general sense that he's stubborn, not particularly good at what he does," said Michaels. "They would like to see him moved aside or at least have his power diluted."

Many monitors, including United Nations expert Tom Andrews, have described the election as a "sham".

Rebels defying military rule have pledged to block the vote from their territory -- deriding it as choreography allowing Min Aung Hlaing to prolong his rule by wearing a civilian sash.

But the nominal return to civilian rule will hedge Min Aung Hlaing's power, said Michaels, forcing him to choose between the presidency or armed forces chief -- roles he has held in tandem under military rule.

"It probably will result in his power being diluted or him having to make some sort of compromise," said the analyst.

After the junta started to lay out an election timetable, Min Aung Hlaing enjoyed his first post-coup meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in May.

Meanwhile, China began to defuse the "Three Brotherhood Alliance" -- peeling away two of its factions based along its border with truces.

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army agreed to an armistice in October, after the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army handed back once bitterly contested Lashio in April.

"I feel lost as a citizen," said the Lashio woman who requested anonymity.

"Some of my friends cannot come back. Some have already died. They are not in the world anymore."

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesman told AFP: "China supports Myanmar in broadly uniting domestic political forces, steadily advancing its domestic political agenda and restoring stability and development."

Lashing back at foreign criticism of the poll last week, junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun told reporters: "It is not being held for the international community."

But he said that "partner countries" are "assisting and supporting the election" - doing so "out of a desire for the betterment of Myanmar".

AFP



United Nations rights chief Volker Turk. Photo: AFP

UN SAYS MYANMAR JUNTA USING 'BRUTAL VIOLENCE' TO FORCE PEOPLE TO VOTE

The UN said on 23 December that Myanmar's junta was using violence and intimidation to force people to vote in upcoming military-controlled elections, while armed opposition groups were using similar tactics to keep people away.

"The military authorities in Myanmar must stop using brutal violence to compel people to vote and stop arresting people for expressing any dissenting views," United Nations rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement.

Myanmar's junta is set to preside over voting starting Sunday, touting heavily restricted polls as a return to democracy five years after it ousted the last elected government, triggering civil war.

But former civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi remains jailed and her hugely popular party dissolved after soldiers ended the nation's decade-long democratic experiment in February 2021.

International monitors have dismissed the phased month-long vote as a rebranding of martial rule.

Turk, who last month told AFP that holding elections in Myanmar under the current circumstances was "unfathomable", warned Tuesday that civilians were being threatened by both the military authorities and armed opposition groups over their participation in the polls.

His statement highlighted the dozens of individuals who have reportedly been detained under an "election protection law" for exercising their freedom of expression.

Many had been slapped with "extremely harsh

sentences", the statement said, pointing to three youths in Hlainghaya Township in the Yangon region who were sentenced to between 42 and 49 years behind bars for hanging up anti-election posters.

The UN rights office said it had also received reports from displaced people in several parts of the country, including the Mandalay region, who had been warned they would be attacked or their homes seized if they did not return to vote.

"Forcing displaced people to undertake unsafe and involuntary returns is a human rights violation," Turk stressed.

He said that people were also facing "serious threats" from armed groups opposing the military, including nine women teachers from Kyaikto who were reportedly abducted last month while travelling to attend a training on the ballot.

They were then "released with warnings from the perpetrators", the statement said.

It also pointed to how the self-declared Yangon Army bombed administration offices in Hlegu and North Okkalapa townships in the Yangon region, injuring several election staff, and had vowed to "keep attacking election organisers".

"These elections are clearly taking place in an environment of violence and repression," Turk said.

"There are no conditions for the exercise of the rights of freedom of expression, association or peaceful assembly that allow for the free and meaningful participation of the people."

'NOT IMPRESSED' - INTERNATIONAL REACTION TO THE MYANMAR JUNTA ELECTION

Much of the international community, particularly in the West and in the halls of the United Nations, are not impressed by the Myanmar military's election aimed at keeping the military in power under a civilian cloak.

Here are some pertinent quotes:

1. Human Rights Watch / ASEAN statement

"Myanmar's junta has demonstrated neither the intention nor the capacity to organize and hold elections that would even remotely meet international standards... The junta's repression and unlawful attacks have created a climate of fear in which no genuine polls can take place, let alone voting that will be free and fair." — John Sifton, Asia advocacy director at Human Rights Watch, urging ASEAN and others to reject the December election.

2. International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

"These moves are nothing more than a strategic fraud to disguise the military dictatorship as democratic rule." — Luc Triangle, ITUC General Secretary, denouncing the junta's planned election.

3. Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M)

"It defies logic that these elections could in any way be seen as credible. What they will deliver is more bloodshed and more suffering for the Myanmar people." — Ben Lee, Executive Director, on why the December-January polls are a sham.

4. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) joint statement

"An election held by war criminals is not credible. A fraudulent election will not bring peace or stability to Myanmar; it will only deepen societal divisions and fuel further conflict." — Civil society coalition condemning the junta's plan as a sham.

5. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

"ASEAN must join the international community in rejecting this sham election organized by a military

junta which has relentlessly killed, imprisoned, tortured and repressed its own people." — IFJ joint statement urging rejection of the sham polls.

6. UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar

"A strong, coordinated rejection of these sham elections is essential to deny the junta the means to fabricate credibility and legitimacy." — Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, urging international opposition to the junta-orchestrated vote.

7. UN Special Rapporteur (from UN Office of the High Commissioner)

"The military junta has been scoffing at ASEAN's Five Point Consensus... now it wants ASEAN to legitimise a sham election despite the fact that tens of thousands of political prisoners are behind bars, freedom of speech and the press are outlawed, and military attacks against civilians continue unabated... Elections cannot be free, fair or credible when held amid military violence and repression..." — UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar.

8. European Union Special Representative for Human Rights

"I would call them regime-sponsored elections. And if they're regime-sponsored, they can only lead to one outcome... The necessary conditions for free and fair elections in Myanmar have not been met, and the presence of observers would not make any difference to the outcome." — EU Special Representative for Human Rights Kaja Ollongren on why the upcoming polls lack credibility.

9. European Union (collective position)

"The European Union will not send observers to what it says is a 'regime-sponsored' exercise, emphasising that the necessary conditions for free and fair elections have not been met." — EU's public stance on the Myanmar vote.



NUCC CALLS ON PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO REJECT MYANMAR JUNTA'S 'SHAM' ELECTION

The National Unity Consultative Council released a position statement on 28 December rejecting the Myanmar military junta's planned election as illegal and illegitimate, reaffirming that the 2020 general election remains the only valid expression of the people's will and urging both the public and the international community to refuse recognition of the junta's sham process.

The results of the 2020 General Election, which were recognized and participated in by national and international stakeholders as well as the people, are the only legitimate election results. The illegal military junta, which seized power unlawfully, has no authority or mandate to organize or hold elections.

The illegal and sham election conducted under the 2008 Constitution is neither a solution to resolve Myanmar's Political Crisis nor a path to achieving the goal of Federal Democracy aspired to by the ethnic and people of Myanmar.

The 2008 Constitution has already become null and void since the Military Junta's unlawful seizure of power and, even prior to that, it failed to resolve Myanmar's political problems. On 30 March 2021, the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) formally declared the abolition of the 2008 Constitution.

In accordance with the Federal Democracy Charter, Parts (I) and (II), the core political roadmap of the revolution, we will continue to carry forward the revolutionary struggle along this established political path.

We earnestly call upon the public to refrain from cooperating with and to collectively oppose the illegal and sham election organized by the unlawfully seized terrorist military junta.

The 2020 election results remain politically legitimate, and the act of creating and conducting an illegal election without the consent of the elected representatives and the voters constitutes not only a violation of democratic norms, but also an attempt to unlawfully seize the sovereign power of the people.

Even in the post-sham election period, evolutionary forces will continue the struggle until the following six objectives are fully achieved.

- (a) To eradicate the military dictatorship and permanently end the Myanmar military's involvement in politics.
- (b) To permanently abolish the 2008 Constitution and to combat any attempts to revive it.
- (c) To draft and enact a constitution that is based on federalism and democratic systems acceptable to all stakeholders.
- (d) To bring all armed forces fully under the administration of a democratically elected civilian government.
- (e) To build a new Federal Democratic Union in accordance with the newly established Federal Democratic Constitution.

(f) To ensure justice for victims of unlawful violations, including "sexual and gender-based violence" committed during the conflict, and to implement a transitional justice process.

We strongly urge the international community to firmly and consistently uphold its position of non-recognition of the military junta's sham election, not only during the election period but also thereafter, and to refuse recognition of any outcomes or results emerging from such a sham election.



NLD EXPELS DEFECTORS AND DENOUNCES MYANMAR MILITARY 'SHAM' ELECTION ON DAY ONE OF POLLS

The National League for Democracy (NLD) has officially expelled nine members for participating in the military junta's phased general election which began today. In a scathing statement released by the party's Interim Central Committee, the NLD reiterated its refusal to recognize the polls, characterizing them as a sham designed to manufacture false political legitimacy for a regime that seized power by force.

The party provided a stark statistical contrast to justify its stance, noting that in the 2020 General Election, polling was successfully conducted in 1,117 constituencies with a nationwide voter turnout exceeding 71 percent. In that internationally recognized contest, the NLD won 82.36 percent of all constituencies and secured 920 parliamentary representatives before the military, led by Min Aung Hlaing, violated the constitution and unlawfully arrested state leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi.

The NLD statement emphasized that the military commission's current attempt to hold an election is a blatant disregard for the will of the people expressed in 2020.

Consequently, the party has designated any members contesting or assisting in this process as individuals who have failed to comply with party regulations and decisions. The list of expelled individuals

includes Daw Khin Nyo from Lawksawk Township and Sai Say Han from Langkho Township in Shan State. From the Ayeyarwady Region, the party expelled U Zaw Min of Yegy, U Thant Zaw Win of Myaungmya, and Daw Khin Myo Thet of Maubin. In the Yangon Region, the expulsions targeted U Win Myint Than and U Thura Aung, both associated with the Yangon City Development Committee, as well as U Nay Win Htun and U Myint Oo from South Dagon Township.

This purge of party members occurs as the junta-led election faces significant security challenges and widespread international criticism. While the military administration claims to be restoring democracy through this three-phase voting process, the NLD and its supporters maintain that the exercise is invalid without the participation of the country's most popular political force and the release of detained leaders.

The party's decision to formally remove these nine individuals serves to draw a clear line between the remnants of the democratic mandate and those who have chosen to collaborate with the current administrative machinery. As the first phase of voting continues in only 102 townships, the NLD remains firm in its position that any cooperation with the military commission is a betrayal of the democratic progress achieved during the last decade.



Photo: AFP

ANFREL WARNS MYANMAR JUNTA ELECTIONS LACK DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY

The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) released a statement on 27 December warning that Myanmar's junta-planned elections, scheduled to begin on 28 December, cannot be considered democratic or credible, citing widespread violence, human rights violations, and the exclusion of large parts of the population as conditions that fundamentally undermine any genuine electoral process.

ANFREL is gravely alarmed by intensified violence against civilians nationwide, including airstrikes, shelling, arbitrary arrests, and village raids that disproportionately affect women, children, and ethnic minority communities. Such a situation makes it impossible to guarantee voter safety or conduct electoral activities freely or fairly. Elections held amid ongoing armed conflict and systematic human rights violations cannot reflect the will of the people.

Large areas of the country are expected to be excluded from the polls due to conflict, resistance control, and administrative collapse, particularly in

ethnic and resistance-held areas. The systematic exclusion of significant segments of the population raises serious concerns about the representativeness and inclusiveness of the process and fails to meet basic democratic standards.

In addition, ANFREL raises serious doubts about the credibility of voter turnout figures and election results to be announced by the junta control Union Election Commission. In the absence of independent observation, transparent procedures, free media, and trusted electoral institutions, any declared results will lack legitimacy.

Taken together, these conditions demonstrate that the junta-planned elections lack legitimacy, inclusiveness, and integrity. Elections conducted under military rule, amid widespread conflict and repression, cannot contribute to democratic transition or political stability and risk further entrenching illegitimate rule and violence.



People's Party leader Ko Ko Gyi.
Photo: AFP

BOMB BLAST ROCKS PEOPLE'S PARTY HQ AHEAD OF MYANMAR NATIONAL ELECTION

The headquarters of the People's Party (PP) was targeted in a bomb attack on Sunday evening, marking a significant escalation in violence just one week before Myanmar's scheduled national election.

The explosion occurred at approximately 7:00 pm at the party's office on Upper Pansodan Road in Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township in Yangon. While no injuries were reported, the blast shattered windows, damaged a parked vehicle, and destroyed a large election campaign poster displayed at the front of the building.

The Civilian Military SRDF, an urban guerrilla group, claimed responsibility for the attack shortly after.

In a public statement, the group revealed the operation was a joint effort with Shwebo District Battalion 15 and a cell known as Unknown YGN UG. They described the weapon used as a "high-tech mine."

The group further issued a warning, labelling the People's Party "illegal" for its participation in the military-organized election set for 28 December.

"Individuals who help prolong the military dictatorship by participating in this illegal election... will be punished," the statement read.

Local residents noted the audacity of the attack, as the office sits directly opposite the Mingalar Taung Nyunt General Administration Office in an area under heavy security. This incident marks the first direct hit on a political party office in Yangon during this election cycle.

The People's Party is one of nine parties approved by the junta-appointed Union Election Commission (UEC) to compete nationwide. As of Monday morning, the party has not released an official response to the bombing.



MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES NATIONAL FLAG RAISING AND MANDATORY VOTER LIST CHECKS IN MAGWAY AND YANGON

The military junta has forced the hoisting of national flags and threatened to take action against those who fail to do so in Magway Region and Hlaing Tharyar in Yangon Region, according to local residents.

Residents stated that the junta is applying pressure on shops and homes in its controlled-areas, including Magway, Minbu, Minhla, Salin, Aunglan, and Pwintbyu.

Furthermore, it is reported that the General Administration Department (GAD) is forcibly selling flags, with prices ranging from 15,000 to 25,000 Kyats for a flag including a bamboo pole.

"They came and told us about three days ago, saying we would be arrested if we didn't hoist it. Even today, I saw flags raised at shops at the entrance of the town. People are hoisting them out of fear, though there are still some shops that haven't," a resident of Magway told Mizzima.

A local reporter from Magway told Mizzima that the junta instructed GAD officials in the third week of December to enforce flag hoisting at every house in the towns within Minbu and Thayet districts. Residents were told every household must fly the flag and were threatened with legal action.

"The GAD is selling the flags. There are reports of threats that those who do not hoist them will be arrested and imprisoned. Locals are buying them out of fear, even though daily-wage workers are already

struggling just to afford food," the reporter added.

While specific dates varied by town, residents were told the flags must be flown until Independence Day on 4 January. Consequently, some residents began hoisting them the day after the announcement, according to Magway locals.

In Yangon Region, ward administrators in Hlaing Tharyar Township, specifically in Wards 1, 2, 3, and most other areas, are also forcing every household to fly the national flag for Independence Day. The Hlaing Tharyar Scout group released a statement on 23 December, saying flags would be sold for 20,000 Kyats each.

The Rangoon Scout Network (RSN) noted that while the flag-hoisting order has been announced in Hlaing Tharyar, they have not yet heard of similar mandates in other townships.

Additionally, in certain wards of Hlaing Tharyar, Lanmadaw, Thingangyun, and Dala townships, announcements were made via loudspeakers on 23 December, urging people to check voter lists at ward administration offices and stating that voting is mandatory, according to residents.

According to residents in Magway and Yangon, the Election Commission has been repeatedly urging the public to verify voter lists as the date for the junta-organized election draws nearer.



Photo: Supplied

CDF-HAKHA CONFISCATES PROPERTIES AND CALLS FOR SILENT STRIKE AHEAD OF MYANMAR JUNTA'S ELECTION

The Chinland Defence Force-Hakha (CDF-Hakha) Central Council announced on 24 December that it has confiscated all properties belonging to individuals and political parties participating in the military junta's upcoming elections in Chin State.

The seizures were executed under Section 16 of the Law on Preventing and Opposing Junta Elections, a legislation enacted by the Chinland Council on 6 November 2025 to block the junta's attempts to hold what it describes as "sham elections."

The CDF-Hakha statement warned the public against the transfer, purchase, or engagement in any transactions involving the confiscated assets in Hakha Township. The resistance group accused the junta of attempting to hold elections to mask ongoing atrocities, including the daily bombing and burning of schools, hospitals, and religious sites. Under Phase 1 of the military's staggered election plan, polling is scheduled for 28 December in nine townships across Chin State, including the capital, Hakha, and Tedim.

In a direct move to disrupt the process, the CDF-Hakha has called on all residents of Hakha City to

remain indoors and observe a silent strike on 28 December as a form of non-violent protest.

This call for defiance is echoed by the Chin Brotherhood alliance, which previously vowed to take action against anyone involved in the polls. The alliance maintains that the military-led vote will only prolong the conflict and fail to produce a legitimate democratic government.

Meanwhile, tensions are rising for civil servants in the region. A circular from the Tedim Township Public Health Department has surfaced on social media, pressuring departmental employees to cast ballots. The document warns that any staff member who fails to vote will not be protected by the department and must personally bear any legal or administrative consequences.

This coercive atmosphere follows a 22 December security meeting in Hakha led by junta-appointed Chief Minister Dr. Vungh Suan Thang, aimed at coordinating military forces to secure the polling sites amidst widespread local opposition.

ELECTION MAP SHRINKS AS MYANMAR UEC SCRAPS 20 ADDITIONAL CONSTITUENCIES

On the eve of Myanmar's multi-party general election, the military-appointed Union Election Commission (UEC) issued an urgent late-night announcement significantly reducing the number of constituencies where polling will occur. The declaration, released on 27 December, confirms that voting has been canceled in 20 additional constituencies across the country's most volatile conflict zones due to security concerns.

The eleventh-hour directive specifically targets areas where the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system is utilized. Among the casualties are nine Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) constituencies, including three townships in Chin State, two in Sagaing Region, and four in Rakhine State. The cancellation of these seats underscores the junta's inability to maintain administrative control in the country's northwest and western borderlands.

In a further blow to the election's scope, the commission announced the complete suspension of voting for the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) in two entire districts. Both Falam District in Chin State (Constituency No. 3) and Ann District in Rakhine State (Constituency No. 6) have been removed from the ballot. The loss of Ann District is particularly notable as it serves as the headquarters for the military's Western Command, signaling that even high-security zones are not exempt from the growing instability.

State and Region legislatures have been equally impacted, with nine FPTP constituencies scrapped. These include three townships for the Chin State Hluttaw, two for the Sagaing Region Hluttaw, and four for the Rakhine State Hluttaw.

Following these major subtractions, the UEC clarified the final scale of the polls beginning today. Voting will now proceed in only 265 Pyithu Hluttaw constituencies out of the originally planned 330, representing a loss of nearly 20% of the Lower House seats. For the Amyotha Hluttaw, contests remain in 73 FPTP constituencies and 26 Proportional Representation (PR) constituencies.

At the regional level, the election will move forward in 257 FPTP constituencies, 42 PR constituencies, and 29 Ethnic Affairs seats. While the military government has utilized Proportional Representation to maintain a facade of national coverage, the widespread cancellation of localized FPTP seats highlights a fragmented electoral landscape where millions of citizens in Chin, Sagaing, and Rakhine states remain entirely disenfranchised as the country goes to the polls.



Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing shows he has voted in the first phase of the election. Photo: AFP

JUNTA CHIEF MIN AUNG HLAING, TOP GENERALS AND FAMILIES CAST BALLOTS AS MYANMAR BEGINS MULTI-STAGE POLLING

Myanmar's military government launched the first phase of its multi-party general election on Sunday, with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing casting his ballot in the capital as part of a staggered three-part voting process.

The junta chief, acting as Acting President and Chairman of the State Security and Peace Commission, arrived at Polling Station No. 1 in Anawrahta Ward, Zeyarthiri Township in Naypyidaw, at approximately 8:00 am to participate in a poll that critics and international rights bodies have condemned as a "sham" designed to consolidate military rule.

Junta's state media reported that the Senior General utilized the Myanmar Electronic Voting Machine (MEVM) to cast his vote. He was accompanied by a delegation of high-ranking military officials and their families, including Chief of Military Affairs Security General Ye Win Oo, Coordinator of the Special Operations General Kyaw Swar Lin, and Major General Zaw Min Tun, the lead spokesperson for the military's information team.

The presence of the military's top hierarchy at the capital's polling stations was framed by state outlets as a demonstration of the country's transition toward what the junta calls a "disciplined democratic system".

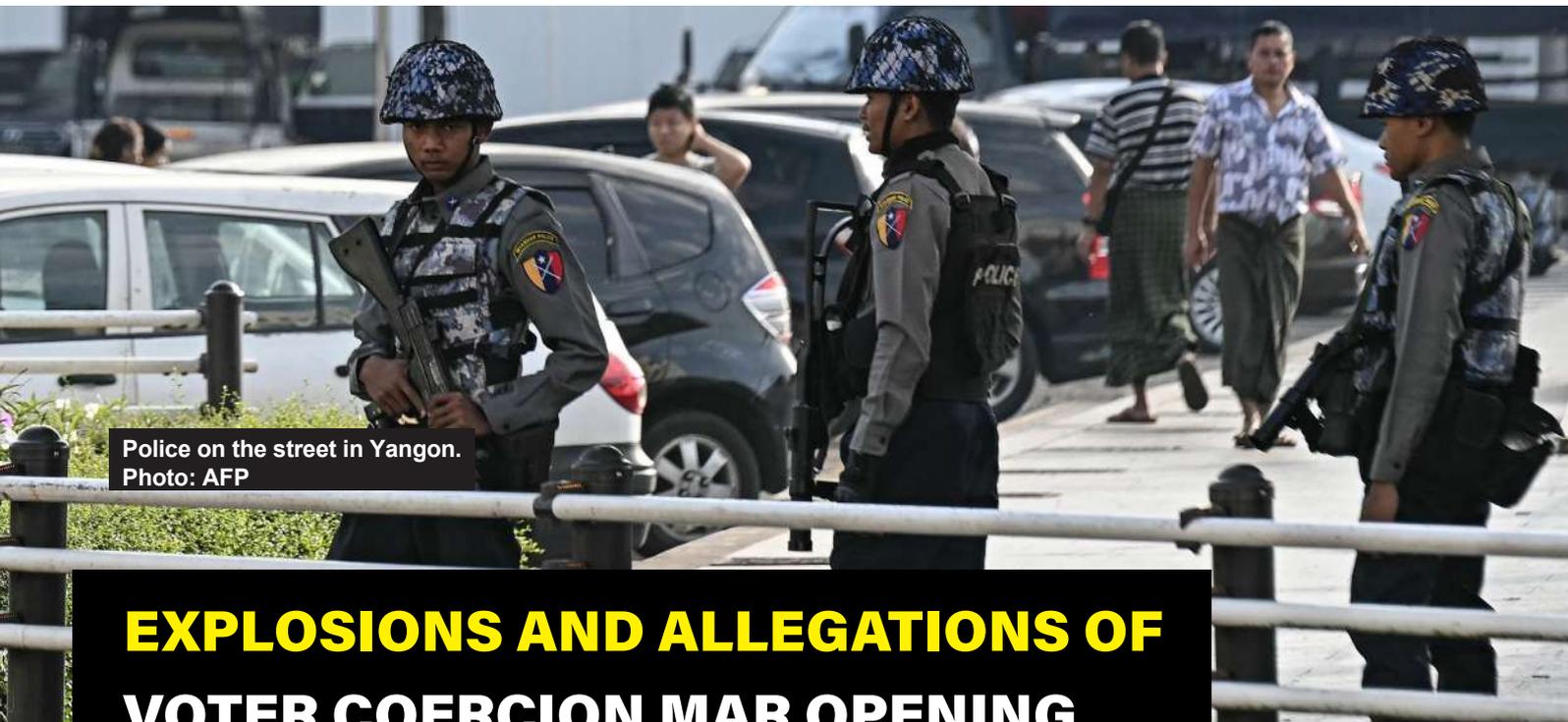
The first phase of the election is being held across 102 townships, including all eight townships within the Naypyidaw Council Area.

In the commercial capital of Yangon, voting is restricted to 12 of its 45 townships for the initial round, including Kamaryut, Kyauktada, Taikkyi, Twante, Dagon Myothit (South), Botahtaung, Mayangone, Mingaladon, Hmawbi, Thingangyun, Thanlyin, and Ahlone.

The Union Election Commission has scheduled the second phase for 100 townships on 11 January, 2026, followed by a final phase in 63 townships on 25 January.

The election is the first held since the 2021 coup, which the military justified by alleging widespread fraud in the 2020 landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD).

With the NLD now dissolved and its leader Aung San Suu Kyi imprisoned, the United Nations and Western governments have stated the current conditions lack the transparency and inclusivity required for a free and fair vote. While observers from China, Russia, India, and Belarus were present in the country to monitor the process, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) declined to send an official mission, citing the ongoing civil war and the exclusion of major political stakeholders.



Police on the street in Yangon.
Photo: AFP

EXPLOSIONS AND ALLEGATIONS OF VOTER COERCION MAR OPENING OF MYANMAR'S PHASED ELECTION

Synchronized explosions and reports of forced participation have overshadowed the first phase of Myanmar's military-led general election on Sunday. As polling stations opened in 102 townships, residents in several major regions reported blasts near voting sites and intense pressure from local authorities to cast ballots.

According to local sources and reporting from Mizzima, the violence began late Saturday night and continued into the early hours of 28 December. In Pyay Township (Bago Region), mines exploded near polling stations in Lebè Village and Watmyaetaw Village, the latter situated close to a local police station.

"The explosion sounds were very loud. We were listening intently for what might happen next," said one resident in Pyay.

The same resident alleged that local administrators and "hundred-household heads" had issued stern warnings to the community.

The unrest extended to the Thai-Myanmar border in Myawaddy in Kayin State, where the office of the military-proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) was targeted by five separate drone attacks. While unconfirmed reports suggested a civilian woman was injured, the strikes caused significant damage to nearby commercial properties, including a gold shop in the Bayint Naung Market.

In Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, at least five heavy artillery shells struck Aungmyethazan

Township at approximately 1:00 am, injuring two civilians. Residents in Monywa (Sagaing Region) and Dawei (Tanintharyi Region) also reported hearing heavy artillery fire during the night.

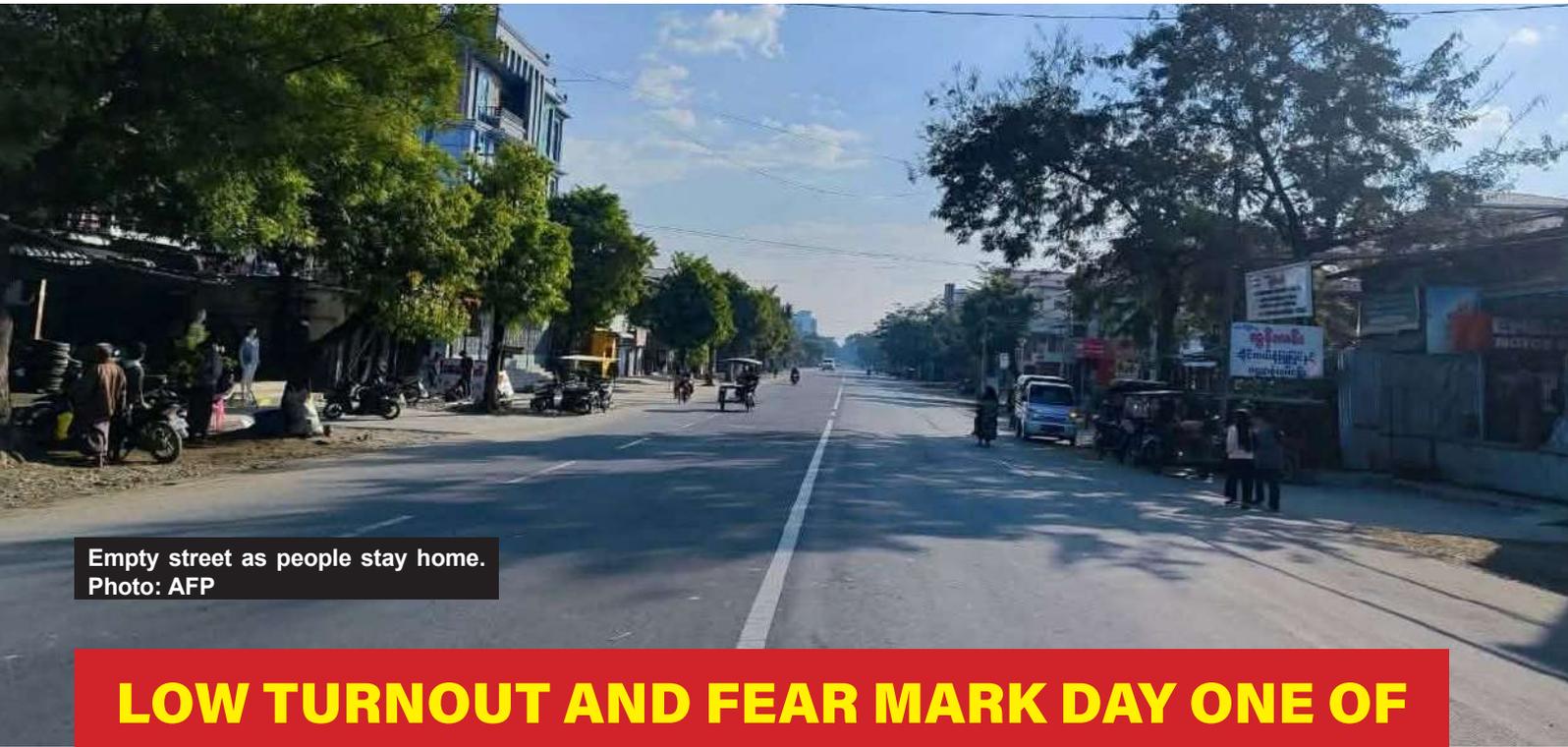
Pro-military channels on the Telegram messaging app have blamed the People's Defense Forces (PDF) for the attacks. While most resistance groups have called for a total boycott of the "sham" polls, Mizzima and other independent outlets have not yet confirmed which specific groups carried out the morning's coordinated actions.

Despite the security risks and a widespread boycott, the junta-appointed Union Election Commission (UEC) insists the vote is proceeding smoothly.

State-run media showcased Senior General Min Aung Hlaing casting his ballot in the capital, Naypyidaw, using a new electronic voting machine. However, observers on the ground noted a stark divide: while some voters, often from military-affiliated families arrived at the polls early, many urban streets remained eerily quiet as citizens chose to stay home in protest.

This first phase covers less than a third of the country's townships, with subsequent rounds scheduled for 11 January and 25 January, 2026.

The United Nations and Western governments have condemned the process, citing the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and the exclusion of her dissolved National League for Democracy (NLD) party.



Empty street as people stay home.
Photo: AFP

LOW TURNOUT AND FEAR MARK DAY ONE OF MYANMAR'S PHASED GENERAL ELECTION

Widespread boycotts, missing voter names, and allegations of state coercion characterized the opening phase of Myanmar's military-led general election on Sunday.

As polling stations opened across 102 designated townships, many citizens reportedly stayed home, citing a total lack of trust in a process they dismissed as a "sham" designed to cement military rule.

Mizzima has learned that while some urban areas saw a trickle of voters, large numbers of families chose to ignore the polls entirely. In interviews conducted across several regions, residents expressed a mix of apathy and defiance.

A former political prisoner in Mandalay said he refused to participate because the parties and leaders the public actually trusts have been excluded from the ballot. He added that he had no faith in the competing parties or the election commission itself, stating that casting a vote would change nothing for the country's future.

In the commercial capital of Yangon, some residents appeared indifferent, with one local noting that most people in their circle were treating the day like a holiday and traveling rather than heading to the polls. In other areas, the refusal to vote was accidental but welcomed.

A resident of Myawaddy reported that their entire household was missing from the official voter registry, a discovery that brought relief to the family as it exempted

them from the pressure to participate.

However, the decision to vote was often driven by necessity rather than civic duty. Reports have surfaced of "hundred-household heads" and local administrators pressuring residents to show proof of voting.

One woman in Yangon said that out of her family of five, only one member, a civil servant, went to cast a ballot. She noted that while rumours of arrests for non-voters were circulating, she was no longer interested or afraid, despite having been anxious about her voter registration in previous, more credible elections.

The geography of the election itself remains heavily restricted due to the country's ongoing civil war. The military-appointed Union Election Commission (UEC) initially planned to hold the three-phase vote in 265 of the nation's 330 townships. However, that number continues to shrink as the security situation deteriorates.

The exclusion of voters extends beyond the country's borders. A Myanmar national living in Mae Sot, Thailand, confirmed that they did not participate in advance voting at the embassy and that their entire family remaining inside Myanmar also planned to boycott.

The junta's attempt to project a return to normalcy is being met with a stark reality on the ground: a fragmented landscape where the military lacks the territorial control to hold a nationwide vote and the public lacks the will to validate it.



Voting machine. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR SETS LATE JANUARY DATE FOR FINAL ELECTION ROUND

Myanmar's junta will stage the third and final round of its heavily restricted elections on January 25, a statement said 25 December, just days before polls opened for the first batch of ballots.

Democracy watchdogs say the junta-run vote is a charade to rebrand the rule of the military, which snatched power in a 2021 coup triggering a civil war that has seen much of the country captured by rebel factions.

Democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi remains jailed since the putsch, her massively popular party dissolved, and the United Nations has slated the junta for a sweeping pre-election dissent crackdown.

The first round of voting ran on Sunday, with a second bout of ballots due to be cast on January 11.

The junta-stacked Union Election Commission said in a statement a third round will take place in 63 of the country's 330 townships on January 25.

Myanmar's military has ruled the Southeast Asian country for most of its post-independence history,

before a 10-year interlude saw a civilian government take the reins in a burst of optimism and reform.

But after Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party trounced pro-military opponents in 2020 elections, military chief Min Aung Hlaing snatched power, alleging widespread voter fraud.

Security forces put down pro-democracy protests, and many activists quit the cities to fight as guerrillas alongside ethnic minority armies that have long held sway in Myanmar's fringes.

Min Aung Hlaing touts the upcoming polls as a return to democracy and a chance for rebels opposing the military to make peace.

Monitors say the ballot is stacked with a curated list of military allies, while the junta has introduced stark legislation punishing protest or criticism of the vote with up to a decade in prison.

AFP



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA'S SHAM ELECTION - PANEL DISCUSSION

Independent Myanmar media and Thai PBS held a collaborative media monitoring event in Chiang Mai, Thailand focused on the Myanmar junta elections on 28 December.

This event allowed regional and international journalists to engage with Myanmar's media professionals, civil society organizations (CSOs), academics, and political experts in gaining a fuller appreciation for the significance of the election and what it means for both Myanmar and the international community.

The 2025/2026 General Election is widely seen as an attempt by the Myanmar junta to legitimize their control and ensure that their preferred candidate(s) win under the guise of a democratic system. The election, though flawed in many respects, will still serve as an important barometer for the political health of the country and the democratic aspirations of Myanmar's people. Not to mention an indication of any legitimacy conferred upon the junta and subsequent government.

Moreover, vast swaths of the country lie outside junta control, while people throughout Myanmar and from all walks of life stand opposed to the polling, which they assess to be a "sham" that will permit the military to legitimize its control over the country under a civilian façade.

The following is the first of a handful of panel discussions held at the Thai PBS studio in Chiang Mai.

Myanmar Junta's 'Sham' Election

Moderator/Facilitator: Sein Win, Managing Editor, Mizzima Media

Panelists:

- **Khun Myint Tun:** Chairman of Pa-O National Federal Council (PNFC), Anti-Illegal Sham Election Joint Working Committee

- **Khaing Thinzar Aye @ Phoug Yoe:** MLA-CTUM General Strike Coordination Body (GSCB) Platform on People Movement

- **Aung Aung:** General Strike Collaboration Committee, Anti-Illegal Sham Election Joint Working Committee

- **Bhone Thit:** General Strike Coordination Body (GSCB) Platform on People Movement

Sein Win: Greetings to everyone. First, I want to ask a question. The reason we call this "sham" is because the election being held itself is a sham. The United Nations does not accept this military coup. ASEAN also does not accept it. Individually, the United Nations recognizes our country's official government as President U Win Myint and the Foreign Minister is Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; therefore, the official Ambassador of Myanmar to the United Nations is U Kyaw Moe Tun.

So, it is not just us saying this illegal military group is illegal. The United Nations is also saying it. ASEAN is also saying it. The European Union is saying it as well. The international community does not accept them. Our public also does not accept them. An election held by a military group that neither our public nor the international community accepts is a sham. Therefore, because they themselves are illegal, we say the election is a sham.

Khaing Thinzar Aye: Yes. Regarding being illegal, it is true they seized power at gunpoint. The public also knows this. The ultimate owners of the sovereign power of our nation are the public. Therefore, this illegal election without the support of the public will only be a sham. This military is certainly a terrorist organization. Any action performed by a terrorist organization, especially this illegal sham election, has no reason to be accepted at all; this is what I want to say.

Aung Aung: Yes. I see this as a military that is failing in every aspect, searching for an exit here to make their unsuccessful military coup legal. That is why this is a

sham election.

Bhone Thit: Yes. We use the term "illegal sham". Regarding "illegal," whether politically or legally - politically, if the military is present, it is not a political system of our public representatives. Legally, they violated the 2008 Constitution itself. The coup was carried out by violating the law. Since then, it has been a state rebellion. That is why we can say it is illegal. "Sham" refers to the current election systems being used, the election formats, and the election setup - in a way, even like a football match; finally, it includes the PR (Proportional Representation) system mixed with the proportional system and representation system just for the sake of winning. There are many other reasons as well; I will explain in detail later. Thank you.

Sein Win: Now, this election is called a sham. But using the election as an excuse, they changed to a political platform. It is said they are calling this a political system platform from the current armed conflict. Similarly, it is assumed that after this election, three branches of power sharing will emerge. At that time, it is believed power will be divided from the current state where Senior General Min Aung Hlaing alone controls all power. Regarding this, what is Khun Myint Tun's view? How do you feel about that?

Khun Myint Tun: Yes, if we look back politically and historically, there are times the military led and held elections. One time in 1990, one time in 2010. This time is the third time. In all three elections, there were the aforementioned broken promises. There are points of not taking responsibility and a lack of accountability.

Another thing is that in political problems, the military is also working for its own group's interest. In another way, they always ignore the will of the public. Since we live together with ethnic people, they always oppose the federal dreams of the various ethnic organizations. They do as they please. They give promises and break promises. We have been in a cycle with such a political system from 1962 (under General Ne Win) until today. For example, in the 2015 election, the NLD won. Even though they won and wanted reform

- wanted to go toward democratic reform - they [the military] did not accept it. Now in 2020, they destroyed the promise.

In a way, it became a form where they can dominate and control in their hands. Therefore, such a military that has staged a coup will never face the public. They will never face the country. It will not become the Federal Democratic State that all ethnic people hope for. They are the only obstacle.

Therefore, we cannot trust the election they provide, whether historically or legally. That is why we see this as not only a plan to prolong the military's power, but everything else is just a trick. That is why we call it a sham. The sham has various forms and they have their own ways of rigging it. Whether it is the voting system, voting formats, or campaigning methods, they use the law to oppress and commit human rights violations. At the same time, intense wars are happening across the entire country. I see all these situations as not leading to a possible peaceful condition, but only acting to gradually bring everything under their control.

Sein Win: Now in this election, electoral fraud is seen. Why is this said? Because for the coup, they said there was electoral fraud in the 2020 election and voter list errors. They say they staged the coup using that as an excuse. So, the GSCB said they would be monitoring the election. What is their current work situation?

Khaing Thinzar Aye: Yes, Sayar. Regarding these voter lists, the foundation of these lists must be the census collection. If we look back at our census collection, there are over 330 townships nationwide. Because the country has no peace and stability, there are 122 townships where we could only collect data partially. There are 58 townships where data could not be collected at a 100% rate at all. Looking at this, we can clearly see that in over 50% of these 330 townships, there was no census collection.

By looking at this point, the voter list cannot possibly be complete. For another point, we must talk about the advance votes of Burmese people abroad.

Regarding advance votes, they started collecting them in December 2024. They were collected in over 50 countries. In collecting them, we learned from information sources that about 5,000 were obtained. In the 2020 multi-party democratic election, there were over 150,000 overseas votes; so, 5,000 is an extreme difference in voter lists. Even in Thailand, where there are millions of Burmese migrant workers, we learned from Bangkok sources that only about 300 advance votes were received. By considering these points, we can clearly see the public's lack of trust and interest in the election held by this military.

Another point is the displaced public. A UN Agency released that as of November 2024, there are up to 3.4 million. Since it is now December 2025, a year later, it is certain the number is over 3.4 million. These votes cannot exist under the Military Council at all. This can be said firmly.

As a final point, regarding the interior, according to information sent by members of labour union federations, in Yangon - Hlaing Thayar, Shwepyithar, North Dagon - and in Bago industrial zones, there are hundreds of workers in factories and the potential voting power is in the thousands. In such places, the military cooperates with those who want to force workers to give fingerprints. Workers are very worried that these fingerprints will be changed into advance votes and into votes that support the military. To summarize, the discrepancies in the voter lists cannot be complete in any way. And it can be firmly said that there is absolutely no interest from the public.

Sein Win: (Repeats question regarding the shift in political platform and power sharing under Min Aung Hlaing). Regarding this, what is Ko Aung's view?

Aung Aung: Yes, if we look back politically and historically, there are times the military led and held elections. One time in 1990, one time in 2010. This time is the third time. In all three elections, there were the aforementioned broken promises. There are points of not taking responsibility and a lack of accountability.

In political problems, the military is also working for its own group's interest. In another way, they always ignore the will of the public. Since we live together with ethnic people, they always oppose the federal dreams of the various ethnic organizations. They do as they please. They give promises and break promises. We have been in a cycle with such a political system from 1962 until today. In the 2015 election, the NLD won. Even though they won and wanted reform - wanted to go toward democratic reform - they [the military] did not accept it. Now in (the election in) 2020, they destroyed the promise.

In a way, it became a form where they can dominate and control in their hands. Therefore, such a military that has staged a coup will never face the public. They will never face the country. It will not become the Federal Democratic State that all ethnic people hope for. They are the only obstacle.

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Yes, I will tell a small example incident. Last night, I spoke on the phone with a friend in Yangon. He lives in a provincial town. His family's names are not on the voter list. But he was satisfied and happy with that; it's fine, he doesn't have to vote, it's over, no problem because they aren't on the list. But as it happens, in his household list, there is a soldier currently serving in Naypyidaw. When listening to what he said next, what happened was that because that soldier is in his household list, that one soldier in Naypyidaw voted on behalf of all family members in that soldier's household list. If there are 5 family members, that one soldier cast a batch of 5 votes for all 5 people. So think about it - on one hand, the names of people who aren't even on the

voter list have already had votes cast on the other side.

Similarly, if they were family members of soldiers who are actually on the voter list, this vote would be doubled. They vote once in the military, and if these family members also go and vote outside, the vote is doubled. What I want to say is, looking at this incident, we can certainly call it electoral fraud and say the voter list is incorrect. That is number one. Number two is the problem following the incorrect voter list. When our military came down from ward administration offices to check voter lists, that was 3 or 4 months ago. But since then, many messages have arrived. In the part of checking voter lists, public cooperation was extremely weak; we saw this practically, and this information was even more prevalent in the media. In other words, while there are examples of wrong voter lists, on the other hand, looking at the consequence where the public themselves did not go to check or cooperate, we can say for sure that there can be many voter list errors in the election.

Sein Win: Now this election has three parts. In the third part, what was released a few days ago included pagoda festivals. Pagoda festivals - now in Kachin and Shan, there are really huge battles happening. Parts where these battles are happening are included. So my question is, in such places including areas where armed conflict and wars are happening - places controlled by the Military Council and places outside their control - is it possible to hold the election successfully?

Khun Myint Tun: Rather than whether our election is successful or not, they will steal the result they want in various ways. When our 2008 Constitution was approved, it was during the (Cyclone) Nargis period. On the days the country was being destroyed by the Nargis storm, they managed to approve that 2008 Constitution. Since they do things in that manner, our country's main requirement is responsibility and accountability. Whether we hold elections in our country, implement peace processes, or hold political discussions, our country's main requirement is responsibility and accountability. The Burmese military's lack of responsibility and accountability is what destroys our country.

After the 8888 Uprising, they said they would give us democracy and an election. We entered the election. Just like in 2020, the National League for Democracy won with 82 percent. I myself was the election official at Dr. Zaw Myint Maung's polling station in the Madaya constituency. But they delayed that '90 election result and destroyed it. Power was not transferred. Then in 2015, we wanted our country to have peace and resolution; for that, I signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015. I signed as the Chairman of the Pa-O National Liberation Organization. I actively implemented the peace process. But when they didn't get the result they wanted, they staged a coup and destroyed it. They staged a coup and destroyed the entire peace process we worked hard for. Now they also destroyed the 2020 election result when it was a situation they didn't want.

Regarding this 2025 election, now USDP Chairman U Khin Yi says the election result cannot be something the military doesn't like; it must be an election result the military likes. An election result is not based on who likes it or not; it is the public's will. So if an election result must be one the military likes, this election has no responsibility or accountability. If a result he doesn't like comes out, he will destroy it again. That is why the main problem of our country is responsibility and accountability. Without responsibility and accountability, we cannot do any work.

Now in this election, even the people who say they will do it for the country to get a political platform are suffering in silence. Those who can speak out, speak; those who can't, don't. Now as evidence, we can mention the Pa-O National Organization party (PNO); also in the PNO, there is the People's Militia which is being transformed. Now PNO Secretary Saw Khun Kyaw Win says the election commission's votes are wrong. In one of their villages, there are 22 villages; only nine villages are on the list, and there are 13 villages [left out]. The PNO used to be a revolutionary group but has now become a transformed People's Militia. Even the PNO, which is doing everything the military orders, is now suffering. Some political party leaders - many political party leaders who will enter the election - are also suffering in silence. They are being oppressed.

As soon as it affects this evil dictatorial system, it [the system] isn't affected at all. What he wants to do now is the continued survival of the evil military dictatorial system.

In that implementation, some small incentives were given before. If the election actually happens, there will still be State Administration Council members and 25 percent in uniform in parliament. Then over 500 people who just took off their uniforms yesterday or the day before will compete from the USDP. So they are also suffering within the USDP. People who stood by this party for a long time are not there to compete; instead, military officers who just came out yesterday or the day before will compete in this election. So what will come in the future? A "steel gate" pinched by the military from both inside and outside will arrive in parliament. A sham parliament will be implemented, and a sham government will be implemented.

Another most important thing is that the main goal our public can hope for today is "system change". We must go toward a new system and a new era with new minds and new people. The role of today's new generation of youth is extremely important. They will not accept it. Even though we are performing "regime change" - making changes within the government and showing an organizational form just by applying makeup and flowers to this evil military dictatorial system - our public today won't accept it anymore. Especially our new generation of youth won't accept it anymore.

Therefore, in this process of applying makeup and flowers to the evil military dictatorial system, these political parties that will participate with all the strength we have will also face the troubles of being oppressed. What I mainly want to say repeatedly is that the actions of the Burmese military, which lacks responsibility and accountability, will continue to destroy our country. Therefore, we need to resolutely oppose this evil military dictatorial system.



Voters wait in the sun. Photo: AFP

BURMESE INDEPENDENT MEDIA EDITORS OFFER INSIGHT INTO THE MYANMAR JUNTA ELECTION - PANEL DISCUSSION

Myanmar Election: BNI Editors' Insights panel discussion offered Myanmar editors' insights into reporting the election during the Thai PBS collaboration in Chiang Mai.

Moderator/Facilitator: Tin Tin Nyo, Managing Director, Burma News International (BNI)

Panelist: Htaike Htaike Aung, Director, Myanmar Internet Project

Panelist: Nan Paw Gay, Editor In-Chief, Karen Information Center

Panelist: Soe Myint, Editor In-Chief, Mizzima Media

Panelist: Sai Mueng, Editor In-Chief, Shan Herald Agency for News

Panelist: Sam Naw, Editor In-Chief, Kachin News Group

Question: Regarding the election, what is happening in terms of reporting?

Sam Naw: In Kachin State, it is difficult to get information immediately. According to some accounts, the results are already decided without even needing to cast votes. Based on what I have asked, there are very few people who intend to go and vote. Compared to the previous election, the polling stations are very deserted.

Question: What is the situation in Kayin State?

Nan Paw Gay: Most people do not even know who the candidates are. Regarding the voter lists, there are announcements urging people to come and check them until the 25th. It is observed that the number of people on the voter list is less than the actual population eligible to vote. Out of 7 townships, only 3 parties are contesting. On the ground, there is no active or crowded campaigning. We only see them doing their own propaganda and campaigning on their social media pages. Some groups that signed the NCA previously said they wouldn't allow the election in their territory, but they ended up cooperating as the date drew near. In areas that do not support them, we see terrorist attacks being carried out from the air. There are also some people who go to vote simply because they do not understand the situation. There is more than one Kayin party. Locals do not clearly know which party is which. In 2020, there were bomb blasts in Kayin State; now, things are even worse. It simply shows signs of regional instability.

Question: How is the situation in Shan State?

Sai Mueng: Out of 55 townships, [the election was held in] 12 in the first round, 17 in the second, and 9 in the final - so only 38 townships. It was announced that the election would not be held in 17 townships. It cannot be held in townships controlled by the 1027 [Operation]. During the 10th anniversary of the NCA, the Wa group said in Naypyidaw that they supported it. However, they are now not allowing the election to be held in the four towns under Wa control. In Northern Shan, it is being held in three towns: Lashio, Naungcho, and Muse. In the Muse District, which Northern troops do not dare to touch because of China, there are four towns. It cannot be held in three of those towns as they are controlled by Kokang troops. It can only be held in one town. There are 18 polling stations. As of last night, three layers of security have been deployed. Shops are not allowed to open, and phones cannot be brought in. It is an election that is very restrictive for the public. Someone assigned as a polling station officer said that none of the names of his six family members were on the voter list to cast a vote.

Question: What are the notable points regarding Mizzima's coverage?

Soe Myint: Our editorial position is important. Deciding to call it a "sham election" was not a decision made lightly. It was done after looking at it from all angles. While this is happening, we must report the news; we work to ensure the public knows the information more comprehensively. Reporters have to gather news anonymously, and they do so in the central regions (Anyar) and ethnic regions where the Myanmar military cannot govern. According to the news received so far, in areas dominated by the military and under strict administration, voter turnout is very low. Pro-military media report extensively on military leaders' voting and spread propaganda about voting to achieve democracy. In other areas where military influence is weak, most people are not interested in voting at all. In regions like Rakhine and Kachin, intense fighting is currently taking place.

Question: The military commission announced that elections will be held in over 250 townships, but other data suggests they only control around 100. Is what they are saying actually possible?

Nan Paw Gay: In Kayin State, out of 7 townships, they have said they will hold the election in three this time. However, all these territories are linked to KNU areas. They have been extending their terms for five

years, and they are seeking a solution through this election. I think that is why they are conducting it in three phases. Regarding human rights, people should have the right not to vote if they don't want to, and they should be able to speak their minds. Right now, that is not the case.

Sam Naw: It cannot be said that the military has full control. There are six townships where it is absolutely impossible to hold the election. Even in the townships where the military says they will hold it, they can only move around with security in the urban areas. The villages within those townships are controlled by the revolutionary forces. Looking at the big picture, the remaining townships where they plan to hold the election in January are places where fighting could break out at any time. In Bhamo, for instance, fighting is ongoing, and it is a place where nothing is certain.

Sai Mueng: In Lashio, which the Military Commission claims to control, they can only hold the election in the villages they actually hold. The population in the village tracts is much larger. They are telling people in the villages to come and cast advance votes. It is a situation where the military comes to pick them up by car so they can vote in the town. This is happening at a time when families are separated and struggling to survive due to the fighting. The Kokang forces gave instructions regarding voting, and then the military came to collect people by car. In Naungcho, the public cannot move or vote freely. Even in Wa-governed towns held by the (junta), they can only operate within the town centre; they cannot do it in every village tract. There is also an underlying element of threat behind the order to come and vote.

Soe Myint: They want to put on a convincing performance for this "show." From their perspective, it is about how successfully they can appear to carry it out. They are forcing civil servants to vote. Their claim that they will hold elections in 265 townships is in name only; we will have to continue to monitor the situation in the coming days.

Question: While the Military Commission is conducting the election, what preparations do the revolutionary forces have?

Soe Myint: Looking at the situation of the people, more than 50 percent of the population across many parts of Myanmar are suffering. These people are in a state of hopelessness; although they are not interested in the election itself, they are concerned about what might happen because of it. Revolutionary forces also face difficulties. There is concern about whether neighbouring countries and the international community

will recognize the resulting government as legitimate. Efforts are being made among various groups to reach a common agreement. A general political consensus is roughly in place. As a journalist, my assessment is that significant challenges will continue to persist. Many issues remain out of reach; for example, we cannot adequately cover the Rohingya issue, and the lives of IDPs (internally displaced persons) - who live day-to-day, not knowing if they will survive - are also currently beyond our reach to report on fully.

Sam Naw: The military must exit from politics. Looking at it from a Kachin perspective, we see that winning or losing the election doesn't change much for the Kachin people. Since it is rooted in the 2008 Constitution, there is a lack of trust. Our observation is that this is merely a political setup orchestrated by the Military Council.

Nan Paw Gay: I understand that after the election, the KNU (Karen National Union) intends to release a report containing facts and stories from the public, in collaboration with its partner organizations. I believe they may also have other low-profile plans and operations in motion.

Sai Mueng: Voting is a public right, and not voting is also a public right. An election should represent the rights of the people. The public wants a leader who can win and is willing to sacrifice for the common good. Shan people are among those who are loyal; after the Panglong Agreement, they waited ten years as promised and only took up arms after that period. They did not talk about secession; they only demanded federal democracy. The people of Shan State want a leader who will truly stand up for the public that supports them.

Question: Amidst the Military Commission's control of information and their propaganda, how do news agencies ensure that the reports they present actually reach the public?

Soe Myint: Revolutionary groups are operating with the goal of ending the military dictatorship. Governments in Sagaing and Magway have emerged, and they are continuing with necessary preparations and actions. For the media, it is difficult. We cannot report openly on the ground. Those who do report face challenges as they have to work undercover. As journalists, regardless of the difficulties, we will continue to collaborate and perform our necessary duties.

Sai Mueng: Shan State-based media outlets have formed a collective called MASS. Later on, we had to move everything to the border. There is no situation where we can work openly. During our reform efforts,

we tried to make everyone our informants. Our CJs (Citizen Journalists) are also very strong. Currently, even some polling station officers have become our CJs.

Nan Paw Gay: Although they [the military] have stated what will happen if the election is disrupted, we simply continue to do our jobs. We have developed and implemented clear safety and security policies in our recent plans. This is to protect ourselves. It is also important for CJs and ordinary civilians. There are times when we have to gather news beyond standard media ethics [due to the circumstances]. Information is gathered from the people, and we present it back as news so that the public can stay informed. It's about taking information from the people within and presenting it so that those same people remain aware. Currently, there is collaboration among media outlets, and we intend to continue this in the future. We can also use these platforms to let neighboring countries know what is happening.

Sam Naw: In areas controlled by the military, their propaganda still exists. In Kachin, we don't have a large number of reports, and there are times when we cannot write effectively enough to make an impact. There is an overwhelming amount of fake news and misinformation coming from online sources. It has become a difficult situation to counter. It is even harder when the relevant organizations cannot provide confirmation. However, we will continue to present stories that reflect the daily lives of the public.

Nay Aung (Nation Voice): In Magway, they [the military] cannot operate fully either. In other towns and villages, people are preoccupied with struggling through battles. Revolutionary groups dominate most of the townships and villages in Magway Region. In areas of central Myanmar where there had never been war before, battles have been breaking out following the military coup.



Resistance fighters in Mandalay.
Photo: AFP

FAKE ELECTIONS AND THE FIGHT FOR THE REVOLUTION'S FUTURE - PANEL DISCUSSION

Fake Elections and The Fight for The Revolution's Future panel discussion at the Thai PBS studio in Chiang Mai on 28 December offered an insight into what might come after the Myanmar junta's election.

Moderator/Facilitator: Thet Swe Win, Executive Director, Synergy-Social Harmony Organization

Panelist: Lway Mownt Noon, Ta'ang Woman, Activist

Panelist: Sithu Maung, Member of Parliament, PABEDAN Constituency Rangoon, and Spokesperson of CRPH

Panelist: Hnin Hnin Hmwe, Joint General Secretary-Democratic Party for A New Society (DPNS)

Question: The international community has called the military's election a sham, yet Min Aung Hlaing is pushing ahead with it. What does the fascist military want to gain from this election, and how do you analyze today's news?

Hnin Hnin Hmwe: What the military wants is some form of legitimacy. They have been extending their term time after time, and now they have run out

of extensions. This election is their final exit strategy, which is why they are doing it. However, since neither the people nor the international community accepts it, their expectations are not meeting reality.

Sithu Maung: When we talk about the "State," it no longer looks like the map we knew as children; this has become even clearer since the coup. They are now attempting to establish an election and a parliament that lack democracy. By holding the election in phases, they are essentially admitting that they can only operate within limited constraints. This is not an election for the people or for the country.

Lway Mownt Noon: They are holding the election because they want recognition from both the international community and the people. They also want to hide the fact that they are in the crisis that revolutionary forces have described. To this day, we can see how much the public is resisting them.

Question: The military group wants international recognition. If the international community were to accept them, what impact would it have on the revolution?

Lway Mownt Noon: The Spring Revolution is about rooting out the military dictatorship. It is not being

fought because of an election alone. Major powers have already formally rejected it. While international recognition might not affect the entirety of our revolution 100%, I believe it would cause some level of damage. The revolutionary goal is the emergence of a Federal Union. International support is necessary. War crimes are currently being committed nationwide. If they are recognized, it would be equivalent to granting them permission to continue committing international crimes.

Question: The 2020 mandate remains in effect. What has been done to maintain this, and what else is needed?

Sithu Maung: The feeling that the people's choice still exists remains strong. As long as a free election cannot be held again, this mandate will be upheld. We need to build a shadow government among ourselves that is even stronger than the NUG. Whether people vote or not, they (the military) will just rule through bullying. Nothing in Myanmar will change even after the election.

Question: How can the election pose a danger to the revolutionary forces currently fighting?

Hnin Hnin Hmwe: Our revolutionary forces may differ in their operations and ways of thinking. However, at this time, the distinction between the enemy's side and our side has become very clear. The military hasn't just started doing this; they did the same in 1962, 1988, 1990, and 2010. They themselves broke the 2008 Constitution. They are the ones controlling which parties can or cannot be formed. The military group is repeating this old pattern. Because of this, our unity has grown even stronger. This is the only election that has been so silent and lacked public interest. We see USDP candidates being declared winners even before competing, citing security reasons. We need to accept the "People's Mandate." We must accept what the people chose between the military group and a civilian government. In this election, it is absolutely impossible for them to obtain a people's mandate.

Question: At this current time, where is the revolution's greatest strength in unity, and where is its greatest weakness?

Hnin Hnin Hmwe: Our shared common goals - the complete end of the military dictatorship, the total abolition of the 2008 Constitution, and the realization of federal democracy - are where we are most united. We are about 80% prepared for the transitional period. I don't think there are significant weaknesses. Issues and discussions that we couldn't address for over 70 years are now finally being negotiated and talked about.

Sithu Maung: After this election, what they (the military) will get is a country without sovereignty. On the other hand, we are moving toward a unity based on federalism. We need to create the state we want to establish ourselves. Our unity lies in the fact that we share a federal vision. If I had to point out a weakness, it would be that we haven't been able to carry out reforms effectively yet; we are only in Phase 1. We are striving to do better in Phases 2 and 3. Those involved have already voiced this.

Lway Mownt Noon: Our strength lies in our inclusivity and our collective unity. Our unity is built on the belief that a Federal Union must emerge and that we must revolt against violence and oppression. Even regarding the Rohingya issue, the courage to speak out and provide recognition is something that has emerged from this Spring Revolution. It is crucial that our actions do not contradict federal principles. Regarding the armed revolution, there is a need for a unified command and control system. I am concerned that if cooperation remains weak, we may fail to receive the support we deserve from the international community.

Question: What preparations are necessary for the alliances between Federal Unit governments and military forces, and what has already been accomplished?

Sithu Maung: There are organizational structures within the respective units and states. Mechanisms

have been established in these local areas for tasks such as tax collection. This demonstrates the establishment of justice through taxation and the reinvestment of those funds for the benefit of the people. Currently, we are operating under Transitional Constitutional Arrangements, moving toward a Federal Transition. However, the definitions regarding these periods and processes have not yet been fully "digested" (agreed upon) among us. While we share the common goal of moving toward federalism, we still need to build and define the specific framework and foundation for how that federalism will function.

Question: Are women's voices sufficiently included in decision-making processes? What kinds of reforms are needed to ensure the inclusion of diverse forces?

Lway Mownt Noon: Women are the backbone of the current revolution. It was women who led the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), and the importance of the CDM has been paramount to this revolution. This is a revolution not just against the military dictatorship, but against all forms of oppression and violence. The military is an institution that builds its hold on power by exploiting Buddhism and patriarchy. As long as we cannot eliminate patriarchy, the Federal Union we desire will not be complete. Women's groups are the ones addressing the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and conducting international advocacy. We still need many more dialogues to ensure proper representation for women.

Question: Before the election, there were instances of political fragmentation among revolutionary forces. If the military speaks of peace after this sham election, what preparations have been made?

Hnin Hnin Hmwe: We started this revolution knowing full well that the military group would oppress us. People who were once satisfied with just having a meal have now taken up armed revolution. Every issue has a solution; it is just a matter of how we reach that solution. Working together on shared commonalities is a practical approach. Nothing that comes out of this sham election will be genuine. Historically, General Ne

Win did the same. We must move forward by deciding our own future. While there is a possibility, they might initiate a peace process, I believe many countries will be hesitant to engage closely with the military group. Currently, several embassies in Yangon are planning to close completely by 2026, and many have already downgraded their diplomatic ties.

Guest: Tun Kyi The military's framework is currently only expanding in terms of its militarization. This is a time when the country is in a state of mourning (suffering), and the difficulties we face are suffocating. No matter how dutiful the public remains, it is essential for the revolutionary government to function as a true, competent government. As the military regime enters its fifth year, it has failed to implement any of the ASEAN agreements. The Proportional Representation (PR) system is also designed solely for their own interests. Among ourselves, it is vital that we find political reconciliation and resolution.

Guest: Dr Bio The military group is seeking legitimacy through this sham election. Personally, I believe they will absolutely not achieve it. They built the 2008 Constitution specifically to ensure their own dominance. In terms of public endorsement, we can see that it is currently silent and deserted. In 2020, people were queuing up since the night before to vote at polling stations, and the youth were very active. How much can this military group actually do for the country's economy, security, social affairs, and national development? Things are only set to get worse. Regarding international recognition, the EU and UN have already objected. Furthermore, they will not be able to achieve stability in central authority. This sham election will only conclude with sham results.



Refugees in the Thai-Myanmar border.
Photo: Supplied

BURMA'S INVISIBLE REFUGEES: THE ECONOMICS OF EXODUS

ANTONIO GRACEFFO

Nang Yem's monthly budget tells the story of Burma's refugee crisis in numbers. She earns 13,000 baht working at a café in Chiang Mai. She and her two sisters send 4,500 baht home to their parents in Northern Shan State. Rent costs 2,500 baht. The remainder covers food, transportation, phone, and other expenses.

"Usually, by the end of the month, there's nothing left," the 28-year-old Ta'ang woman explained. "Sometimes, I take extra work washing dishes in restaurants to earn a little more."

Nang Yem and her sisters didn't want to leave Burma. During the 1027 military operations in Northern Shan State, fighting between the Burma army and ethnic armed alliances made their hometown of Lashio too dangerous for young people.

Fear of war, fear of conscription, excessive taxation, and harassment by multiple armed organizations have driven roughly four million Myanmar nationals to seek refuge in Thailand, more than half of whom are undocumented.

Nang Yem's situation is typical. "We didn't want to come to Thailand," she said quietly, "but it was not safe to work or live there, so our parents decided to send the three of us to Thailand."

Her parents remained behind to manage the family's tea plantations. "My parents don't want to come

to Thailand because they can't speak the language and find the weather too hot," Nang Yem explained. "They stay behind to take care of our property, while we send them money every month."

Most migrants are young, military-age people avoiding conscription, or working-age adults who believe they can find some way to survive in Thailand. Very often, they are forced to leave parents and grandparents behind because the elderly are too old for such a transition and, like Nang Yem's family, suffer from language barriers. Most Burmese migrants do not want to remain in Thailand. Their primary goals are to stay alive and to send money home while they wait for the war to end.

Nang Yem expressed her greatest wish simply: "I want to go back to my home country when peace returns. I hope the international community will help Burma move forward toward lasting peace."

According to UNHCR, approximately 81,000 refugees from Burma, primarily Karen and Karenni, live in nine official refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. These are officially registered refugees, recognized by both the Thai government and the United Nations. Many have lived in these camps for decades, with nearly half born under canvas. Until August 2025, when Thailand granted them work rights, they were barred from working outside the camps,

traveling freely, or accessing public services, making them largely dependent on humanitarian assistance.

But these 81,000 camp refugees represent only a fraction of Burma's displaced population in Thailand. Millions of undocumented Myanmar workers live without legal protection or external support. These are Burma's invisible refugees, people like Nang Yem, Sai Awn, and Pa Noon. Their stories are filled with struggle and hardship and illustrate the human toll of the war, which is destroying tens of millions of lives far beyond the battlefield.

Sai Awn, a 20-year-old ethnic Shan Christian from Kayah State, fled to Thailand more than two years ago when the military junta announced enforcement of the conscription law. He was still in high school. He left school and traveled to Thailand with his mother, while his father remained in Burma. His two older sisters also work in Thailand.

"I want to go back to my homeland, but I cannot return now," he said. "If I go back, there is a risk of being captured by the military." He explained that remaining in Thailand was also difficult because of financial pressures. "Here in Thailand, the cost of living is higher than in Burma, and I have many expenses such as documentation, visa, and passport renewals every year," he said. Speaking about life in Chiang Mai, Sai Awn added, "The income is low but the expenses are high, and it is not easy to find a better job."

Since arriving, Sai Awn has struggled to find stable employment. He worked in a bakery shop that closed down, then at a plant shop market where the income wasn't enough to survive. After weeks of unemployment depending on his sisters for support, he found work delivering vegetables at a local market.

The employer first asked whether Sai Awn had a passport, visa, and work permit. Sai Awn only had a pink card, but the employer said that was acceptable. When asked if he could speak Thai and drive, Sai Awn said "yes," though he did not have a driving license because he cannot apply for one without a passport.

The job pays 350 baht (about \$10 USD) per day, working from 10 am to 10 pm, delivering fresh vegetables to customers.

When asked if he wanted to say something to the outside world, he said "My message is: I want the international community, including powerful nations, to push Burma towards peace," Sai Awn said. "We, the people of Burma, have suffered enough from war."

Pa Noon, a 62-year-old Shan widow from Laikha in Southern Shan State, has lived in Thailand for the

past decade with her two sons. Her daughter remains in Burma.

She explained that her sons left to avoid being forcibly conscripted by the local militia that controls their village.

"We never wanted to separate our family," Pa Noon said. "But if we had stayed together, I am sure I would have lost my two sons. In my village, every three months the militia under the Burmese Army demands new soldiers and supplies."

These demands placed immense pressure on villagers. Families who already did not have enough money for food were forced to borrow from relatives or sell property to pay the military tax.

After her daughter married and moved to town, Pa Noon sold the family's paddy fields and remaining property. She gave part of the money to her daughter and used the rest to finance her journey to Thailand. Before leaving, she refused to pay the militia's latest fee, knowing she would never return.

"Now I cannot go back. If I return, the militia will arrest me because I did not pay what they ordered," she explained. "I am too old now. I will stay in Thailand for the rest of my life. I already lost my husband because of the militia, and I do not want to lose my children. My sons never want to go back."

In Thailand, Pa Noon works in garlic plantations, leaving home at five in the morning and returning around six in the evening. On some days she earns 500 baht, about \$15, while on other days she earns less. The work is irregular and usually lasts only about two weeks per season. She has three main periods of employment each year: garlic planting, garlic harvesting, and chili harvesting. Her total annual income is approximately 25,000 baht, or about \$800. Although her sons sometimes send money, Pa Noon refuses it. "I told them I can still work. Don't worry," she said. "One day, if I can no longer work, then I will ask for your help."

Burma's invisible refugees do not live in camps and receive no international aid. Instead, they work in Thailand's fields and cafés, sending money home while waiting for a peace that seems further away each year. They fled conscription, militia extortion, and combat zones. Now they survive on the margins of Thailand's economy, earning just enough to support families scattered across borders and dreaming of the day they can safely return home.

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



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA BOMBS PREDOMINANTLY CHRISTIAN MINDAT ON CHRISTMAS DAY

The Myanmar junta carried out an airstrike on the town of Mindat in Chin State at approximately 5:20 pm on 25 December, targeting the predominantly Christian community on one of its most sacred religious holidays. While the bombing caused significant damage to residential properties, no civilian casualties were reported as most of the town's population had already fled due to the ongoing conflict.

The Chin Defence Force–Mindat (CDF–Mindat) released photographs showing the aftermath of the strike, which damaged several homes. Salai Yaw Man, an official from the Mindat Township People's Administration, condemned the attack as a "wicked act" by "wicked people," noting that the junta has shown a total disregard for religious sanctity by repeatedly bombing churches, monasteries and wedding ceremonies. According to the 2024 census, Christians make up 54.5% of Mindat's population.

The airstrike occurred despite proactive safety measures taken by local administrative bodies.

On 19 December, the Mindat Township People's Administration had issued a formal ban on mass

gatherings and public celebrations for the Christmas and New Year period to protect civilians from expected aerial assaults.

Across the country, the junta's approach to Christmas has been marked by both violence and coercion. In several states, including Kachin and Chin, churches were reportedly ordered to hold Christmas services before 20 December to avoid interfering with election preparations.

Additionally, Christian groups reported the recent forcible conscription of religious leaders, including Reverend Pau Muan Lian in Yangon, despite legal exemptions for clergy. Administrative officials report that Mindat Township has been hit by more than 30 airstrikes throughout 2025.

The latest strike on Christmas Day is seen by local resistance forces as a tactic to demoralize the population and maintain a "reign of terror" ahead of the junta's phased elections, which are scheduled to begin in parts of Chin State on 28 December.



KIA fighters. Photo: KIA

KIA CAPTURES KEY MYANMAR JUNTA BASES IN BHAMO OFFENSIVE

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) has reportedly seized two major military installations in Bhamo, Kachin State, as it intensifies its long-running offensive to take control of the strategic southern hub.

"We received reports this morning that Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 47 and Ordnance Depot 641 fell to resistance forces on the evening of 26 December," a source told Mizzima on 27 December.

The capture of Ordnance Depot 641 followed reports that its battalion commander was killed during heavy clashes on Christmas Day. While the KIA has not yet issued an official confirmation, spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu acknowledged that intense fighting had occurred around LIB 47 and the surrounding 3-mile and 4-mile areas leading up to the reported seizure.

He noted that updated field reports from the front lines were still being processed as of the morning of 27 December.

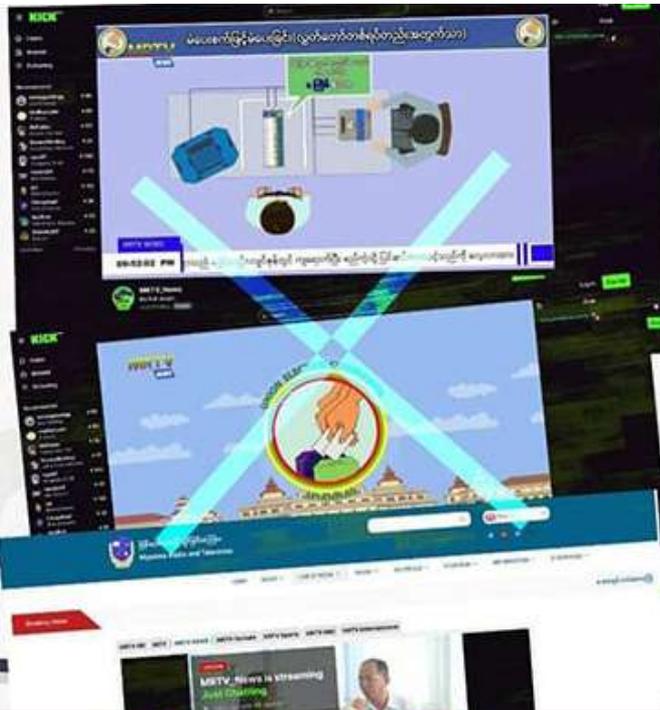
The offensive on Bhamo, which began in late 2024, saw a significant surge in activity on 25 December. The fall of these bases marks a major setback for the

junta, which has already lost control of Bhamo airport, Artillery Unit 366, and Armored Battalion 7006 earlier this year.

Military analysts suggest that the loss of the ordnance depot and LIB 47 further isolates the junta's remaining stronghold at Military Operations Command (MOC-21).

Despite the reports of KIA territorial gains, pro-junta channels claimed that skirmishes were still ongoing in the vicinity of the bases as of late Friday. The military has increasingly relied on air transport and river convoys from Mandalay to resupply its embattled troops in Bhamo, as ground routes remain heavily contested.

Fighting continues at several other key positions in the township, including Military Engineering Battalion 914 and Supply and Transport Battalion 933.



AUSTRALIAN STREAMING PLATFORM KICK SWIFTLY REMOVES MYANMAR JUNTA PROPAGANDA CHANNELS

An Australian live-streaming platform, Kick, has removed multiple propaganda channels linked to Myanmar's illegal military junta within hours of their launch, refusing to host the accounts for even 24 hours.

According to Justice For Myanmar, the junta began using Kick after its propaganda accounts were removed from Amazon-owned Twitch. Shortly after the junta started livestreaming on Kick, the platform took down the accounts. The removed channels included MRTV HD, MITV, MRTV News, MRTV Farmers, MRTV Sports, MRTV NRC and MRTV Entertainment.

The junta had had intended to use Kick to livestream content through MRTV websites and mobile applications. Following the takedown, MRTV websites and apps displayed an error message from Kick stating that the connection appeared to be unavailable.

Kick is a Melbourne-based company owned by Australian billionaire Ed Craven and his business partner Bijan Tehrani. Like Twitch, Kick is primarily

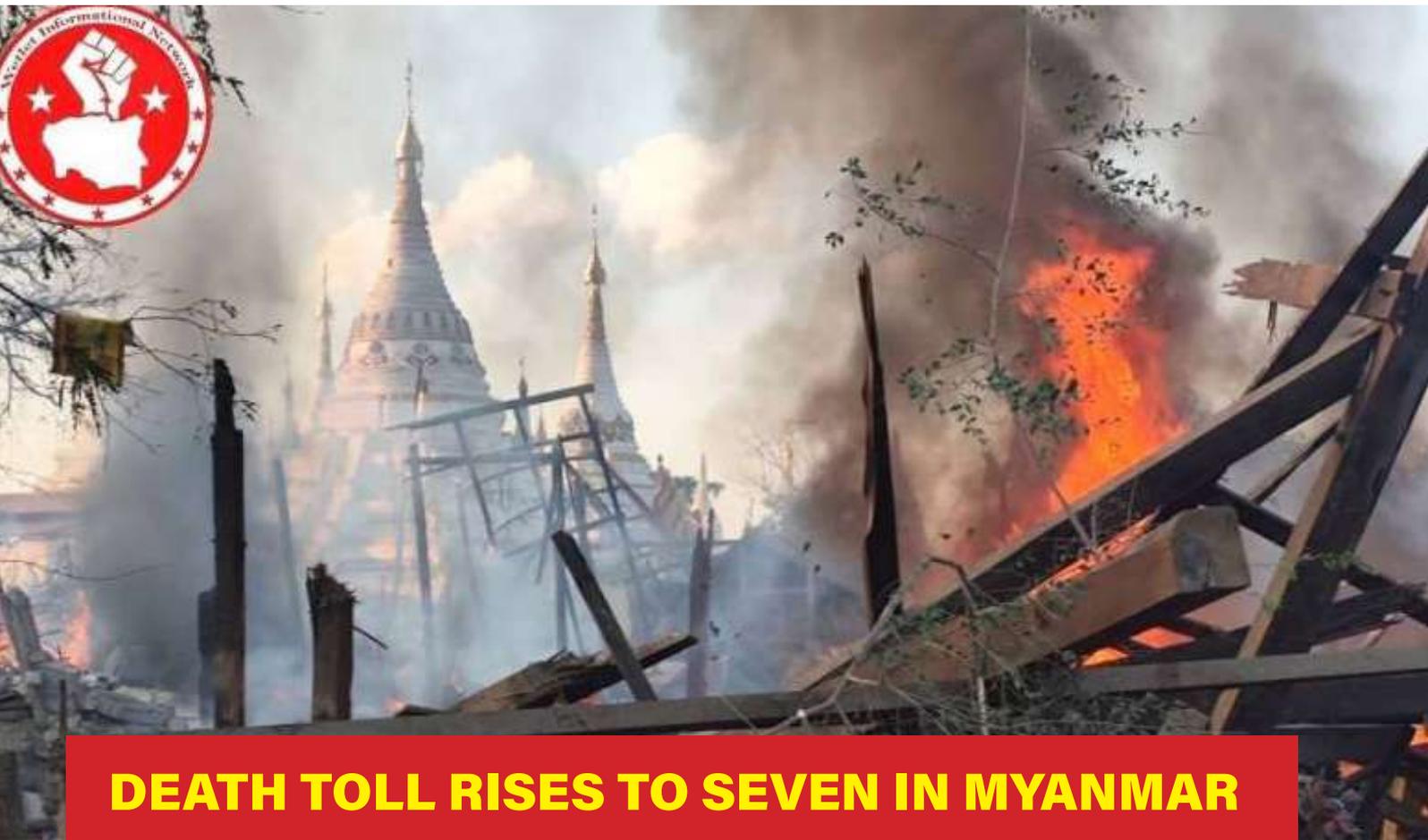
used for live streaming gaming.

Justice For Myanmar continues to call on all tech companies to take down the junta's propaganda accounts and ban the junta from using their platforms.

In a further development, YouTube has also removed the junta's Myanmar International TV (MITV) channel. YouTube had previously taken down the military's Ministry of Information channel, and MITV had already been removed by Twitch and Facebook.

MITV has been used by the junta as a propaganda tool aimed at international viewers, as part of efforts to legitimize the 2021 coup and the planned sham election.

Justice For Myanmar called on Alphabet, YouTube's parent company, to remove all remaining junta propaganda accounts and to block the military from using its products and services.



DEATH TOLL RISES TO SEVEN IN MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON WETLET TOWNSHIP

The number of fatalities following a military airstrike on Ngapatchaung village in Wetlet Township has risen to seven, according to the Wetlet Informational Network. While initial reports on 23 December indicated three deaths, four additional victims including two young children have since been confirmed dead.

The attack occurred at 4:21 pm on 23 December when a jet fighter from the Meiktila Air Base dropped four 200-pound bombs on the western part of the village.

Ko Nagar Lay, head of the Wetlet Informational Network, stated that the bombs struck a pagoda premises and nearby residential homes. The victims have been identified as 80-year-old Daw Than Mya, 75-year-old Daw Kyin, 25-year-old Ko Min Thant, a 14-year-old child, a seven-year-old child, 35-year-old Daw Mar Thwe, and her mother, 80-year-old Daw Khin Tint.

In addition to the loss of life, the bombardment destroyed four houses and four vehicles and killed livestock.

Local residents and resistance groups emphasized that there was no active fighting in the area at the time of the strike, accusing the military of deliberately targeting a civilian population. As of 24 December, many residents remain in hiding in nearby forests as reconnaissance drones continue to fly over the area, sparking fears of subsequent attacks.

“The military has also deployed reconnaissance drones. People are still fleeing because more jet fighters are expected to arrive,” a resistance fighter said.

This incident brings the total number of civilians killed by airstrikes in Wetlet Township this month to at least 24.



POLITICAL PRISONERS TORTURED AT DAIK-U PRISON AFTER MEDICAL COMPLAINTS

The Political Prisoners Network–Myanmar (PPNM) reported on 23 December that political prisoners at Daik-U Prison in Bago Region who raised complaints about inadequate medical care were subjected to beatings and torture.

In a statement, PPNM said that political prisoners who complain about inadequate medical care are placed on a list and subjected to severe punishment, including being forced to crawl on all fours, beaten, tortured, and sent to solitary confinement. The group described the practices as systematic abuses carried out under the military's command structure.

The statement added that prison authorities conducted searches and confiscated medicines and books, including items sent by families to compensate for the lack of adequate medical care inside the prison.

The group also reported that items purchased at inflated prices from the prison market have been confiscated, while food sent by families is frequently searched at the prison entrance, with some items seized or not fully delivered to prisoners.

Mizzima contacted PPNM for further information

regarding the statement but had not received a response at the time of reporting.

However, a family member of a political prisoner told Mizzima that medicines sent to Daik-U Prison are often withheld and only released after long delays, while the right to send books has been banned for about four months.

The family member said that while books were initially allowed, they have been banned for about four months, and although medicines were permitted, they were not delivered promptly, often taking 20 days to a month to reach political prisoners.

PPNM said prison authorities are committing ongoing human rights violations and injustices against political prisoners at Daik-U Prison, alleging that the actions are being led by the current deputy warden, Hein Zin Aung, who was transferred from the military.

The group said the incidents constitute serious violations of the political prisoners' basic human rights and pose grave risks to their lives and health.



Arrested suspects. Photo: Supplied

KAREN NATIONAL UNION SAYS FOUR DETENTION ESCAPEES KILL CDM TEACHER AND HER HUSBAND

The Karen National Union (KNU) says four men who escaped from detention have been arrested in connection with the killing of a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) teacher and her husband in Palaw Township, Tanintharyi Region.

According to a statement issued on 21 December by the Public Relations and Information Committee of the KNU's Myeik-Dawei District, the suspects were recaptured while attempting to flee to Thailand following the murders.

CDM teacher Daw Aye Thi Aung and her husband were killed on the evening of 15 December inside their home in Sar Khae village, Palaw Township. Both victims suffered fatal knife wounds, the statement said.

The KNU identified the suspects as Maung Aung Naing Oo, Maung Phyto Wai Oo, Maung Zaw Htike and Maung Win Soe. They had escaped from detention at the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) Battalion 7, Column 5 camp on 13 December. The statement did not specify the offences for which they had originally been detained.

According to the KNU, Maung Win Soe went to Daw Aye Thi Aung's house claiming he was hungry and asked for food. When she refused, he stabbed her to death. After hearing her screams, her husband came out of the house, at which point the other three men

restrained him while Maung Win Soe killed him, the statement said.

After the killings, the suspects allegedly took the couple's jewellery, including earrings, necklaces and bracelets, and attempted to escape to Thailand. Three of the suspects were arrested on 17 December and the fourth on 18 December. During interrogation, all four reportedly confessed to the murders.

Daw Aye Thi Aung was the head of the Palaw Township Education Board and was widely known for her efforts to support children's education, according to local sources.

The funeral for Daw Aye Thi Aung and her husband was held on 17 December at the Sar Khae village cemetery in Palaw Township.

More than 10 Township Education Boards issued a joint statement on 17 December calling on the National Unity Government (NUG) and the KNU to take swift action to ensure justice for the killing of Daw Aye Thi Aung, also known as Daw Pan Htwar, and her husband.

The KNU's Myeik-Dawei District Public Relations and Information Committee said the organisation would continue its investigation and effective legal action would be taken against those arrested in accordance with Kawthoolei law.



Photo: Supplied

MASSIVE ARSON CAMPAIGN BY MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS LEAVES SEVEN SAGAING VILLAGES IN RUINS

Myanmar junta troops launched an offensive and set fires across seven villages in the eastern part of Yinmabin Township, Sagaing Region, resulting in the destruction of more than 200 houses destroyed and burnt down, according to local sources.

Starting from 17 December, a military column with a strength of over 100 personnel launched set fire to homes in the Kyauk Maw village tract of Yinmabin Township.

“Well-built houses were also destroyed in the fire. Even the houses that weren’t burned were thoroughly ransacked. There are also some houses that were set on fire but did not burn down completely,” said a local man from Kyauk Maw.

During the incident, it is reported that 25 houses in Kyauk Maw village, 34 in Kyun Paw village, 36 in Hnaw

Pin village, 67 in Kyauk Kone village, 49 in In Pat village, 16 in Kyet Lya village, and two houses in Pan Tein Pyin village were lost in the arson.

These villages are located in the western portion of the Northwestern Regional Military Command. It is an area where residents are frequently displaced, and more than 10 people have been killed due to heavy artillery fire.

Locals reported that they are facing housing difficulties due to arson attacks by military column and are in urgent need of blankets and warm clothing.



Photo: Supplied

RUSSIA AND MYANMAR LAUNCH JOINT ORGANIC FERTILIZER FACTORY PROJECT

A Myanmar junta-controlled newspaper reported on 20 December that a joint Russia-Myanmar organic foliar fertilizer factory will be built in Naypyidaw and that the groundbreaking ceremony along with the joint venture agreement signing event was held on 19 December.

It is reported that the fertilizer factory is a collaboration between RUMA Organic, a company under Russia's Fund RC-Investments, and Aung Than Htike Co., Ltd.

The news report also stated that the factory will be situated on Plot No. 1662, Ah Lyin Lo Village Tract, Zabuthiri Township in Naypyidaw.

U Hla Moe, the junta's Minister for Cooperatives and Rural Development, described the construction of the plant as the initial phase of a vital project that will offer long-term benefits to Myanmar's agricultural sector and its farmers.

"I would like to say that the factory construction should be given special priority to completing as quickly as possible within the set timeframe," he added.

The announcement did not mention the specific

period set for completion.

The Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) regarding the construction of a liquid fertilizer factory in Myanmar was signed between the junta and Russia in September 2024.

Under the MoC, the junta's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation and the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development, agreed with Russia's Fund RC-Investments to implement foliar fertilizer production as planned in the first phase, and build an organic fertilizer factory in the second phase.

Relations between the junta and Russia have strengthened since the coup, with discussions held to enhance defence cooperation and collaborate across multiple sectors, including investment.

Several Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and contracts have been signed between the junta and Russia, including an agreement to build a nuclear power plant near Naypyidaw.



Aung San Suu Kyi. Photo: AFP

THE MYANMAR JUNTA'S GREATEST FEAR IS NOT AUNG SAN SUU KYI ALIVE - IT IS HER DEAD

ALAN CLEMENTS

A question is now being asked openly across international media, diplomatic briefings, and human rights forums: will Aung San Suu Kyi ever be free?

Because the world delayed demanding an answer, another question now carries unavoidable urgency: is she even alive?

Aung San Suu Kyi is not a marginal political figure. She is a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, the democratically elected leader of Myanmar, and one of the most globally recognized symbols of nonviolent resistance of the last half-century. Her party won the country's last free national election in a landslide. For this, she was erased.

Since the military coup of February 2021, she has been held in windowless solitary confinement, in a prison cell whose location remains undisclosed, cut off from lawyers, family, independent doctors, and the outside world. For nearly three years there has been no verified proof of life - no images, no independent medical confirmation, no credible access by neutral observers. This is not neglect. It is grotesque behavior

by a regime that understands precisely what it is doing.

This is how authoritarianism operates. It replaces truth with managed ambiguity and governs not only bodies, but perception itself. Silence becomes a method of control. The absence of information becomes an instrument of domination. When a state refuses independent verification of a political prisoner's condition, that refusal is itself a form of violence - quiet, deliberate, and corrosive.

Myanmar's military junta understands this dynamic well. It also understands that brute force alone cannot sustain rule. Even dictators require theater. Power must appear orderly even as legitimacy collapses. That is why, while keeping the country's elected leader in isolation, the regime stages what it calls elections - carefully choreographed performances designed not to express the will of the people but to replace accountability with procedure.

These staged elections are now being rolled out in three tightly managed phases - beginning December 28, continuing through January 11, and concluding on January 25 - not as a democratic exercise, but as

a logistical spectacle designed to simulate momentum while eliminating scrutiny. The timing is deliberate. The absence of Aung San Suu Kyi, held in secret solitary confinement without proof of life, is not a flaw in this process but its precondition. Elections conducted in phases under military control are not evidence of transition; they are evidence of fear.

These are not elections. They are simulations.

Authoritarian power does not seek consent. It seeks compliance framed as inevitability. From that perspective, sham elections are not a display of confidence but an admission of anxiety. Legitimacy is rehearsed only when it has already evaporated.

The deeper question is when the regime's calculus changes. Dictators do not release political prisoners because conscience intervenes. They do so when limits assert themselves - when the cost of holding a symbol begins to outweigh the benefit of suppressing it. At that point, release becomes strategic rather than moral.

Aung San Suu Kyi is not merely incarcerated. She is being administered as an absence. This is symbolic containment - a strategy that relies on opacity, delay, and fatigue, on the hope that urgency will dissipate and memory will dull. But symbolic containment works only while a regime believes time is on its side.

That belief is eroding.

Myanmar is not stabilizing. It is fragmenting. Territorial control is contested. The economy is in collapse. Armed resistance has diversified rather than receded. Even within the military itself, fractures are no longer anecdotal but structural, visible in defections, internal purges, and declining morale. These are symptoms of exhaustion, not consolidation.

Authoritarian regimes fear many things, but two above all others: the loss of narrative control and the creation of a martyr.

This is where the question of Aung San Suu Kyi's survival becomes decisive. A living prisoner can be negotiated over, exiled, or instrumentalized. A dead one cannot. Death converts containment into indictment. It transforms silence into accusation and generates a moral force no regime can manage or neutralize.

The junta understands this. The death of Aung San Suu Kyi in custody would collapse its remaining claims to legitimacy and foreclose future diplomatic maneuvering. It would harden global perception of the regime as irredeemably criminal. That is why, paradoxically, her symbolic power increases her chances of survival - not because compassion emerges,

but because fear clarifies the calculation.

The international response has remained cautious to the point of paralysis. The United Nations issues statements. ASEAN convenes meetings calibrated to manage optics rather than outcomes. Western governments balance values against strategic convenience and too often choose the latter. What has been missing is not awareness, but resolve. Pressure accumulates elsewhere - through economic isolation, reputational decay, capital flight, elite defections, and the quiet reassessment of regional actors who recognize that backing a failing junta is becoming costly.

This is how authoritarian systems unravel. They do not confess. They recalculate.

If and when Aung San Suu Kyi is released, it will not feel like victory. It will feel like the end of a lie that could no longer be sustained. Her release will arrive wrapped in euphemism - humanitarian grounds, medical necessity, national reconciliation. The language will be antiseptic. The reality will be raw.

Her freedom will not mean Myanmar is free. It will mean the regime has reached the point where holding her has become more dangerous than letting her go.

Until then, the unresolved question of her condition is not speculation. It is an indictment of international hesitation.

Because stability built on disappearance is not stability at all.

It is merely a pause before collapse.

And history is watching - not with patience, but with memory.

About the Author

*Alan Clements is an author, former Buddhist monk, and human rights advocate who has written extensively on authoritarianism, nonviolence, and Myanmar's struggle for democracy. He is the author of seventeen books, including *Conversation with a Dictator*, *Unsilenced: Aung San Suu Kyi—Conversations from a Myanmar Prison*, and his most recent work, *Politics of the Heart: Nonviolence in the Age of Atrocity*. Clements has worked closely with Burmese democracy leaders for more than three decades, and his writing has appeared in international media outlets across Asia, Europe, and the United States.*



Border traffic. Photo: Supplied

DELVING INTO THAI-MYANMAR BUSINESS RELATIONS IN THE WAKE OF THE MYANMAR JUNTA ELECTION

At a recent panel discussion organised by Thai PBS World, titled ‘Voices from the Frontline: Navigating the Future of Myanmar’, veteran independent journalists took a look into the Myanmar junta’s planned election and Thai-Myanmar relations.

One of the presenters Onravee “Natty” Tangmeesang offered a realistic approach to Thai-Myanmar business in a presentation entitled: Myanmar 2026: Navigating the Fracture – A Strategic Roadmap for Thai Business in a Post-Election Landscape.

Natty is a communications specialist, blogger, and former journalist, renowned for her extensive work on Myanmar. Her deep engagement with Myanmar is evident through her social media platforms “Natty Loves Myanmar,” where she shares insights and stories about the country’s socio-political landscape. With over a decade of experience in journalism and communications, Natty has focused on human rights, migration, and the socio-political dynamics of the region, aiming to bridge complex narratives across borders.

In the following Mizzima interview, Natty delves into Thai-Myanmar business opportunities following the upcoming Myanmar junta elections.

1. In light of the Myanmar junta election, why is it important to pursue what you term “Operational Resilience” over the suggestion of “Waiting for Stability”?

Waiting for stability assumes that Myanmar will return to a single, predictable political and economic environment, but the reality after the junta election is that instability has become structural rather than temporary. The election does not resolve the underlying conflict or governance crisis, so businesses that pause operations risk losing relevance, market share, and partner relationships. Operational resilience accepts uncertainty as the operating condition and focuses instead on continuity—diversifying routes, managing risk exposure, and adapting commercial models to function under disruption. In this context, resilience is not about optimism; it is about survival and strategic positioning in an uneven landscape.

2. Why will the junta election entrench further conflict?

In my opinion, the election is widely perceived inside Myanmar as a mechanism to consolidate power rather than to restore democratic legitimacy. With major opposition parties dissolved, leaders detained, and

voting conducted under heavy security restrictions, the process lacks broad consent. Instead of creating political closure, it reinforces resistance narratives that power is being imposed rather than negotiated.

3. Please explain how the Myanmar economy has effectively split into two?

Myanmar no longer functions as a single national market. One economy operates under junta control, with formal regulations, licensing requirements, official exchange rates, and politically connected firms. Running parallel to this is a fragmented border and resistance-linked economy, where trade flows through negotiated arrangements with local power holders, ethnic armed organizations, and informal logistics networks. These two systems overlap geographically but operate by very different rules, making nationwide distribution extremely difficult and forcing businesses to think in terms of corridors rather than countries.

4. What are the current options for transporting goods between Thailand and Myanmar?

The traditional Mae Sot–Myawaddy route and the Asian Highway can no longer be treated as reliable backbones. Companies now have to adopt a portfolio approach to logistics. Shipments can be transported via sea routes such as Ranong Port–Yangon Port and Laem Chabang Port–Yangon Port, as well as overland routes including the Mae Sai–Tachileik border crossing. The Mae Sai checkpoint in Chiang Rai is particularly suitable for delivering goods to northern Myanmar, such as Kengtung, Taunggyi, and Mandalay, while sea freight routes are more appropriate for shipments destined for Yangon Port.

5. What opportunities exist for Thai brands now?

Thai brands are uniquely positioned as relatively trusted, neutral players at a time when military-linked Myanmar brands face consumer boycotts and many Western firms are scaling back exposure. Demand has not disappeared—especially for essential goods—but consumers are more price-sensitive and value reliability over aspiration. Brands that can consistently keep products available, communicate value rather than politics, and work with resilient local distributors can capture meaningful market share, particularly in food, beverages, personal care, and household essentials.

6. Why do you say the election is aimed at solidifying control rather than building consensus?

The structure of the election—phased voting, selective participation, and strict legal frameworks—suggests it is designed to produce an administratively

valid outcome rather than a socially accepted one. It allows the military to claim constitutional progress while maintaining coercive authority behind the scenes. From a strategic perspective, that signals continuity of control rather than political normalization.

7. What are the three futures for a fractured Myanmar state in 2026?

The most likely future is a disciplined but unstable status quo, where the junta controls core cities while border areas operate semi-autonomously, allowing limited trade under constant friction. A second scenario is deeper fragmentation, where Myanmar effectively becomes a patchwork of economic zones governed by different authorities, making national distribution almost impossible. The third, lower-probability but high-impact scenario is a systemic shock—such as a banking collapse or major internal rupture—that would severely disrupt trade and asset security. Strategic planning must assume the first while being prepared for the others.

8. How does this situation strain Thai-Myanmar trade and commerce?

Trade strain comes from three directions at once. Logistically, disrupted transport corridors increase costs and unpredictability. Economically, the remittance squeeze on Myanmar workers in Thailand reduces household purchasing power, softening demand. Strategically, energy dependence and political risk force Thai companies to balance national interests with reputational and compliance concerns. Together, these pressures compress margins and reward only those firms that can operate efficiently under stress.

9. You say the Asian Highway is “dead.” What does that mean, and what replaces it?

Calling the Asian Highway “dead” does not mean it no longer exists, but that it no longer functions as a dependable national artery. Businesses can no longer assume continuity along that route. In its place is a network model—multiple smaller routes, alternative border crossings, sea transport, and localized distribution hubs. Success now depends on flexibility rather than scale, and on building systems that can reroute quickly when conditions change.

10. What are the key implications of the remittance squeeze on Myanmar migrant workers?

The requirement for overseas workers to remit a portion of their income through official channels, combined with taxation and forced exchange at unfavorable rates, significantly reduces disposable

income. This affects not only families in Myanmar but also consumption patterns in Thailand, as migrant workers become more cautious spenders. It also increases the risk of informality, as workers seek to avoid systems they perceive as punitive. For businesses, this means slower demand growth and heightened price sensitivity.

11. How is PTT managing its relationship with Myanmar given Thailand's energy needs?

PTT appears to be taking a pragmatic, long-term approach rooted in Thailand's energy security. Rather than exiting Myanmar, it is maintaining essential operations while managing exposure and reputational risk. Investments signal a belief that disengagement is not realistic given regional interdependence. This reflects a broader strategy of adaptation rather than withdrawal—staying engaged, but cautiously.

12. Can you explain the “boycott effect” and how Thai brands can step into the gap?

Since the coup, many Myanmar consumers have deliberately avoided products linked to the military or its business networks. This has created gaps in everyday categories that still have strong demand. Thai brands can step into this space by remaining politically neutral, focusing on affordability and availability, and ensuring their supply chains do not visibly connect to sanctioned or controversial entities. The opportunity is less about branding power and more about trust and consistency.

13. How do you view the “dark” prediction around internet restrictions?

Myanmar is unlikely to go fully offline, but digital space will become more controlled, more fragmented, and less reliable. Restrictions on platforms, VPNs, and connectivity introduce volatility for digital marketing and e-commerce. Businesses should plan for sudden disruptions and complement online strategies with offline channels, distributor-led sales, and simple communication tools. Digital presence remains important, but it can no longer be the sole pillar of market access.

14. Why is resilience critical in this competitive landscape?

Competition in Myanmar is no longer won by branding or pricing alone. It is won by those who can secure supply, manage risk, and keep products moving despite disruption. Companies that already operate resilient logistics and distribution networks face fewer competitors because the barriers to entry are so high.

In this environment, operational capability becomes the primary competitive advantage.

15. What should Thai companies focus on in Q1 2026 to gain market share?

The priority should be securing supply before disruption, not reacting after it. Companies need sufficient inventory buffers, diversified transport options, and strong relationships with local distributors who understand corridor-level risks. Messaging should emphasize value and reliability rather than aspiration, while promotions should be simple and executable under constrained conditions. Q1 is about preparation, not expansion for its own sake.

16. What is the strategic compass for 2026—what to trade and what to approach cautiously?

The safest products are essential, repeat-purchase goods such as food, beverages, hygiene items, and basic household products. Industrial goods and construction materials can still perform but require careful payment and logistics controls. High-end discretionary products—luxury, fashion, tourism-linked services—carry the highest risk due to income pressure and volatility. The compass should always point toward necessity, affordability, and operational control.

17. How do you see Myanmar-Thai commerce in 2026 overall?

Trade will continue, but it will be uneven and negotiated rather than seamless. Myanmar should be viewed not as a single market but as a collection of micro-markets defined by routes, authorities, and access conditions. Companies that adapt to this reality—rather than waiting for normalization—will continue to operate, while others will struggle or exit.

18. Is there anything else you would like to add?

The most important shift is mental rather than tactical. Businesses need to accept that uncertainty is no longer a temporary phase but the operating environment itself. Strategic clarity comes from setting firm red lines—on compliance, reputation, and partner selection—while building flexible systems that can still function within those limits. In Myanmar today, resilience is not a defensive posture; it is the only credible growth strategy.

SPRING REVOLUTION IN MYANMAR:

SONGS, SYMBOLS AND TATTOOS
OF RESISTANCE



by Nandita

SPRING REVOLUTION IN MYANMAR: SONGS, SYMBOLS AND TATTOOS OF RESISTANCE BY NANDITA HAKSAR

In her latest book, "Spring Revolution in Myanmar," Nandita Haksar captures the "sonic resistance" and visual symbols driving the fight for democracy.

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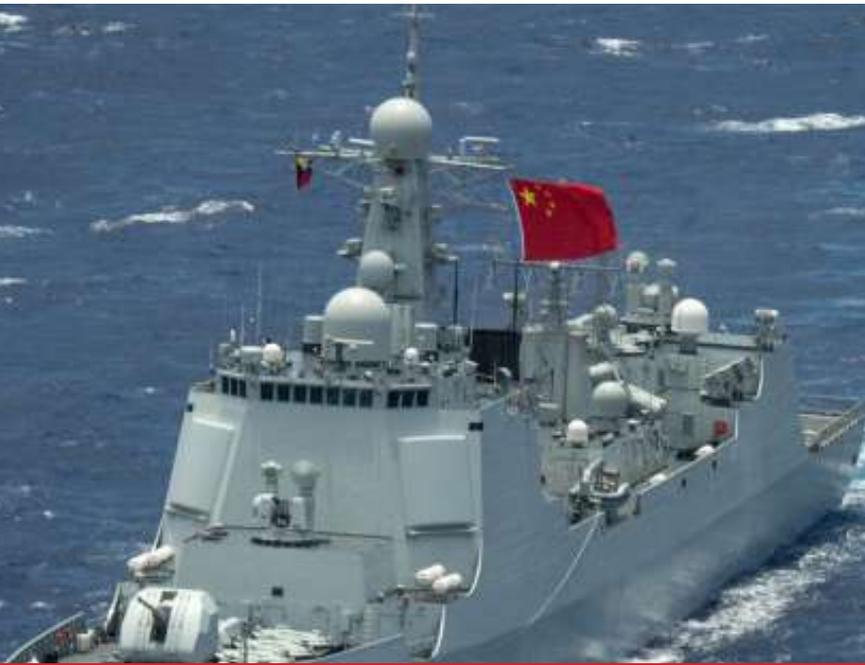
Historic Unity: For the first time, Bamar and ethnic minority armed groups are united against the junta.

Gen Z Leadership: A tech-savvy generation is using social media and crowdfunding to sustain a revolution from within.

Personal Sacrifice: Features the moving story of activist Aung Nay Myo and his journey through prison and exile.

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Chinese naval vessel near Taiwan.
Photo: AFP

CHINA'S ELECTROMAGNETIC KILL ZONE: THE PARTY-STATE'S CALCULATED GAMBLE IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

SUN LEE

China's transformation of the South China Sea into an electromagnetic battlespace represents one of the most assertive and troubling steps in its long campaign to dominate the Indo-Pacific. What began as a series of artificial island constructions has now evolved into a sophisticated electronic warfare hub, designed not merely to monitor but to actively contest and neutralize U.S. and allied military power. This development is not accidental or reactive; it is the product of deliberate planning by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the central brain of the state, which has long sought to fuse military modernization with geopolitical ambition. The result is a "kill zone" that tilts the strategic balance in China's favour while undermining the stability of one of the world's most contested waterways.

Satellite imagery and independent reports confirm that China has quietly expanded its electronic warfare infrastructure across Fiery Cross, Mischief, and Subi reefs. These installations include monopole antennas, mobile jamming vehicles, radomes, and fortified emplacements, all designed to give the People's Liberation Army (PLA) control over the electromagnetic spectrum. Such capabilities allow China to jam

communications, disrupt radar, and geolocate foreign forces, effectively blinding adversaries in contested waters. The CCP's decision to invest heavily in these systems between 2023 and 2025 reflects a calculated strategy: to deny the United States its traditional advantage in networked warfare and to create conditions where U.S. carrier strike groups could be rendered ineffective.

Critically, this is not just about military hardware. It is about the CCP's vision of power projection. The Party has long understood that dominance in the electromagnetic domain is as decisive as control of the seas themselves. By fusing artificial island bases with mobile jammers and shipborne kill webs, China has created a layered defence that can paralyze U.S. reconnaissance and targeting systems. This is a direct challenge to the nervous system of modern U.S. military operations, which depend on satellites, sensors, and seamless connectivity. The CCP's assertiveness here is not defensive - it is offensive, designed to reshape the rules of engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

The Communist Party's fingerprints are everywhere in this strategy. As the architect of China's military modernization, the CCP has ensured that the PLA's

advances in electronic warfare are integrated into its broader counter-intervention doctrine. This doctrine seeks to prevent U.S. forces from operating freely in the region, thereby securing China's ability to coerce neighbours and enforce its expansive territorial claims. The Party's obsession with control both domestically and internationally manifests in its determination to dominate the electromagnetic spectrum. Just as the CCP censors information at home, it now seeks to censor and disrupt the flow of information in contested waters, extending its authoritarian logic into the realm of military conflict.

Reports from the South China Morning Post and other outlets illustrate how China's electronic warfare blueprint is tailored to cripple U.S. naval assets. By targeting phased-array radars, disrupting fleetwide coordination, and exploiting vulnerabilities in cooperative engagement networks, China aims to blind carrier strike groups and dismantle their integrated defences. This is not a defensive posture; it is a preemptive strike capability, designed to neutralize U.S. power projection before it can be brought to bear. The CCP's willingness to pursue such aggressive measures underscores its broader ambition: to rewrite the balance of power in Asia by undermining U.S. credibility as a security guarantor.

The Party's assertiveness extends beyond tactical considerations. At the strategic level, China's electronic warfare infrastructure supports its sea-based nuclear arsenal, shielding ballistic missile submarines from detection. By creating a dense reconnaissance and defensive network, the CCP ensures that its nuclear deterrent remains hidden and survivable. This is a profound shift in the regional security environment, as it allows China to maintain continuous deterrence patrols while complicating U.S. and allied monitoring efforts. The CCP's pursuit of a submarine bastion in the South China Sea is emblematic of its long-term vision: to secure absolute military advantage while eroding the strategic options of its rivals.

Yet the CCP's assertiveness is not without risk. The reported downing of U.S. aircraft in the South China Sea, possibly linked to Chinese electronic warfare interference, highlights the dangers of escalation. While evidence remains circumstantial, the incidents underscore how easily electronic warfare can blur the line between deterrence and provocation. The CCP's willingness to deploy such capabilities in contested waters raises the specter of accidental conflict, where miscalculation could spiral into confrontation. This is

the peril of the Party's strategy: by seeking dominance, it invites instability.

Critically, the CCP's approach reflects its broader governance style. The Party thrives on secrecy, control, and coercion, whether in domestic politics or international strategy. Its expansion of electronic warfare infrastructure was carried out quietly, without transparency, and in defiance of international norms. Just as the CCP suppresses dissent at home, it disregards the sovereignty of neighbouring states in the South China Sea. The Party's role as the "brain" of the government ensures that military assertiveness is inseparable from political authoritarianism. In this sense, China's electromagnetic kill zone is not merely a military development - it is a political statement, a projection of the CCP's authoritarian ethos onto the global stage.

The United States and its allies face a sobering reality. Decades of operating in a permissive spectrum have left U.S. forces ill-prepared for the kind of electronic warfare environment the CCP has engineered. As Lieutenant General John Caine has noted, the U.S. has "lost muscle memory" in this domain, while China has surged ahead. The CCP's assertiveness has exposed gaps in U.S. readiness, training, and investment, forcing Washington to confront the uncomfortable truth that its technological edge is no longer assured. The challenge now is not merely to catch up but to adapt to a battlespace where the CCP has already set the rules.

China's creation of an electromagnetic kill zone in the South China Sea is a stark reminder of the CCP's ambition and assertiveness. It is a calculated gamble by a Party that sees military dominance as inseparable from political control. By reshaping the electromagnetic spectrum, the CCP has extended its authoritarian logic into the realm of warfare, challenging U.S. power projection and destabilizing the Indo-Pacific. The world must recognize that this is not just a military development but a political project, driven by a Party determined to impose its will both at home and abroad. The stakes are high, and the risks of miscalculation are real. The CCP's gamble may secure short-term advantage, but it also sets the stage for long-term instability in one of the world's most vital regions.

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



CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION

"Protecting the children's rights it to educate them, not to give them weapons!"

Ei is a former member of the People's Defense Force (PDF) who initially participated in the armed resistance but later shifted her focus toward education and humanitarian work, particularly concerning child soldiers and youth affected by conflict.

Ei joined the PDF at the age of 28. While the official age requirement ranged from 18 to 35, the reality of war brought many underage participants. Some joined voluntarily out of patriotism, others were pressured, and many simply had no alternatives due to the violence in their communities. During her four months of PDF training, Ei witnessed both bravery and abuse. She recounted cases of sexual harassment from trainers and the execution of fellow fighters over minor financial disputes. These experiences led her to conclude that revolution must be rooted in education and ethics rather than weapons. "We have different skills for education, for healthcare, for the citizens," she says. "My mastery is not in my arms, it is in my brain."

After leaving the training camp, Ei relocated to a Karen village, where she lived for more than three years. Initially met with suspicion due to her Bamar background, she eventually earned the trust of the local community by helping teachers and launching nutrition and agricultural

programs. She planted vegetables and raised pigs and goats to support food security. To encourage participation, she organized school competitions and gave vegetable seeds as prizes, which inspired villagers to start their own gardens. Her work demonstrated that sustainable education and agriculture could exist even in war-torn areas, and she became a bridge of trust between Bamar and Karen communities.

Life in the village was marked by hardship. The community had little to no internet access, making communication difficult. Airstrikes and artillery attacks were constant threats, and schools and religious buildings were often targeted by the military. Despite these risks, Ei helped build two schools and a library, promising that if they were destroyed, she would rebuild them again. Her conviction was that education had to continue regardless of war.

From these experiences, Ei founded the A Lin Eain Shelter in Mae Sot, Thailand. The shelter provides refuge for children under 18 who have been involved with armed groups or otherwise affected by conflict. It accepts children from all sides—including those associated with the State Administration Council (SAC) military, the PDF, and various ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). At the shelter, children receive formal education, vocational training, trauma counseling, and emotional support. Courses include hospitality, phone repair, and mechanical skills, with the goal of preparing the youth for community reintegration. Ei stresses that the shelter is not a permanent institution but a temporary, rehabilitative space designed to help children rebuild their lives.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/12/4/episode-443-children-of-the-revolution>



International observers arrive in Naypyidaw.
Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S JUNTA THANKS INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS FOR THEIR 'IMPARTIALITY'

International delegations from Russia, China, India, Vietnam and several other countries arrived in Myanmar in the week leading up to the first phase of the country's general elections on 28 December, according to reports in the junta-run *Global New Light of Myanmar*.

Observer missions began arriving in Yangon and Naypyidaw on 27–28 December, where they were formally received by members of the junta's Union Election Commission (UEC) and regional authorities.

Delegations reported in the junta-controlled press included senior representatives of election commissions and government agencies from Russia, China, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Cambodia, Vietnam, India and Nicaragua.

Ahead of the polls, the UEC convened a detailed briefing in Naypyidaw outlining electoral procedures, the junta's phased voting schedule, and the operation of the Myanmar Electronic Voting Machine (MEVM).

In a speech to the delegates, UEC Chairman U Than Soe took the opportunity to make clear that the participation of foreign observers demonstrated international backing for the authorities' stated commitment to hold an election that was "free, fair, transparent and credible."

Human rights groups, political analysts, and the Myanmar ethnic and political opposition have repeatedly stated that enhanced legitimacy for the military junta through international recognition is the chief aim of what they have termed "sham elections."

Observers reportedly visited stations across the Naypyidaw Council Area on polling day, where they met voters and polling staff and viewed the casting of ballots using the MEVM. The *Global New Light of Myanmar* reported that observers noted what the paper described as "free" voting and compliance with "international standards and best practices."

A total of 162 international observers were accredited for Phase I of the election, which, according to junta figures, covered 102 townships and involved more than 24 million eligible voters and 4,863 candidates from 57 political parties.

An honorary dinner for the observer delegations was hosted by the UEC on 28 December following the closing of the Phase I polling. Chairman U Than Soe expressed gratitude to the observers for their impartial monitoring of the process.

Phase II of the general election is scheduled for 11 January, followed by a planned Phase III on 25 January, according to the UEC briefing.



CHINESE PROFESSOR SPARKS OUTRAGE BY CLAIMING AYEYARWADY RIVER 'FLOWS FROM CHINA'

Zhao Jin, an associate professor at the Department of Burmese Studies of Beijing Foreign Studies University in China, wrote on her social media page on 23 December that the freshwater source of the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River - which actually originates within Myanmar - flows from China.

In recent posts, Zhao Jin has criticized opponents of the Myitsone Dam project. In one of her posts, she said she was surprised when a resident of the Ayeyarwady region asked whether local farmers would receive compensation if the dam is constructed.

"What does the construction of the Myitsone hydroelectric project in Kachin state have to do with Ayeyarwady region? What will Ayeyarwady Region's farmers lose? Why should they be compensated? When I asked him, he replied me that 'the Ayeyarwady River is the only freshwater river of Ayeyarwady Region. There won't be any fresh water in the Ayeyarwady River if the dam is constructed. There will be salt in the water. We won't be able to cultivate our fields anymore,'" Zhao Jin said.

"I questioned him once again. The freshwater of the Ayeyarwady River flows from China, correct? You can't use it for free. You can only use it if you pay. If you don't pay, China could build a massive dam upstream and block all the water. Isn't that right? I have to answer stupid questions if people ask me stupid questions," she continued.

Following a wave of backlash from the Myanmar public regarding her post, it is no longer visible on her social media page.

Zhao Jin, who also uses the Myanmar name Daw Saw Kyi, is a Chinese teacher who teaches Burmese

language at Beijing Foreign Studies University. She frequently posts on Facebook about Myanmar-related topics.

She is also a member of a Chinese research group studying Myanmar, according to her social media profile.

The Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar, Ms. Ma Jia, also previously wrote in an article regarding the Ayeyarwady river that the river "originates from Southwestern China and flows through Myanmar from north to south for thousands of years." In June, that article was featured on the Chinese Embassy's social media page.

The Ayeyarwady River is formed by the confluence of the N'Mai and Mali rivers, roughly 28 miles north of Myitkyina in Kachin State. It is a river that only flows entirely within Myanmar. Both the N'Mai and Mali rivers originate from the Himalayan glaciers in northern Myanmar.

In the 2018 publication 'Discover Myanmar's Seven Natural Wonders' by the UNESCO Myanmar Project Office, it is stated: "Tributaries originating from the mountains of northern Myanmar flow southward and converge northeast of Myitkyina to form the Ayeyarwady River."

The river is over 1,300 miles long, flowing from Kachin State in the north down to the Ayeyarwady Delta.

According to ISP Myanmar's China Desk, the Myitsone project is part of a larger scheme, which includes seven dams to be developed by China on the confluence and tributaries of the Ayeyarwady river. The entire cascade of dams was designed to have a combined installed capacity of approximately 20,000 MW.

Originally launched in 2009 under the previous military regime, the Myitsone project was later suspended in 2011 during former President Thein Sein's administration due to widespread public opposition. At the moment, the military commission led by Min Aung Hlaing is working to revive the project.

While the Military Commission has threatened to take action against anyone who oppose the project, opposition to the Myitsone Dam project has persisted despite these threats.

Zhao Jin criticized those who oppose the project in one of her posts, saying, "It was not surprising that the grassroots people who live inside Myanmar and do not understand the progress and changes of the outside world are now opposing the Myitsone project. They have been fed medicine [brainwashed] for a long time."

Experts have pointed out that there is a serious risk of dam failure in the event of an earthquake because the Myitsone project is situated just 60 miles from the Sagaing Fault, Myanmar's major fault line.

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.