

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER CONTINUES  
HIS CORRUPT POLL CHARADE**

**ELECTION UPDATE**

# 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.



# MYANMAR AND A WORLD DISTRACTED

As Myanmar proceeds with the second phase of its three-stage general election this month, the event represents a tectonic moment not just for the country but for anyone who still believes in the principles of democracy. These elections, the first since the military seized power in a February 2021 coup, have been widely denounced by observers and rights groups as a sham designed to legitimize junta rule rather than reflect the will of the people. Many areas of the country under active conflict or controlled by resistance forces are excluded from voting, the main pro-democracy party has been dissolved, key leaders like Aung San Suu Kyi remain imprisoned, and the military's proxy, the Union Solidarity and Development Party, dominates the ballot. Most Western governments have refused to send election observers, calling the process neither free nor fair, and international human rights organizations urge rejection of any results that flow from an election held under such conditions.

Yet even as this tightly managed political theatre unfolds in Myanmar, much of the mainstream global media environment is consumed by a rolling series of other headline-grabbing crises and spectacles. Massive protests in Iran, an ongoing power transition in Venezuela, high-profile controversies involving the US president, an enduring war in Ukraine, and angry farmers blocking capitals across Europe all command attention around the world.

In a media ecosystem structured around immediate resonance and audience engagement, these stories - each with their own dramatic visuals, clear protagonists, and real-world disruptions - are easier to package for global consumption than the slow, complex erosion of democratic norms in a country many outside South East Asia may feel distant from or unfamiliar with.

The result is that Myanmar's election, and the deeper questions it raises about authoritarianism and legitimacy in international relations, struggles to break

through sustained coverage despite its profound implications.

This distracted attention matters not just as a matter of news cycles, but as a political and moral issue. When the world is focused elsewhere, the narratives that emerge about Myanmar are often shaped less by critical scrutiny than by the junta's own carefully crafted messaging. State media and pro-regime voices in and around Myanmar portray the election as a return to normalcy and a step toward reconciliation after years of turmoil, while external critics who challenge that framing find their voices drowned out by louder, flashier stories that are easier to sell to global audiences. China's public endorsement of the elections and its portrayal of them as stable and orderly underscores how external powers can exploit this attention vacuum to normalize outcomes that might otherwise be delegitimized.

There's a broader question here about how international attention is allocated in an age of incessant news churn. Crises that fit into familiar narratives - escalation, conflict, leadership drama - will capture headlines. Systemic democratic backsliding, especially in contexts where access is limited and risk is high for independent journalism, often does not.

Yet what is happening in Myanmar is not a peripheral issue - it is a test of whether electoral processes have any meaning when wielded as tools of consolidation rather than real public representation. If the world's gaze continually shifts to the next urgent flashpoint, there is a danger that the slow, grinding work of defending democratic principles in places like Myanmar will be conceded by default to authoritarian designs.

## EDITORIAL

### mizzima WEEKLY

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

**Managing Editor**  
Thaw Zin Tun

**Network Engineer**  
Wai Min Han

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

**General Manager**  
No No Lin

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

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

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

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

# CONTENTS **mizzima** WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight

## 3 EDITORIAL

**6 Myanmar Junta Leader Continues His Corrupt Poll Charade**

**8 ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR**  
Analysis & Insight

## 12 ELECTION UPDATE

Empty polling stations in Yangon force military to use coercion and loudspeakers

**13 Myanmar resistance attacks on administration office targets force polling closures, disrupt elections across Bago region**

**14 Heavy military presence and low turnout mark second phase of Myanmar elections in Karen State**

**15 Myanmar junta holds second phase of polls one day before ICJ Rohingya Genocide Hearings**

**16 Junta minister reports over 300 arrests under Myanmar's repressive election protection law**

**17 Myanmar junta's Union Election Commission details Amyotha Hluttaw candidate lists for Phase I in Chin and Rakhine States**

**18 People's Party to appeal one-year sentence of candidate who used terms 'uprising' and 'revolution'**

**19 The first round of the military junta election: shortcomings, discrepancies, and controversies**

## 22 CORE DEVELOPMENTS

Arakan Army advances on Kyaukphyu town, seizes strategic supply routes



- 23** AA seizes key outposts near Sittwe as battle for Rakhine capital intensifies
- 24** ARSA detains Maungdaw residents and guides near Myanmar-Bangladesh border
- 25** HRW calling for justice for Rohingya as ICJ hearings on the Myanmar genocide case due to begin next week
- 27** Heavy clashes erupt along old Yangon-Mandalay highway as 'Operation Aung Myin' targets election zones
- 28** Katongpaw village fire destroys at least 60 homes in Myanmar's Mudon Township
- 29** One dead, monks wounded as Myanmar junta launches relentless aerial campaign across Gangaw District
- 30** Infant and three women killed as Myanmar junta drops 300-pound bombs on non-conflict villages in Wetlet Township
- 31** Myanmar junta airstrike on Khin-U IDP camp kills three civilians and injures ten
- 32** Teen girl killed and multiple people injured in nighttime airstrike on Myaing Township village
- 33** NUG vows to block revived Myitsone Dam, warning project sacrifices Myanmar's "lifeblood" to China
- 34** NUG welcomes ICJ hearings, says junta has no legitimacy to represent Myanmar

- 35** UN warns Myanmar humanitarian crisis will worsen in 2026 as needs surge
- 36** Facebook takes down 1,000+ Mytel accounts linked to Myanmar military, says JFM
- 37** **US-MYANMAR AFFAIRS**  
Abandoned in Plain Sight - A look at how U.S. policy failed Burmese families, leaving thousands unprotected
- 41** **ASIAN & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**  
'Sever the chain': scam tycoons in China's crosshairs
- 43** Trump says Iran killings stopped, Tehran says 'no plan for hanging'
- 45** **COLUMNS**  
**INSIGHT MYANMAR** – ASEAN in the Balance
- 46** **JUNTA WATCH**
- 47** **SOCIAL WATCH**

Cover photo of Myanmar junta leader  
Min Aung Hlaing by AFP





Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing oversees his polling handiwork. Photo: AFP

# MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER CONTINUES HIS CORRUPT POLL CHARADE

**M**yanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, visited polling stations across Yangon on Sunday 11 January to monitor the second phase of the military junta's general election.

Accompanied by top military officials, the Senior General inspected downtown areas and the townships of Hlaing, Insein, and Latha. State media reported that officials were using computer systems to verify voter lists as the General "provided encouragement" to polling staff and the few citizens present.

This second phase of the three-part election covered 100 townships nationwide, including 16 in the Yangon Region.

Polls opened at 6:00 am in areas such as Bahan, North Dagon, South Okkalapa, and Kawhmu - the former constituency of detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Despite the junta's efforts to project a sense of civic duty, residents and democracy watchdogs described the atmosphere as "numb" and "rigged." In Yangon, some voters told journalists they were voting to "fulfill their civic duty" in hopes of eventual peace, while many others expressed little interest, noting that the results were likely predetermined.

Major General Zaw Min Tun, spokesperson for the National Security and Defense Council, told reporters that the regime plans to convene a new parliament in March, with a new government set to take office in April. This timeline follows the first phase of voting on 28 December, 2025, where the military-proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) claimed nearly 90 percent of the seats in the Pyithu Hluttaw amidst a 52 percent turnout, a figure independent monitors say was inflated by coercion.

The international community, including the UN and most Western nations, has categorized the election as a "sham exercise" designed to formalize military rule. While the junta holds polls in urban enclaves like Yangon, it continues to carry out intense airstrikes in "liberated areas" of Rakhine, Chin, and Bago, where fighting has rendered voting impossible in 65 townships.

A final third phase is scheduled for 25 January, 2026, covering the remaining 63 townships.



An election worker speaking to voters at a polling station in Yangon. Photo: AFP

## ANALYSIS &amp; INSIGHT



## NEW YEAR MESSAGES FROM NUG, RESISTANCE GROUPS AND EROS.

Leaders of Myanmar's resistance movement used New Year messages for 2026 to emphasize unity, coordinated command structures, and renewed military objectives, while acknowledging ongoing challenges faced in the armed struggle against the military junta.

In his New Year address, National Unity Government (NUG) Prime Minister Mann Win Khaing Than stressed the importance of unifying all Spring Revolution forces under a single central command, particularly in the military sector. He said such coordination would significantly strengthen the resistance's ability to uproot what he described as a terrorist military group.

The prime minister also said the NUG is working to form a leading body to guide the revolution. Beyond military coordination, he highlighted the need for political unity, calling for an inclusive conference involving all key revolutionary leaders. According to him, forming a leadership structure that meets public expectations would allow military and political forces to operate together more effectively and accelerate progress toward shared goals with public confidence.



Meanwhile, Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) Chairperson General N'Ban La delivered a New Year address to the Kachin people, focusing on the growing importance of military alliances among resistance forces. He warned against the junta's aggressive efforts to push forward its election plan, supported by its proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

General N'Ban La urged people to remain vigilant, stating that votes cast under the junta's election could shape the fate of many communities. He accused the military regime of attempting to divide revolutionary forces and ethnic groups out of fear of a unified resistance. According to him, the junta has been forming and arming Border Guard Forces (BGFs) and Pyithu Sit militias in an effort to weaken revolutionary unity. He also warned of attempts by the junta to incite conflict between Kachin and Shan communities, who have lived together peacefully in Kachin State for generations. "They have never been enemies," he said, adding that seeing clashes emerge due to junta manipulation was deeply distressing.

In Chin State, the Chin Brotherhood issued a rare public apology in its New Year message, acknowledging its failure to seize Tedim town in 2025 as previously promised. Salai Htan Chun Phae, chairperson of the Chin Brotherhood's military committee, delivered the message during a New Year ceremony on January 3. "We said we would seize and control all areas of Tedim in 2025. However, we have not captured Tedim, and we apologize to everyone," he said. He pledged that efforts to take the town would continue throughout 2026.

Salai Htan Chun Phae noted that capturing and holding a town requires significant sacrifice, including the loss of lives and substantial resources. He said Chin resistance forces face severe shortages of weapons, training, and finances due to the junta's blockade and supply cuts. Despite these challenges, he said the Chin Brotherhood remains committed to continuing the fight to seize Tedim.

The New Year messages collectively underscore both the determination and the difficulties facing Myanmar's resistance movement as it enters 2026,

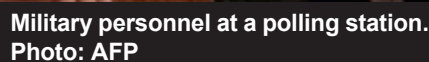


## Next stages for the Myanmar junta election

The phase two vote took place in 12 regions and states, using the Myanmar Electronic Voting Machine (MEVM), a system introduced by the junta to replace paper ballots. During voting, machines at several polling stations reportedly malfunctioned, forcing election officials to replace them in order to continue the process. A source close to the Union Election Commission told Mandalay Free Press that the technical problems were real. "It's true. Today, voting machines had errors and many had to be changed," the source said.

Another source close to the election committee analyzed that the errors were likely caused by a lack of technical skills among operators managing the control units of the voting machines, combined with voters rushing through the process.

The election unfolded amid widespread insecurity. Of the 12 regions and states where voting was conducted, all experienced junta airstrikes except the Yangon Region. Fighting and aerial attacks were reported most frequently in Bago, Sagaing, Magway, and Tanintharyi regions, where resistance forces have remained active. These security incidents reportedly disrupted voting in several townships and constituencies.





Despite the conflict, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing visited multiple polling stations across Yangon on election day. The spokesperson of the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC), who accompanied the visits, told media that the junta would proceed according to its previously announced political timetable. "Parliament will be convened in March. Then the parliament will operate. The new government will take office in April. It is the same timetable as before," the spokesperson said.

Addressing concerns over advance voting and transparency, the spokesperson claimed the election commission was operating openly. He acknowledged the possibility of errors but said corrective action would be taken if necessary. He also stated that all political parties had been invited to observe the advance vote-counting process.

## How the junta is clamping down on people who protest against the election

As Myanmar's military junta concentrates on staging its planned election, it has adopted a zero-tolerance approach toward any form of criticism, increasingly relying on a newly enforced election protection law to suppress dissent. The junta enacted the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Election from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction in late July 2025. Since then, authorities have used this law as the primary legal tool against election critics, rather than relying on existing criminal or security legislation.

According to the junta-controlled press, the Ministry of Home Affairs has taken action against 335 civilians, including 60 women, under the election protection law as of January 5. This marks a sharp rise in arrests: by December 15, the number of those charged under the law stood at 229, meaning more than 100 additional people were arrested within less than three weeks.

Crackdowns intensified around the second phase of the election. On election day, a youth protester was arrested in front of Yangon City Hall after staging a solo protest against the vote. The 21-year-old, identified as Min Htet, held a banner reading "Reject the illegal election" in the morning hours.

A local resident told People's Spring that the protester deliberately sat on a chair to carry out an individual strike. "He was alone. Shortly after he began the protest, police arrived and took him to Kyauktada police station," the source said. The Rangoon Scout Network reported that at least seven civilians were arrested across the Yangon Region between December 23 and 27 in connection with election-related expressions or activities.

Similar incidents were reported outside Yangon. In Kyoneka village, Paung Township, Mon State, a man was arrested on election day after allegedly shouting calls not to vote while intoxicated. He has been charged under Article 24(a) of the election protection law, which carries a maximum sentence of seven years in prison.

Meanwhile, repression has also extended to political candidates participating in the junta-organized election. On January 8, a candidate from the People's Party, led by prominent 88 Generation figure Ko Ko Gyi, was sentenced to one year in prison for using the terms "uprising" and "revolution" during his campaign speeches.

The candidate was convicted under Article 58(c) of the Union Election Commission Law, which allows for a penalty of up to one year in prison, a fine of 100,000 kyats, or both. The court imposed the maximum prison sentence. He was arrested on December 17, 2025, and the verdict was delivered in just over 20 days. Wunna Soe, a member of the party's legal affairs team, told Mizzima that the party would comply with the court's decision and proceed with serving the sentence.

# EMPTY POLLING STATIONS IN YANGON FORCE MILITARY TO USE COERCION AND LOUDSPEAKERS

A stark lack of public participation marked the second phase of the military-led elections in Yangon on Sunday, as authorities resorted to patrolling streets with loudspeakers and conducting door-to-door pressure campaigns to drive up turnout.

From the early morning hours, residents in townships including Kawhmu, Kungyangon, Kyimyindaung, North Dagon, Dawbon, and Pazundaung reported a barrage of announcements from motorcycles, sidecars, and trucks. Officials repeatedly broadcasted orders for everyone on the voter list to report to polling stations by noon.

"They are shouting through microphones on the streets, calling everyone on the voter list to come to the polling station without fail," a resident of Kungyangon Township told Mizzima, noting that officials also distributed pro-election leaflets door-to-door two days prior to instill fear.

In downtown areas like Pabedan, Latha, and Bahan, Mizzima found that voter turnout was nearly nonexistent by 11:00 am. In Pazundaung, one resident noted the defiance of the local community: "The polling station is right under our house, but no one went. I didn't vote either. Even the elderly don't want to participate."

To create an illusion of success for military leader Min Aung Hlaing's visits to Insein and Hlaing townships this morning, sources suggest that crowds were likely staged.

"Since Min Aung Hlaing is there, I think they must have ordered their own people to wear masks to make it look like the polling station is crowded," an official from the Rangoon Scout Network (RSN) said.

The RSN further noted that turnout in this second phase has significantly declined compared to the first. Beyond the loudspeakers, more sinister tactics were reported, including threats to withhold "guest list" registrations essential for legal residency if citizens failed to cast a ballot.

Security remained suffocating throughout the city, with internet outages reported near polling stations and "Faw" trucks patrolling downtown. The RSN confirmed that at least 25 young civilians were arrested between late December and early January for expressing opposition to the election process.





## MYANMAR RESISTANCE ATTACKS ON ADMINISTRATION OFFICE TARGETS FORCE POLLING CLOSURES, DISRUPT ELECTIONS ACROSS BAGO REGION

The second phase of the Myanmar military-led elections faced severe disruptions in Bago Region on 11 January, 2026, as targeted attacks on administrative sites resulted in casualties and the suspension of voting.

In Htantabin Township, located in Taungoo District, polling station was ordered closed on Sunday morning following a fatal drone strike on the Township General Administration office.

U Htay Win, Chairman of the Taungoo District Election Commission, confirmed that a drone-dropped bomb exploded within the office compound, killing one government official and injuring a member of the local election commission.

Although polling stations were situated in separate buildings, the administration office had been designated as the central hub for consolidating and counting ballots.

A local witness said, "The drone came from the direction of Karenni Kone village and dropped bombs, scattering the crowd."

The drone originated from the direction of Karenni Kone village, a contested area approximately five miles away where military and resistance forces frequently clash. It remains uncertain whether the votes cast prior to the closure will be validated.

Meanwhile, in Western Bago's Minhla Township, a separate explosion occurred around 4:30 am near a polling station located at a Chinese school on Lanmataw Road. The Minhla People's Defense Force (PDF) claimed responsibility for the attack, which took place shortly before polls were set to open.

"Despite the blast and the presence of approximately 300 security personnel patrolling the town, voting reportedly continued under an atmosphere of coercion. The authorities had previously threatened locals with three-year prison sentences and 300,000-kyat fines for failing to participate," Minhla resident said.

These attacks mark a significant disruption to the Military Commission's efforts to conduct phased elections. While the junta has deployed heavy security in urban centres like Yangon, resistance forces in the Bago Region have intensified their operations against administrative targets linked to the electoral process.

Also, these incidents highlight the significant volatility surrounding the 12 townships in Bago Region participating in this second phase. While conflict disrupted these areas, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) secured automatic victories in several other townships including Minkin, Wuntho, Mawlaik, Ye-U, Yebu, and Gangaw where their candidates ran entirely unopposed.

# HEAVY MILITARY PRESENCE AND LOW TURNOUT MARK SECOND PHASE OF MYANMAR ELECTIONS IN KAREN STATE

Security was significantly tightened in Hpapun and Hlaingbwe townships as the Military Commission's second phase of elections proceeded amid widespread public indifference and territorial losses to resistance forces.

In Hlaingbwe Township, which includes the towns of Hlaingbwe, Paingkyon, and Shan Ywa Thit, voting was restricted to limited urban areas and nearby villages. Shan Ywa Thit remains under the full control of the Karen National Union (KNU), rendering the election commission powerless to operate there. To secure the remaining stations, joint forces from the junta army, the Karen National Army (KNA/BGF), and Pyu Saw Htee militias established a heavy armed presence.

A young resident of Hlaingbwe said, "The unusual thing is how tight security is. Soldiers are stationed at polling stations. There are far fewer voters than in previous elections. They are still driving around urging people to vote because they are worried people won't turn up."

While 48 polling stations were originally planned for Hlaingbwe and Paingkyon, local sources indicate that voting was abandoned in at least 10 village tracts due to volatile security conditions.

Residents in Paingkyon report that the sight of fully armed soldiers has intimidated the public rather than encouraged participation.

"People are almost completely uninterested. Only one or two voters come at a time," said a resident of Paingkyon. "The heavy presence of fully armed soldiers makes people afraid, so they avoid the polling stations. Some are even afraid to sleep in their own homes."

The situation is even more precarious in Hpapun Township. Since the KNU seized control of Hpapun town in early 2024, the military has been forced to relocate election activities.

U Tun Lwin, Chair of the Hpapun District Election Commission, confirmed that voting was confined to only four wards in Kamaung town and two village tracts, totaling just 10 polling stations.

"Elections cannot be held in Hpapun, so they are being conducted in Kamaung instead," a Kamaung resident noted. "There are very few voters. Even today, vehicles are still going around calling on people to come and vote."

Despite the use of loudspeakers and mobile patrols to pressure residents into casting ballots, reports from across Kayin State indicate that voter turnout remained at an all-time low.





Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA HOLDS SECOND PHASE OF POLLS ONE DAY BEFORE ICJ ROHINGYA GENOCIDE HEARINGS

The Myanmar military junta is forging ahead with the second phase of its sham election today, 11 January, in a move widely viewed as a calculated attempt to manufacture political legitimacy just 24 hours before facing the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague.

The "Phase 2" polling, conducted under intense security and reported coercion, coincides with the upcoming Merits Hearings of the Muslim Rohingya genocide case at the ICJ, scheduled to begin tomorrow, January 12.

Earlier this morning, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was seen visiting polling stations in Hlaing Township, Yangon. The military leader has previously asserted that a voter turnout of over 50 percent would constitute a valid public mandate. Following Phase 1 of the polls, junta spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun claimed a 52 percent success rate, though the regime has consistently failed to provide granular, township-level data to back these figures.

An investigation by Mizzima into the Phase 1 results reveals a pattern of data manipulation and discrepancies that undermine the regime's claims of a "free and fair" process.

In Tiddim Township, Chin State, Mizzima uncovered a glaring statistical impossibility where 4,235 "valid

votes" were recorded despite only 3,980 voters being registered - an excess of 255 votes.

In the military stronghold of Zeyarthiri, Naypyidaw, the regime reported a 78.20 per cent turnout. However, local sources confirm this was achieved through the systematic intimidation and forced participation of civil servants and military families.

The Union Election Commission (UEC) has refused to release the "Eligible Voter Lists" required to calculate turnout percentages. Furthermore, the UEC's official website remained non-functional as of January 10, preventing independent verification.

Analysts suggest the timing of Phase 2 is a strategic maneuver. By establishing a "newly elected" administrative facade, the military junta hopes to argue at the ICJ that it represents a legitimate state authority.

However, Mizzima's cross-verification of data from all 102 townships in Phase 1 confirms that the UEC (Central) maintains a tight grip on information to mask widespread irregularities.

Over a three-week period, the ICJ will hear arguments based on the indictment that The Gambia submitted to the court in 2019. The allegations state that Myanmar's treatment of the Muslim Rohingya minority in Myanmar violates its obligations under the 1948 Genocide Convention.

# JUNTA MINISTER REPORTS OVER 300 ARRESTS UNDER MYANMAR'S REPRESSIVE ELECTION PROTECTION LAW

In an announcement on 6 January 2026, Lieutenant General Tun Tun Naung, the military junta's Minister of Home Affairs, revealed that 335 individuals have been arrested nationwide under the controversial Election Protection Law.

According to reports in military-controlled media on 7 January, the detainees include 60 women and several minors, all of whom face charges in 240 separate cases for allegedly "obstructing" the ongoing multi-phase general election. This figure marks a sharp escalation in the regime's crackdown, with over 100 new arrests occurring in just the 20 days since 15 December, as authorities intensify their efforts to suppress any opposition to the polls.

Lt. Gen. Tun Tun Naung, who also serves as the Chair of the Central Committee for Election Period Security, stated that investigations will continue into those involved in "incitement and propaganda" deemed a threat to election security. The enforcement of the law – formally titled the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction – has been particularly severe in the cultural sector.

Several prominent film directors and artists, including Mike Tee, Aung Yay Chan, and Zabu Htun Thet Lwin, were reportedly detained and sentenced for social media activities, such as liking or sharing posts critical of the junta's election propaganda films.

The Election Protection Law, enacted in late July 2025, carries draconian penalties ranging from three years in prison to the death penalty for acts that result in fatalities.

Human rights organizations, including Fortify Rights, have condemned the legislation as a tool of state repression used to silence dissent and legitimize a "sham" electoral process.

Observers argue that by criminalizing peaceful criticism and even minor social media interactions, the junta is effectively disenfranchising the population and ensuring an environment of fear during the second phase of voting scheduled for 11 January.

# MYANMAR JUNTA'S UNION ELECTION COMMISSION DETAILS AMYOTHA HLUTTAW CANDIDATE LISTS FOR PHASE I IN CHIN AND RAKHINE STATES

The Union Election Commission (UEC) has officially released the candidate lists for the Amyotha Hluttaw (House of Nationalities) during Phase I of the 2025 Multiparty Democratic General Election.

Voting for this initial phase took place on 28 December 2025, in designated townships where the military maintains significant control. The election utilized a dual system involving First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) for specific constituencies and Proportional Representation (PR) for broader state-level representation.

In Chin State, the contest was primarily concentrated in Tedim and Hakha townships. For Amyotha Hluttaw Constituency 1, the candidates included U Paung Lun Ming Thang of the Zomi National Party, U Lyan Za Khup of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), U Kai Khant Mang of the New Chin Land Congress, and U Arkar of the People's Pioneer Party (PPP). In Constituency 6, the race was a head-to-head between U Tha Lal Thang of the USDP and U Myo Thura Lin of the PPP. The USDP, Zomi National Party, PPP, and New Chin Land Congress also participated in the election for the PR Constituency 1 block of Chin State.

Rakhine State saw competition in three constituencies during this first phase. In Constituency 1, U Min Min Tun of the Arakan Front Party (AFP) competed against U Tin Nyo of the Rakhine Nationalities Party (RNP), Dr. Khin Soe of the USDP, and U Tin Htet Hlaing of the PPP. Constituency 2 featured U Mya Lin of the USDP, U Tin Tun of the AFP, and U Ba Shein of the RNP. For Constituency 3, a larger field emerged, including U Than Tun of the USDP, Dr. Aye Maung of the Rakhine Federation of Allies (RFA), U Aung Myat Thu of the Rakhine National Allies (RNA), U Swe Hsan Oo of the PPP, and Daw Nyo Mar Win of the Mro National Development Party.

Following the close of the first phase, preliminary results from military-controlled media indicate that the junta-backed USDP has taken a significant lead. Notably, prominent Rakhine nationalist leader Dr. Aye Maung confirmed that he lost his bid for the Amyotha Hluttaw seat in Sittwe to the USDP candidate.

While the UEC has begun announcing the names of elected representatives in the official Gazette, comprehensive final results for all national seats will not be confirmed until after the completion of Phase III in late January 2026.





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

## PEOPLE'S PARTY TO APPEAL ONE-YEAR SENTENCE OF CANDIDATE WHO USED TERMS "UPRISING" AND "REVOLUTION"

**T**he People's Party (PP) has announced its intention to appeal a one-year prison sentence with hard labour handed down to its member and former parliamentary candidate, U Lwin Myint.

The Thingangyun Township Court delivered the verdict on the morning of 8 January 2026, convicting the 68-year-old under Section 58(c) of the Pyithu Hluttaw Election Law for using "unlawful" language during his campaign.

The case stems from a TikTok campaign video posted by U Lwin Myint in November 2025, in which he identified himself as a third-generation political prisoner and utilized terms such as the "2021 Uprising" and "Revolution."

Following the post, military-aligned lobbyists pushed for legal action, characterizing his remarks as supportive of terrorism and a violation of campaign

regulations. The Ministry of Home Affairs officially filed the case on 17 December, and the court reached its decision in just over 20 days.

U Lwin Myint, who contested the Thingangyun Township seat for the Pyithu Hluttaw in the first phase of the military junta's general election on 28 December, lost the race to the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

U Wunna Soe, a member of the People's Party legal team, confirmed that the party is currently preparing the necessary documentation to challenge the sentence, which they view as a direct suppression of political expression.

စဉ်	မြို့နယ်	မဲဆန္ဒနယ်	မဲရပ်	ကြိုတင်မဲ	မဲရပ် + ကြိုတင်မဲ	နိုင်ရပ်	မဲဆန္ဒနယ်အဆင့်	မှတ်ချက်
၁	ပင်းတယ		၄၄,၁၆၆	၂,၉၅၆	၄၇,၁၂၂	၄၇,၁၂၂		
၂	ဟိုပုံး		၄၂,၁၁၆	၄,၃၁၄	၄၆,၄၃၀	၄၆,၄၃၀		
၃	နောင်ချို		၄၃,၂၁၈	၅,၄၁၄	၄၈,၆၃၂	၄၈,၆၃၂		
၄	ကျိုင်းတုံ	၁၁၃,၇၂၈	၄၃,၈၆၉	၉,၉၃၈	၅၃,၈၀၇	၅၃,၈၀၇	47.31 %	
၅	တာချီလိတ်		၅၅,၀၆၉	၄,၇၇၉	၅၉,၈၄၈	၅၉,၈၄၈		
၆	တောင်ကြီး		၁၇၁,၄၁၁	၁၂,၉၅၀	၁၈၄,၃၆၁	၁၈၄,၃၆၁		
၇	နန့်စန်	၈၇,၄၉၁	၃၇,၃၃၇	၅,၂၄၁	၄၂,၅၇၈	၄၂,၅၇၈	46.38 %	
၈	မုဆယ်		၂၂,၅၉၂	၂,၀၀၀	၂၄,၅၉၂	၂၄,၅၉၂		
၉	မိုင်းဆတ်	၅၀,၇၀၈	၃၃,၇၅၄	၄,၆၃၉	၃၈,၃၉၃	၃၈,၃၉၃	75.71 %	
၁၀	လားရှိုး	၁၀၉,၂၄၇	၂၉,၈၈၀	၅,၇၃၇	၃၅,၆၁၇	၃၅,၆၁၇	32.60 %	
၁၁	လင်းခေး		၁၅,၂၁၀	၃,၁၅၅	၁၈,၃၆၅	၁၈,၃၆၅		
၁၂	လွိုင်လင်		၃၂,၂၅၃	၃,၇၅၈	၃၆,၀၁၁	၃၆,၀၁၁		

## THE FIRST ROUND OF THE MILITARY JUNTA ELECTION: SHORTCOMINGS, DISCREPANCIES, AND CONTROVERSIES

INVESTIGATIONS CONDUCTED BY JU CHAN AND 001

While Myanmar's legal framework does not establish a minimum requirement for voter turnout, a participation rate above 50 percent is typically viewed by international standards as essential for an election to be representative.

During a Military Commission meeting on 12 August, 2025, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing stated that a turnout surpassing 50 percent would demonstrate that the majority will have been captured.

Subsequently, on 31 December, spokesperson Major General Zaw Min Tun declared the first phase of the election a success, reporting a voter turnout

of over 52 percent. However, Mizzima News reports that these official claims are contested by residents and candidates, as the authorities have not provided specific township-level data to verify the figures.

### Withholding of information and technical barriers

The voter registry, which is essential for calculating participation rates, remains shielded from the public; while the Union Election Commission's website features a section for these lists, the links remained broken as of 10 January.

A Mizzima investigation, which compared official data from the 102 townships in the first phase against local reports, revealed that the central commission exerts rigid authority over all election-related figures. Furthermore, various local commissions have refused to disclose data or have referred inquiries back to the central administration. In the majority of townships, actual participation appears notably low, and there are substantial inconsistencies within official statements.

## Voting conditions and characteristics by region

Nay Pyi Taw (the area with the strongest military control)

Average turnout: 66.54 percent

Highest: Zeyathiri Township (78.20 percent)

Lowest: Pyinmana Township (56.45 percent)

In Nay Pyi Taw, where military control is strongest, voters faced significant pressure and intimidation, and irregularities in the voter lists raised serious suspicions about the integrity of the electoral process.

## Mon State and Kayin State

In Mon State, the mean participation rate reached 38.96 percent, led by Chaung Sone Township with a peak turnout of 44.1 percent.

In Kayin State, participation rates showed a notable range, with Myawaddy seeing a 28.92 percent turnout while Hpa-an reached 34.39 percent. Meanwhile, the voter registry for Thandaunggyi remains undisclosed, as voting activities there were restricted entirely to military bases.

## Chin State and Karenni State

Chin State: The average voter turnout was 22.18 percent, with only 10.31 percent in Tedim Township. A glaring inconsistency was identified in Tedim, where the final ballot count of 4,235 valid votes actually surpassed the 3,980 registered voters by a margin of 255.

Karenni State: elections were held only in Bawlakhe and Loikaw, where voter turnout remained very low.

## Other Regions and States

Sagaing: records indicate a significant disparity in participation: Kalay saw the lowest turnout at 32.88 percent, while Shwebo reached the highest at 67.83 percent.

Yangon: Although the election was held in 12 townships, Ahlone had 30.63 percent, and the rest were estimated to have around 30 percent.

Shan State: participation statistics reflected the region's complex security landscape: Lashio recorded the lowest turnout at 32.6 percent, while Mong Hsat, an area with a significant military presence, saw the highest engagement at 75.7 percent.

Ayeyarwady: Myaung Mya had the highest turnout at 71.61 percent, and Hinthada had the lowest at 57.24 percent.

Rakhine State: Only 27.22 percent of voters voted in military-controlled Kyaukphyu. Locals said turnout was also very low in Sittwe and Man Aung.



In Kachin State, participation figures were recorded at 67.97 percent for Khaung Lan Phu and 43.19 percent for Putao. In Naungmoon Township, the USDP candidate secured an automatic victory as the sole representative, eliminating the need for a ballot count. Meanwhile, turnout data for Myitkyina, Mohnyin, and Tanai has not yet been released.

In Mandalay Region, voting occurred across eight townships; investigation by Mizzima confirmed that Pyawbwe reached the peak participation rate of 66.41 percent, whereas Chanayethazan recorded the lowest at 52.14 percent.

Magway Region: The election was held in nine townships, with Minbu having the highest turnout at 61.15 percent and Chauk having the lowest turnout at 45.14 percent. No voter lists were available for Pwint Phyu Township.

Bago Region: The election was held in eight townships, but the voter turnout was only calculated for Taungoo Township at 47.67 percent and Bago Township at 43.13 percent. The remaining townships were not released.

Tanintharyi Region: The election was held in Kawthaung, Dawei, Boke Pyin and Myeik, but the commission did not release data for the remaining townships, except for Myeik at 46.68 percent.

During the initial stage of the military commission's elections, significant voter participation was observed exclusively in Nay Pyi Taw and regions hosting military installations.

The election results are deeply disputed, characterized by a lack of transparency in data, significant mismatches between voter registries and ballot counts, and numerous contradictions identified through media inquiries.

Skepticism persists regarding the Military Commission's claimed 52 percent first-round turnout, particularly as the tally of valid ballots surpassed the total number of registered voters. In response to these irregularities, Mizzima launched an inquiry into the discrepancies and assessed the real-world conditions across 102 townships.



## ARAKAN ARMY ADVANCES ON KYAUKPHYU TOWN, SEIZES STRATEGIC SUPPLY ROUTES

Intense fighting between the Arakan Army (AA) and junta forces has escalated significantly in Kyaukphyu Township, with the AA reportedly gaining control of the critical road linking the town to the Dhanyawadi Naval Base.

Following the first phase of the junta's election on 28 December, 2025, the AA launched a multi-front offensive targeting the Thit Poke Taung village junction, Zin Chaung, and areas surrounding the Police Battalion 32 camp. Local military sources and CDM Captain Zin Yaw report that the junta has suffered "numerous casualties and arrests" at the Thit Poke Taung junction, a strategic chokepoint now held by the AA.

As of 8 January 2026, the AA's advance has brought several large columns close to the outskirts of Kyaukphyu town, home to billions of dollars in Chinese-funded infrastructure.

Residents report continuous artillery fire and airstrikes as the military attempts to push the AA

columns back, which are now firing shells into the vicinity of the Dhanyawadi Naval Headquarters. Despite the heavy combat, a junta Y-12 support aircraft was observed landing at Kyaukphyu Airport at 3 pm today to deliver supplies to the besieged garrison.

The offensive marks a major shift in the region. While the junta reinforced Kyaukphyu with hundreds of troops and conscripts via sea in late 2025, the AA has successfully blockaded land routes, isolating the naval base from the town's main infantry battalion camps.

With the capture of Gwa on 29 December 2024, and the recent consolidation of the Min Pyin area, the Arakan Army now controls 15 towns across Rakhine and Chin States. The group continues to press its advantage on several fronts, including Sittwe's Kankaw Island and along the borders of Bago and Magway Regions, as it seeks to fully liberate the Rakhine coastline.

## AA SEIZES KEY OUTPOSTS NEAR SITTWE AS BATTLE FOR RAKHINE CAPITAL INTENSIFIES

**M**ilitary sources have confirmed that the Arakan Army (AA) captured two strategic outposts near the Regional Operations Command in Sittwe, Rakhine State. According to Captain Zin Yaw, a CDMer, the military has concentrated high-level leadership in the city, including Western Command Commander Major General Kyaw Swar Oo and Lieutenant General Naing Naing Oo, who are reportedly moving locations constantly to avoid being targeted.

"AA and the Military Commission are facing off between Kan Kaw Kyun and War Bo Kyun on the other side. The Military Commission completely lost two outposts on Kan Kaw Kyun. Their troops fled, though we don't know yet about casualties or captures. We know that besides the ROC and Western Command, the Bureau of Special Operations (BSO) chief is also there. He hasn't retreated yet but is constantly moving locations," he said.

Captain Zin Yaw concluded that because the Military Commission forces in Yay Chan Pyin Village have been forced to retreat as far as the State Parliament office, the capture of Sittwe would be imminent if the AA can gain full control of the strategically vital Kan Kaw Kyun.

"If the AA can hold Kan Kaw Kyun, the military will have to flee, but there will be nowhere left to flee. Those in Sittwe know that if the AA captures Kan Kaw Kyun, the battle for Sittwe is effectively over," he said.

According to military sources, Kan Kaw Kyun, Nar Yi Kan Bridge, and Kyauk Tan Bridge on the outskirts of Sittwe are strategic landmarks. To defend these areas, the Military Commission has been fortifying its defenses around the Thet Kay Pyin Regional Operations Command in Sittwe since mid-2025.

However, a local military source stated that the AA has currently deployed enough forces to surround the Sittwe area.

"The AA's capture of the two outposts near the Regional Operations Command didn't just happen yesterday; it was known about two days ago. Both enemy bodies and wounded soldiers have been captured," the source told Mizzima.

The source added that close-quarters combat is occurring in the Sittwe battle zone, with small arms fire being exchanged.

Mizzima attempted to contact local residents in Sittwe, but communication remains cut off due to phone line outages.

Since the beginning of 2025, the Military Commission has repeatedly reinforced its troops and ammunition in Sittwe via naval vessels and has spent months preparing heavy defenses.

It is reported that the Military Commission has established high security at the airport and naval bases within Sittwe.

There are more than 10 naval ships in Sittwe, and at least 10 military units, including the ROC, Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) 20, 270, 232, and Infantry Battalions (IB) 344, 354, as well as Police Battalions 12 and 36.

The AA has already captured and controlled 15 towns, including the Western Command headquarters, in Rakhine State.

The AA is currently conducting simultaneous operations in Sittwe and Kyaukphyu, while maintaining offensives on three fronts along the border between Rakhine State and central Myanmar.





## ARSA DETAINS MAUNGDAW RESIDENTS AND GUIDES NEAR MYANMAR-BANGLADESH BORDER

**T**he Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) abducted six residents from Maungdaw and three local guides on 4 January 2026, while they were traveling toward the Rakhine–Bangladesh border for medical treatment. According to the Global Arakan Network (GAN), the group was intercepted near Border Post 42 on the Bangladesh side of the border.

While five of the detainees – the three Bangladeshi guides and two Maungdaw men – managed to escape or were released that same night, two women and a nine-year-old child remain in ARSA custody.

“There is only ARSA operating in this area. Five men, including three Bangladeshi guides, have been released, but it appears they are unable to secure the release of the remaining detainees. We are trying to

establish contact,” a source familiar with the incident told Mizzima on 6 January.

Released detainee Ko Yan Naung Soe reported that the men were subjected to beatings during their time in captivity. While the women and child were not physically harmed, ARSA members reportedly robbed the group of their gold and silver valuables.

The missing residents have been identified as Daw Thandar Soe, Daw Soe Soe Khaing, and her son, Maung Wai Yan Lin. This abduction occurs amid heightening tensions in northern Rakhine State, where ARSA continues to clash with the Arakan Army (AA) along the border following the AA's complete capture of Maungdaw in late 2025.



## **HRW CALLING FOR JUSTICE FOR ROHINGYA AS ICJ HEARINGS ON THE MYANMAR GENOCIDE CASE DUE TO BEGIN NEXT WEEK**

**O**n 8 January 2026, Human Rights Watch (HRW) along with the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, Global Justice Centre, Refugee Women for Peace and Justice, and the Women's Peace Network issued a statement highlighting the need for justice for ethnic Rohingya as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) prepares to hold hearings on the merits of the Myanmar genocide case on 12 January 2026.

The text of the press release continues below.

In August 2017, Myanmar security forces began a sweeping campaign of massacres, rape, and arson against Rohingya in northern Rakhine State that forced more than 700,000 people to flee to neighboring Bangladesh. In November 2019, Gambia filed a case before the ICJ alleging that Myanmar's atrocities against the Rohingya constitute genocide and violate the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This is not a criminal case against individuals, but a request for a legal determination of Myanmar's state responsibility for genocide.

"Seeing Gambia's landmark case against Myanmar finally enter the merits phase delivers renewed hope to Rohingya that our decades-long suffering may finally end," said Wai Wai Nu, founder and executive director of the Women's Peace Network. "Amid ongoing violations against the Rohingya, the world must stand firm in the pursuit of justice and a path toward ending impunity in Myanmar and restoring our rights."

In December 2019, the ICJ held hearings on

Gambia's request for provisional measures to protect the Rohingya remaining in Myanmar from genocide, which the court unanimously adopted in January 2020. The court's provisional measures require Myanmar to prevent all genocidal acts against the Rohingya, to ensure that security forces do not commit acts of genocide, and to take steps to preserve evidence related to the case. Myanmar is legally bound to comply. Human Rights Watch and others have documented ongoing grave abuses against the Rohingya remaining in Myanmar, contravening the court-ordered provisional measures.

On February 1, 2021, Myanmar's military staged a coup, overthrew the democratically elected government, and installed a military junta. Since the coup, armed conflict between Myanmar's security forces and opposition forces and ethnic armed groups has engulfed much of the country, with security forces committing grave abuses, including airstrikes against civilians in multiple ethnic areas.

The Myanmar military has long subjected Rohingya to atrocity crimes, including the ongoing crimes against humanity of apartheid, persecution, and deprivation of liberty. Since late 2023, Rohingya civilians have been caught in the fighting between the junta and ethnic Arakan Army armed group. Both sides have carried out grave abuses, including extrajudicial killings, widespread arson, and unlawful recruitment.

"The Myanmar military's vicious cycles of abuses

and impunity need to end,” said Shayna Bauchner, Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch. “This should begin with governments holding the junta to its legal obligation to comply with the ICJ-ordered provisional measures.”

In January 2021, Aung San Suu Kyi’s ruling National League for Democracy government filed preliminary objections challenging the ICJ’s jurisdiction and Gambia’s standing to file the case. In February 2022, the ICJ heard Myanmar’s objections from the military junta. In July, the court rejected the objections, allowing the case to proceed on the merits.

Establishing that genocide has taken place under the Genocide Convention requires demonstrating that genocidal acts were committed with an intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group in whole or in part.

During the three-week hearings at the ICJ, the parties are expected to present their arguments and supporting evidence about whether Myanmar violated the Genocide Convention.

Eleven countries intervened in the case but will not present orally at the hearings on the merits. While their written submissions remain confidential, their declarations of intervention outline several arguments in support of Gambia’s position, including on the issue of genocidal intent, the scope of the obligation to prevent and punish genocide, and the role of sexual and gender-based violence for a genocide determination. The latter is detailed in a paper being published by the Global Justice Center.

“Genocide does not unfold only through mass killing,” said Elise Keppler, executive director of the Global Justice Center. “In Myanmar, targeted sexual and reproductive violence inflicted on Rohingya women and girls was designed to break families, threaten futures, and eliminate the possibility of survival as a group. A gender-competent analysis makes this intent visible – and without it, the case that genocide against the Rohingya occurred is incomplete.”

In addition to Gambia’s ICJ case, there are several ongoing efforts to bring individual perpetrators of crimes in Myanmar to justice.

In 2019, the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor opened an investigation into alleged grave crimes against the Rohingya. Although Myanmar is not a member of the ICC, the court’s judges have determined that the ICC has jurisdiction over the situation because at least one element of the alleged

crimes took place in Bangladesh, an ICC member. In November 2024, the ICC prosecutor requested an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of Myanmar’s military, alleging his responsibility for the crimes against humanity of deportation and persecution of the Rohingya in 2017.

To bring comprehensive accountability, the United Nations Security Council should expand the ICC’s jurisdiction to address the full scope of criminality by referring the situation in Myanmar to the court, the groups said.

In November 2019, a group of human rights organizations, including the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, filed a criminal case in Argentina under the principle of universal jurisdiction against Myanmar authorities for crimes committed in Rakhine State. In February 2025, an Argentine court issued arrest warrants for 25 individuals from Myanmar, including Min Aung Hlaing.

“To fully address the scale of the crimes against the Rohingya, it is key to seek justice and accountability through different avenues,” said Tun Khin, president of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK. “This case and the pursuit of justice are not only about accountability for past atrocities, but about preventing future ones.”

Gambia’s filing in 2019 was the first time that a country without any direct connection to the alleged crimes used its membership in the Genocide Convention to bring a case before the ICJ.

In December 2023, South Africa filed a case with the ICJ alleging that Israel violated the Genocide Convention by committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and by failing to prevent it, including by not holding senior Israeli officials and others accountable for their direct and public incitement to genocide. In January, March, and May 2024, the court issued provisional measures, but Israel has flouted the court’s orders to open the crossings into Gaza and allow sufficient humanitarian aid in.

“Myanmar’s case before the ICJ is a beacon of hope for hundreds of thousands of people like myself that our plight for justice will not go unheard,” said Lucky Karim, founder and executive director of Refugee Women for Peace and Justice. “This and other cases before the ICJ are powerful warnings to abusive states across the world that one day, they too may be called to respond for their actions before a court of law.”



# HEAVY CLASHES ERUPT ALONG OLD YANGON-MANDALAY HIGHWAY AS 'OPERATION AUNG MYIN' TARGETS ELECTION ZONES

Fierce fighting broke out early Sunday morning, 11 January, between Military Commission troops and allied resistance forces across two townships along the old Yangon-Mandalay highway.

Frontline sources report that the conflict is centered in Phyu and Penwagon townships in eastern Bago, marking a significant escalation in the region.

The hostilities began when resistance forces launched an assault on a Military Commission outpost in Sar Gwin Village, Zeyawaddy. Concurrently, intense clashes were reported near Penwagon involving the military's Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 307. This specific battalion had been deployed as reinforcements following the capture of Taw Kywe Inn by resistance forces on 9 January.

A frontline military source said, "We launched an attack on the Sar Gwin checkpoint and its permanent base. Sar Gwin is located right along the old Yangon-Mandalay Road between Zeyawaddy and Phyu. Since 6:00 am this morning, fighting has also been ongoing near Kyein Khar Kone Village in Penwagon as the Military Commission pushed forward with a column."

The intensity of the combat has forced local residents to flee their homes, with many seeking refuge in religious buildings and makeshift safe zones. The timing of the offensive is particularly significant as both Phyu and Kyauktaga (Penwagon) townships are designated for "Phase 3" of the military-led elections scheduled for 25 January.

These coordinated strikes are part of the National Unity Government's (NUG) "Operation Aung Myin" in the Sittaung River basin. The operation has already dealt significant blows to the military; in the 9 January battle for Taw Kywe Inn, at least 50 military personnel were killed and a substantial cache of weapons and ammunition was seized.

The momentum extends to western Bago as well. On 7 January, the Bago Region People's Defense Force (PDF) executed simultaneous raids on three bases in Nattalin, Zeekone, and Minhla townships. During those engagements, resistance fighters torched a Pyu Saw Htee militia camp in Zeekone. Reports indicate approximately 40 military fatalities and numerous injuries resulted from the western Bago raids.



Photo: AFP

## KATONGPAW VILLAGE FIRE DESTROYS AT LEAST 60 HOMES IN MYANMAR'S MUDON TOWNSHIP

A massive fire swept through Katongpaw village in Mudon Township, Mon State, on January 8 2026, destroying at least 60 civilian homes and reportedly claiming the life of an infant.

The blaze erupted in the northern part of the village around 11:00 am and burned for nearly two hours before being brought under control by the combined efforts of the Fire Department, social welfare organizations, and local residents at approximately 12:50 pm. While the exact cause remains under investigation, local sources believe the fire may have started after a wood-burning stove was left unattended in a residential kitchen.

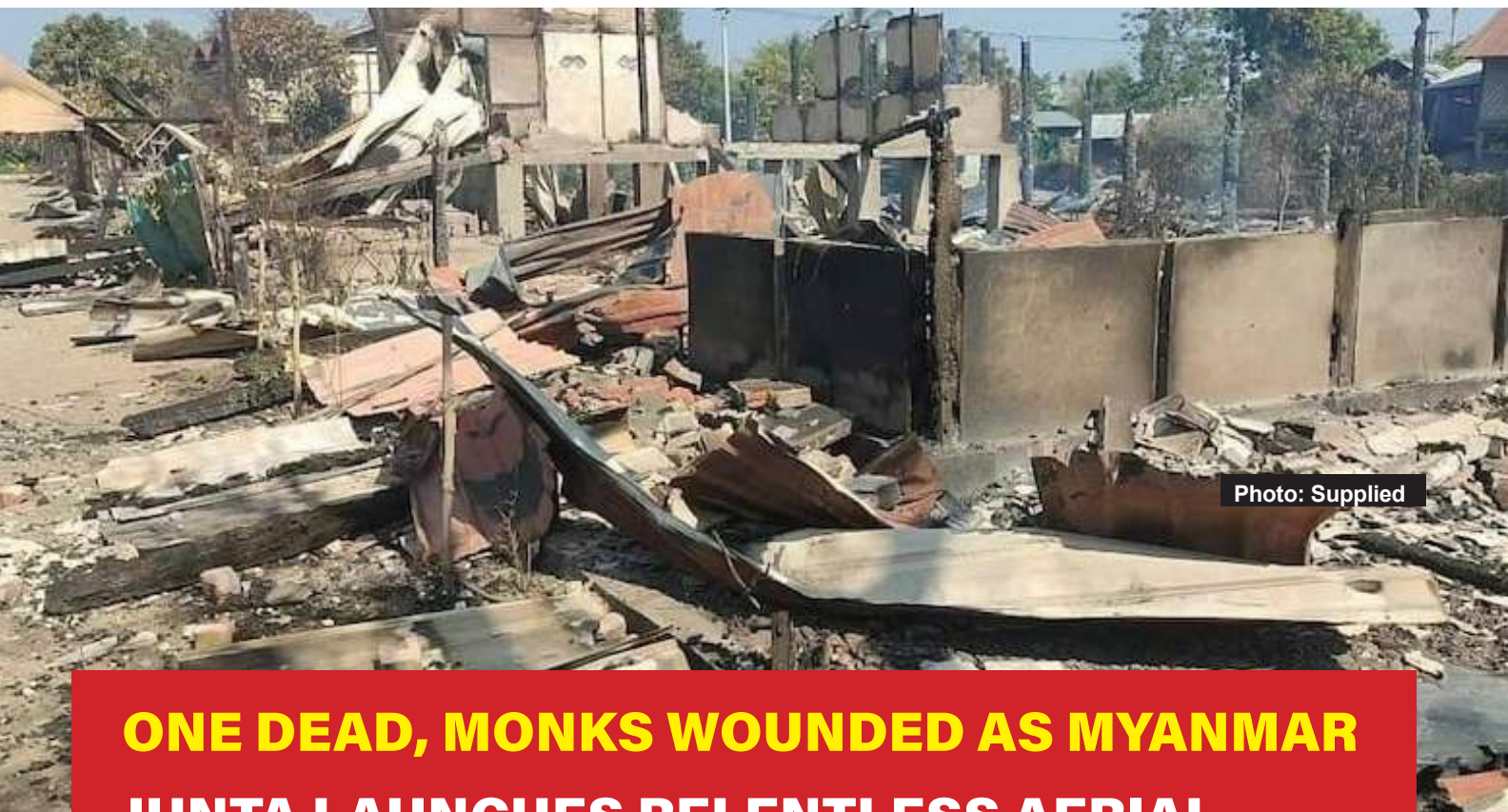
"At least 60 civilian homes were destroyed in the blaze," a local resident stated, adding that a one-month-old child was reported to have died in the fire, though

this loss has not yet been independently verified by local authorities.

Despite Katongpaw village's proximity to the Thanlwin River and the Puma International Port Terminal, an oil storage facility operated by Yar Zar Min Company, residents confirmed that the blaze did not reach the industrial site.

The storage tanks, which are critical for fuel distribution across Mon State and the capital of Mawlamyine, are located in the upper part of the village, at a significant distance from where the fire broke out. Social relief groups are now working to provide emergency shelter for the dozens of families left homeless by the disaster.





## ONE DEAD, MONKS WOUNDED AS MYANMAR JUNTA LAUNCHES RELENTLESS AERIAL CAMPAIGN ACROSS GANGAW DISTRICT

**T**he military junta conducted a series of coordinated airstrikes across Htilin, Kyaukhtu, and Gangaw townships in Magway Region throughout 7 January 2026, resulting in civilian fatalities and injuries to religious figures.

According to the Yaw Ah Lin Tan group, the air campaign began in Htilin Township between 10:00 am and 10:50 am, where aircraft dropped more than 80 bombs on villages sheltering displaced residents, including Tharakhar, South and West Aung Myint, Htilin, Htanpinkone, Taw Yaung, and Ponna.

The strikes killed a local man from the western part of the township, while a woman and a three-year-old child from Htilin sustained non-life-threatening injuries. During the operation, a Mi-17 transport helicopter landed at a football field east of Shwe Hti Hall in Htilin for approximately 30 minutes before departing.

The assault continued in the afternoon when a Y-12 transport plane, supported by a jet fighter, dropped over 80 additional bombs on Kyaukhtu Township

around 12:40 pm. Verification of the total damage and casualties from this specific strike is currently underway.

By early evening, the focus shifted to Gangaw Township, where a Yak-130 fighter jet from the Tada-U Airbase fired rockets at a monastery in Myin Zar village at 6:36 pm. The attack wounded two monks and a novice and caused significant structural damage to the religious buildings.

These daily airstrikes coincide with Gangaw Township's inclusion in the second phase of the junta's general election, scheduled for 11 January. Local organizations have noted that the frequency of aerial attacks has increased since the start of the month, leading to a mounting civilian death toll and widespread displacement.

Residents are being urged by local defence groups to remain under constant vigilance and utilize pre-dug bunkers as the military continues to target non-military sites ahead of the upcoming polls.



# INFANT AND THREE WOMEN KILLED AS MYANMAR JUNTA DROPS 300-POUND BOMBS ON NON-CONFLICT VILLAGES IN WETLET TOWNSHIP

In a sudden aerial attack on 6 January 2026, Myanmar junta forces dropped three 300-pound bombs on civilian villages in southeastern Wetlet Township, killing an infant boy and three women.

According to the Wetlet Informational Network, the strike targeted Pauk Kan Station village and Yay Thauk Kan village between 9:47 am and 9:57 am. In addition to the four fatalities in Pauk Kan, a man from Yay Thauk Kan village was injured, and several homes were levelled by the high-explosive munitions.

Military sources and local residents emphasized that there was no active fighting or presence of revolutionary forces in the immediate vicinity at the time of the attack. "There was no clash.

They barefacedly targeted and attacked the civilian population," a local military source stated, describing

the strikes as a deliberate act of terror against non-combatants.

The attack follows a month of intense aerial activity in the township. Data from the Wetlet Informational Network reveals that the junta conducted 14 airstrikes in Wetlet during December 2025 alone, resulting in 26 civilian deaths and the killing of two monks.

Ground reports indicate that junta columns remain active in the region, with troops currently stationed in Htone Bo, Hmaw Oo, and Kan Phyu villages. These units have reportedly engaged in arson, burning down homes and kitchens in nearby Ywar Thit village as recently as 3 January, supported by food supplies delivered via military transport planes.



Photo: Supplied

## MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE ON KHIN-U IDP CAMP KILLS THREE CIVILIANS AND INJURES TEN

**A** military airstrike targeting an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in eastern Khin-U Township killed three civilians and left ten others injured on the night of 5 January 2026.

According to the Khin-U Township People's Administration, the attack occurred at approximately 8:30 pm when junta aircraft targeted an oil storage yard near the Kongyi Village School. The site, situated along a vital inter-district road, was being used as a temporary shelter for families fleeing conflict in neighbouring townships.

The casualties include one female and two male IDPs, with local officials warning that several of the injured remain in critical condition.

"The deceased were not local residents but displaced people from other townships," an official from the Khin-U Township People's Administration stated. "Medical treatment began immediately after the attack, but the severity of the injuries is a major concern."

In the wake of the strike, local authorities emphasized that the area held no military significance and accused the junta of deliberately targeting defenceless civilians.

On 6 January, the Township Administration issued an emergency directive urging residents to adopt immediate air-raid precautions. The statement advised the construction of reinforced bunkers and communication tunnels, the use of walkie-talkies for early warnings, and the establishment of neighbourhood air-raid codes to mitigate the impact of ongoing aerial offensives.

"They said we must not stay inside buildings when aircraft are heard. We are being told to seek shelter in pre-dug tunnels as early as possible," a local volunteer assisting the IDPs mentioned.

For those without access to bunkers, the administration recommended seeking cover in natural low-lying terrain like ditches and valleys until evacuation to safer zones is possible.



Photo: AFP

## TEEN GIRL KILLED AND MULTIPLE PEOPLE INJURED IN NIGHTTIME AIRSTRIKE ON MYAING TOWNSHIP VILLAGE

**A** 16-year-old girl was killed and at least six others were injured when a junta jet fighter bombed Kyatmauk village, approximately six miles north of Myaing town, on the night of 6 January 2026.

The strike occurred at 9:40 pm, targeting the eastern part of the village where a bomb exploded near a school, destroying two homes and causing widespread panic among residents.

The Myaing People's Defence Organization (PDO) confirmed the casualty and reported that medical teams were dispatched to treat the wounded.

A local resident informed Mizzima that the junta Air Force dropped a bomb from a jet fighter which exploded near a school in the eastern part of the village, noting that civilian areas continue to bear the brunt of the military's aerial campaign.

The 6 January attack was part of a larger surge in aerial operations across Myaing Township. On the same afternoon, three military gyrocopters bombed a medical clinic in North Wetaung village, located near northwestern oil fields. This followed an earlier incident on 4 January at 11:16 pm, when a fighter jet from the Tada-U Air Force Base dropped two bombs on Ywathit Kone village, damaging several homes though no casualties were reported.

These escalations follow a pattern of indiscriminate bombing in Magway, where the junta has increasingly targeted schools and clinics to undermine the infrastructure of resistance-controlled and contested territories.





## **NUG VOWS TO BLOCK REVIVED MYITSONE DAM, WARNING PROJECT SACRIFICES MYANMAR'S "LIFEBLOOD" TO CHINA**

**T**he National Unity Government (NUG) has issued a stern warning against the military junta's attempts to restart the long-suspended Myitsone Dam project, characterized by NUG spokesperson U Nay Phone Latt as a desperate move to trade the nation's "heart and lifeblood" for Chinese backing.

Speaking on the "Reporting to the Public and International Community" program on 6 January 2026, U Nay Phone Latt declared that any international agreements signed by the "terrorist military junta" are legally void and that investors will be held solely responsible for any subsequent financial losses.

The spokesperson detailed catastrophic environmental risks, noting that blocking the natural flow of silt would lead to severe soil degradation across the Ayeyarwady Region and allow seawater intrusion to destroy the agricultural viability of the Delta.

Furthermore, the NUG highlighted the lethal threat posed by the dam's location near the Sagaing Fault; experts warn that a structural failure could submerge major cities in Kachin State within minutes.

"The power-seizing military junta has no legal authority to sell state-owned resources or enter into international agreements," U Nay Phone Latt asserted, reiterating the NUG's commitment to working with ethnic revolutionary allies to ensure the Ayeyarwady River remains free-flowing.

The junta, meanwhile, recently issued a sweeping directive threatening to prosecute anyone who opposes such "state-authorized" projects, a move widely viewed as a shield for Chinese investments in exchange for Beijing's continued diplomatic and military support.



## **NUG WELCOMES ICJ HEARINGS, SAYS JUNTA HAS NO LEGITIMACY TO REPRESENT MYANMAR**

**T**he National Unity Government (NUG) issued a statement on 9 January, that ahead of the upcoming international Court of Justice (ICJ) hearings in The Gambia vs Myanmar case, they are the only legitimate representative of Myanmar before the Court and rejecting any role for the military junta.

The NUG notes that the ICJ is entering the next phase of proceedings in the case of The Gambia v. Myanmar case, with hearings scheduled to begin on 13 January. These hearings are of critical importance for the Rohingya people and for the future of Myanmar. Acting on behalf of the people of Myanmar, the NUG has accepted and welcomed the jurisdiction of the ICJ and has withdrawn all preliminary objections previously submitted.

The NUG has repeatedly acknowledged that failures in Myanmar's past enabled grave atrocities against minority communities, including the Rohingya, Rakhine, and others across the country. "We are committed to ensuring that such crimes are never repeated and to pursuing structural change that allows all people in Myanmar to live together in peace, dignity, and mutual respect," their statement says.

Justice is a fundamental pillar of any lasting resolution to the long-running conflict between Myanmar's military and its people. International justice mechanisms, including the ICJ, are essential partners in the pursuit of a just and sustainable peace.

"We wish to make clear to the Court and to the international community that the National Unity

Government is the sole legitimate representative of Myanmar before the ICJ. This has been the case since the unlawful military coup of February 2021. On 30 March 2021, the acting Vice President appointed Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, as the additional alternate agent in this case. The Ambassador formally communicated this appointment to the International Court of Justice.

"The military junta is not recognised by the United Nations General Assembly and does not enjoy the support of the people of Myanmar. It therefore has no right to speak on behalf of the State of Myanmar before the Court. The junta's attempt to hold a so-called "sham-election" amid its widespread international crimes, violence, repression, and voter intimidation only further exposes its lack of legitimacy. No government can derive legitimacy from a process conducted through fear, exclusion, and war crimes.

"Allowing the junta to represent Myanmar at the ICJ would be an affront to the dignity of the Rohingya people and to all the people of Myanmar. The International Court of Justice must listen to the voices of the people.

"The NUG reserves all its rights in respect of the ICJ proceedings and affirms that any submissions made by the illegitimate junta do not represent the views of the lawful Government of Myanmar nor the will of its people."

## UN WARNS MYANMAR HUMANITARIAN CRISIS WILL WORSEN IN 2026 AS NEEDS SURGE

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners released a report on 10 January, warning that Myanmar's humanitarian crisis will continue to deepen in 2026, with more than 16 million people, including five million children, expected to need urgent life-saving assistance as conflict, displacement and economic collapse persist.

Since the military take-over of 2021, the humanitarian situation has continued to worsen with each passing year marked by intensifying conflict, recurrent disasters, and steady economic collapse. Conflict and disasters have already displaced an estimated 3.6 million people.

Over the next year, the humanitarian community will focus efforts on reaching 4.9 million of the most vulnerable people – a steep contraction from the 6.7 million people targeted in 2025.

"Behind every number is a person trying to survive a crisis they did not choose," said Ms Gwyn Lewis, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. in Myanmar. "The world's attention is stretched, but the needs in Myanmar continue to rise and the people deserve to be heard and seen."

The highly-prioritized response set out in HNRP is estimated to cost US\$890 million, down from a 1.4 billion ask in 2025. This reduction reflects the reality of a global funding crisis, which has forced a much narrower focus on those facing the most severe challenges and life-threatening conditions.

Often left out of the global headlines, Myanmar remains one of the world's most dire and yet under-funded humanitarian crises. Humanitarians warn that millions could be left without the support required to stay safe and protected unless urgent funding is mobilized.

"In 2025, underfunding left millions of people without aid and without the support they needed to stay safe, fed and protected. Families were pushed into impossible choices, with many skipping meals, taking dangerous journeys, and exposing themselves to serious risks simply to survive," said Ms Lewis. "We simply cannot allow this to happen again next year."





Photo: AFP

## FACEBOOK TAKES DOWN 1,000+ MYTEL ACCOUNTS LINKED TO MYANMAR MILITARY, SAYS JFM

Justice For Myanmar (JFM) said on 9 January that Facebook has removed more than 1,000 pages, groups and accounts linked to Mytel, a Myanmar military-controlled telecom company, following reports that the network was continuing to operate online in violation of Meta's 2021 ban on military-owned businesses.

The statement from JFM continues below.

While Mytel was previously removed from Facebook at the time, the company had created new pages that circumvented the ban, and Mytel agent and reseller accounts continued to operate.

Justice For Myanmar reported the pages to Facebook this week, along with the MRTV Friday Night Live Show page, which was also taken down.

Thanks to all those who informed us of these pages.

Telecom International Myanmar, which trades as Mytel, is owned by the military conglomerate Myanmar

Economic Corporation, the Vietnamese defence ministry-owned corporation Viettel Global, and a holding company for Myanmar cronies. Mytel provides revenue and technology to the Myanmar military and supports surveillance and censorship.

Mytel's profit projections suggest that the Myanmar military's shareholding could yield it US\$270 million in Mytel's fifth to ninth years of operation and a further US\$450 million in the five years after that, a major windfall for the military and top generals.

By financing the military and facilitating its digital surveillance, Mytel is aiding and abetting the Myanmar military's continuing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Justice For Myanmar demands other tech companies ban Mytel, including Alphabet and Apple, which host its apps in the Google Play Store and Apple App Store.



Photo: Andy Feliciotti

## **ABANDONED IN PLAIN SIGHT**

### **A LOOK AT HOW U.S. POLICY FAILED BURMESE FAMILIES, LEAVING THOUSANDS UNPROTECTED**

**INSIGHT MYANMAR**

**"W**e will not leave them behind," promises Simon Billenness, director of the Campaign for a New Myanmar and a Burma policy advocate with more than three decades of experience lobbying the United States Congress about U.S. sanctions policy, congressional appropriations, and accountability efforts related to Myanmar's military. Over the years, he has worked closely with bipartisan coalitions in Congress, civil society organizations, and Burmese diaspora communities, building pressure campaigns that link American values to concrete policy tools.

This is Billenness's second time on the Insight Myanmar Podcast; in his first appearance, he examined the issue of sanctions. In this discussion, he addresses the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's November decision to terminate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Burmese nationals, a development that he sees as both a humanitarian crisis and a profound

rupture in U.S. policy. Speaking from long familiarity with the mechanics of Congress, executive power, and international advocacy, he situates the decision not as an isolated immigration action but as a single moment in a broader realignment of American foreign policy toward Myanmar as well as toward refugees more generally.

TPS had allowed nearly 4,000 Burmese nationals to remain legally in the United States because conditions in their home country made safe return impossible. They were given sixty days before protections expire, which will come due in late January. Billenness describes the immediate consequences for those affected as stark and unforgiving. For individuals whose only lawful status derives from TPS, there are few viable alternatives. Immigration attorneys, he notes, have already told some refugees that no realistic legal pathways remain for them to stay in the country. The prospect of a forced return to Myanmar is, for many, terrifying!



Billenness emphasizes that TPS recipients are real people. Many arrived in the United States as students or professionals before or immediately after the 2021 coup. They remained in the country because returning home would expose them to grave danger. Some openly support the Civil Disobedience Movement from abroad; others belong to ethnic or religious minorities targeted by the military. Several are Christians, including at least one Catholic priest. Regardless of their individual stories, all face a Myanmar that remains engulfed in violent conflict, indiscriminate military violence, and severe political repression. Young men risk forced conscription under the junta's draft law. Even those who never protested face danger simply because of age, identity, or association.

From Billenness's perspective, the decision to end TPS represents a profound misrepresentation of both American interests and American values. He explains that the Burmese nationals protected under TPS are among the United States' strongest allies within Myanmar society, and many were initially drawn to the country because of its historical support for democracy, human rights, and religious freedom. Many pursue advanced education and professional training. Their presence strengthens U.S. institutions and communities, rather than burdening them. Ending TPS, he argues, amounts to rejecting precisely the people most aligned with American principles.

The Department of Homeland Security justifies its decision by citing purported improvements in Myanmar, including ceasefires, preparations for elections, and increased stability. Billenness rejects those claims outright. He describes this as false and misleading narrative, crafted not to reflect reality but to create a legal rationale for ending protections. In his assessment, the elections referenced by DHS are sham exercises conducted under military rule, and condemned by Congress and international observers alike. The ceasefires cited are coercive arrangements imposed on ethnic armed organizations under pressure from the junta and China, while airstrikes continue unabated. Stability, he insists, does not exist.

The characterization of Myanmar as a safe country, Billenness warns, departs sharply even from present U.S. policy. The State Department continues to advise American citizens not to travel to Myanmar because of insecurity. By presenting a rosier picture, DHS not only undermines protections for refugees but risks lending credibility to the junta's propaganda. He notes that the military already touts the TPS decision as proof

that Washington recognizes its authority and electoral plans.

National security considerations form another pillar of Billenness's critique. He explains that the Myanmar military poses direct threats to U.S. interests through its tolerance and facilitation of scam centers that defraud Americans of thousands of dollars daily. Areas under junta control also remain central to narcotics production that feeds the U.S. opioid crisis. From this perspective, protecting Burmese refugees is not merely charitable, it aligns with American security priorities by opposing a regime that actively harms U.S. citizens.

Religious freedom is yet another consideration in Billenness's critique. He points to the U.S. government's longstanding commitment to protecting freedom of belief worldwide, reflected in offices within the State Department and White House. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom documents ongoing persecution of Christians and Muslims. Returning Burmese Christians and Muslims to a country where churches, mosques, and temples are intentionally bombed is a direct affront to that commitment. For conservative lawmakers who champion religious liberty, he frames the question bluntly: "Why would you send your brothers and sisters in Christ back to Burma?!"

In response to the termination, legal and political efforts move forward simultaneously. Billenness expects a lawsuit to be filed challenging DHS's action as unlawful and potentially unconstitutional. While cautious about its prospects, he views litigation as a necessary attempt to secure a stay. At the same time, he works with allies in Congress to draft legislation restoring TPS for Burma. He explains the realities of the legislative process without illusion, however. Even under the best circumstances, passing a bill takes time, often years. A standalone measure would likely face the near certainty of a presidential veto.

Yet Billenness has hope, and draws on his many years of experience to explain his strategy. He recounts how major Burma-related laws, including the Burma Act, ultimately get included as amendments to must-pass legislation such as defense authorization or appropriations bills as opposed to stand-alone legislation. By embedding provisions restoring TPS within broader packages the president cannot easily reject, Congress can force concessions. The timeline is long and the outcome uncertain, but a realistic path exists.



Throughout the conversation, Billenness returns to the central role of Congress. Despite the recent executive actions, he describes bipartisan support for the Burmese people as remarkably strong. Republican and Democratic lawmakers alike denounce sham elections, back sanctions, and press the administration through hearings and public statements. He cites recent House and Senate actions, unanimous committee votes, and oversight hearings as evidence that the junta's influence in Washington remains limited. Billenness stresses that it's not the fact that this is a Republican President that accounts for this new executive policy, noting that some of the strongest U.S. actions against Myanmar's military have occurred under Republican administrations. For example, George W. Bush signed sweeping sanctions in the early 2000s. And after the Rohingya genocide in 2017, the first Trump administration reversed an earlier policy of accommodation and reimposed pressure. Congressional outrage over atrocities removed provisions for military-to-military cooperation. These precedents demonstrate that principled Burma policy transcends party lines.

What concerns Billenness most now is not congressional retreat but the erosion of U.S. soft power. He describes the dismantling of institutions such as USAID, Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the U.S. Institute of Peace as catastrophic. Congress appropriates funds for Burma-related programs, but this administration refuses to spend them, a practice known as impoundment. Courts are now considering whether such actions violate statutory and constitutional limits on executive authority; meanwhile, continuing resolutions replace regular appropriations, freezing policy and delaying accountability.

The junta claims that its lobbying efforts in Washington are effective, but Billenness dismantles that argument. Firms hired to represent the military operate quietly, often raising Myanmar only as an afterthought in meetings. Congressional staff, he observes, recognize the reputational toxicity of representing a regime accused of genocide. Public evidence supports his view, as he points out that hearings, votes, and bipartisan statements consistently side with the Burmese people, not the junta.

Ultimately, Billenness frames the struggle as a battle of narratives. One portrays refugees as burdens and proposes that working with the military will yield economic gain. The other, grounded in fact, presents Burmese refugees as contributors to American society

and the junta as an obstacle to stability. He points to communities like Fort Wayne, Indiana, where Chin immigrants have revitalized local economies and civic life. He notes that even economic arguments fail to favor the military, since it does not control key resources such as rare earth minerals and cannot deliver peace or reliable partnerships.

The path forward, he insists, lies in sustained pressure and grassroots engagement. Constituent advocacy—contacting their representatives, organizing meetings, and demanding accountability—remains the most effective tool. And not surprisingly regarding US policies that affect Myanmar, Burmese American communities are leveraging their growing political power in this way, influencing lawmakers who depend on their votes. Advocacy organizations provide mechanisms for individuals to act, transforming moral concern into political leverage.

Even as he characterizes this moment as unpredictable and dangerous, not only for Myanmar but for U.S. foreign policy as a whole, Simon Billenness remains active. The Burmese people and their allies will remain, he affirms. Through organizing, legislation, and persistent advocacy, he believes a narrative grounded in truth and justice will prevail. "We will endure," he insists. "We will fight back. We will not abandon the Burmese people."

## LISTEN TO THE INSIGHT MYANMAR PODCAST

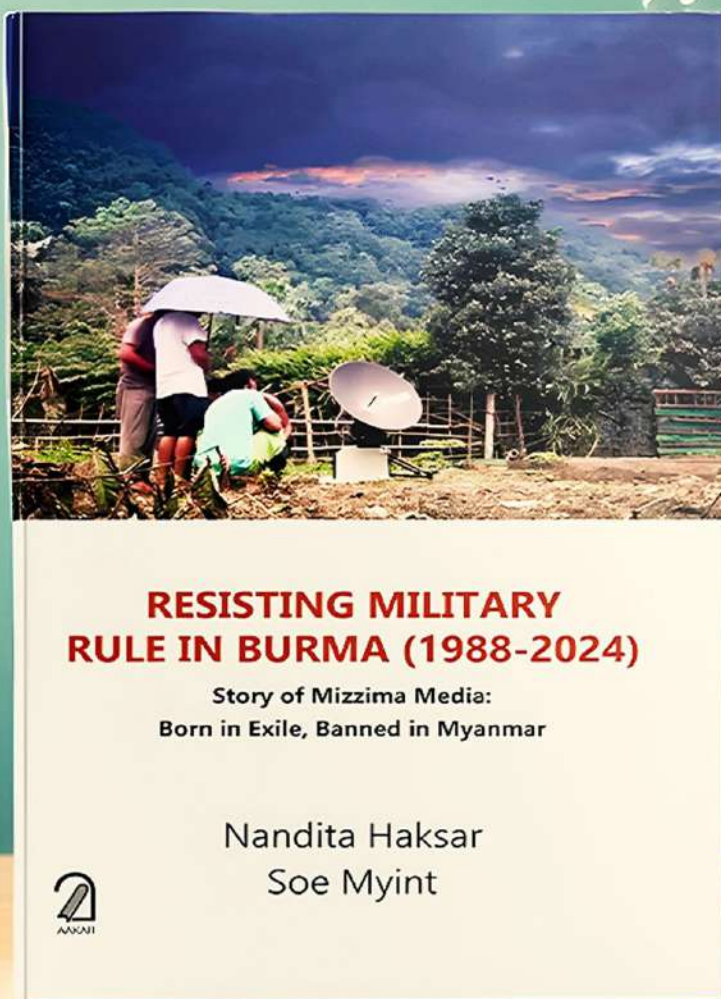
<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/12/24/episode-456-abandoned-in-plain-sight>



RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

*by Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint*



Published by  
**AAKAR BOOKS**

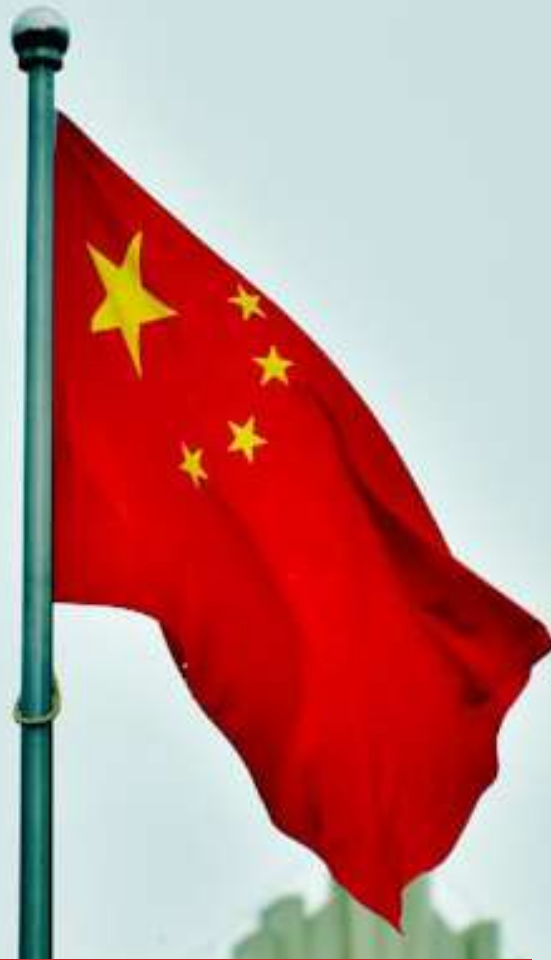


**TO PURCHASE THE BOOK ON AMAZON, CLICK HERE:**

<https://amzn.in/d/5n9Lkhd>

**TO DONATE AND HELP MIZZIMA'S WORK:**

<https://donate.mizzima.com/>



## 'SEVER THE CHAIN': SCAM TYCOONS IN CHINA'S CROSSHAIRS

**C**hina is moving against the cyberscam tycoons making fortunes in Southeast Asia, driven by mounting public pressure and Beijing's desire to keep control of judicial processes, analysts say.

Across Southeast Asia, scammers lure internet users globally into fake romantic relationships and cryptocurrency investments.

Initially largely targeting Chinese speakers -- from whom they have extracted billions, prompting rising public anger -- the scammers have expanded their operations into multiple languages to steal vast sums from victims around the world.

Those conducting the scams are sometimes willing volunteers, sometimes trafficked foreign nationals who have been trapped and forced to work under threat of torture.

Last year, a series of crackdowns largely driven by Beijing -- which wields significant economic and diplomatic influence in the region -- saw thousands of workers released from scam centres in Myanmar and Cambodia and repatriated to their home countries, many of them to China.

Now Beijing has turned its focus to the bosses at the apex of the criminal pyramids, netting its biggest player so far with the arrest and extradition of Chen Zhi from Cambodia this week.

The arrests were "almost certainly a result of Chinese pressure... coordinated behind closed doors", according to Jason Tower, senior expert at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

Chen, a Chinese-born businessman, was indicted in October by US authorities, who said his Prince Group



conglomerate was a cover for a "sprawling cyber-fraud empire".

Phnom Penh said it detained him following a request from Beijing, and after "several months of joint investigative cooperation" with Chinese authorities.

Analysts say Phnom Penh's inaction became intolerable to Beijing, which also wanted to avoid the embarrassment of Chen going on trial in the US.

Jacob Sims, a transnational crime expert and visiting fellow at Harvard University's Asia Center, added that Chen "has a number of reported ties to Chinese government officials".

"China acted in order to prevent him from being extradited to the US given the political sensitivities," he told AFP.

### **'Cut off the flow'**

Beijing made a show of the tycoon's extradition, with video released by China's public security ministry on Thursday showing the 38-year-old in handcuffs with a black bag over his head being escorted off a plane with black-clad armed security forces waiting on the runway.

The sudden extradition of Chen from Cambodia -- where he had close ties to political elites before his naturalised citizenship was revoked by the Southeast Asian nation last month -- follows China scooping up other wanted fugitives abroad to mete out justice on its own soil.

In November, She Zhijiang -- the Chinese-born founder of Yatai Group, which allegedly built a notorious scam hub on the Thai-Myanmar border -- boarded a flight to China in handcuffs after spending three years behind bars in Bangkok.

The same month Beijing held talks with law enforcement agencies from Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam agreeing to "intensify joint efforts against transnational telecom and online fraud".

China earlier publicly handed down death sentences to over a dozen members of powerful gang families with fraud operations in northern Myanmar, with their confessions of grisly crimes broadcast on

national television.

There could be more high-profile arrests to come: weeks ago the public security ministry issued arrest warrants for 100 more fugitives seen as the scam industry's key financial backers, pledging Thursday to "cut off the flow", "pull out the nails", and "sever the chain".

But while the alleged leaders of some major scam groups have been arrested, Sims said the status quo for the wider industry was unlikely to change without sustained and "extremely high" pressure from the international community.

"The vast majority of Cambodia's hundreds of scam compounds are operating with strong support from the Cambodian government," he said.

Cambodian officials deny allegations of government involvement and say authorities are cracking down. Authorities had said in July that the tally of arrests had already reached 2,000.

While in prison, She Zhijiang claimed to have previously acted as a spy for Beijing's intelligence agency before he and his Myanmar urban development project were "betrayed" by the Chinese Communist Party.

His lawyer told AFP that he had been pleading for Thai authorities to allow him to face trial in the US and said he feared "he will be deprived of due process" and "ultimately disappeared".

Some analysts pointed to limitations in China's justice system that might prevent the full extent of the cyberscam schemes from being brought to light.

"China is not an open society where investigation will reveal the true nature of things," said Cambodian academic and former ambassador Pou Sothirak.

AFP



Protests against the Iranian regime have erupted around the world. Photo: AFP

## TRUMP SAYS IRAN KILLINGS STOPPED, TEHRAN SAYS 'NO PLAN FOR HANGING'

**U**S President Donald Trump said 14 January he had been told the killings of protesters in Iran had been halted, but added that he would "watch it and see" about threatened military action.

Trump had repeatedly talked in recent days about coming to the aid of the Iranian people over the crackdown on protests that rights groups say has left at least 3,428 people dead.

But in a surprise announcement at the White House, Trump said he had now received assurances from "very important sources on the other side" that Tehran had now stopped, and that executions would not go ahead.

"They've said the killing has stopped and the executions won't take place -- there were supposed to be a lot of executions today and that the executions won't take place -- and we're going to find out," Trump said.

He offered no details and noted that the United States had yet to verify the claims.

Asked by an AFP reporter in the Oval Office if US military action was now off the table, Trump replied: "We're going to watch it and see what the process is."

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi later said there would be "no hanging today or tomorrow," in an interview with US network Fox News.

"I can tell you, I'm confident that there is no plan for hanging," Araghchi said, also accusing Israel of orchestrating violence, without providing evidence.

A rights group said separately that the execution of an Iranian man arrested during the wave of protests, 26-year-old Erfan Soltani, would not take place as scheduled on Wednesday, citing relatives.

**'Full control'**

But Araghchi said the Iranian government was "in full control" and reported an atmosphere of "calm" after what he called three days of "terrorist operation."

Iran also struck a defiant tone about responding to any US attack, as Washington appeared to draw down staff at a base in Qatar that Tehran targeted in a strike last year.

Iran targeted the Al Udeid base in June in retaliation for US strikes on its nuclear facilities. Ali Shamkhani, a senior advisor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warned Trump the strike showed "Iran's will and capability to respond to any attack."

Fears of possible US military action continued to rile the region.

The British government said its embassy in Tehran had been "temporarily closed," while the US embassy in Saudi Arabia urged staff to exercise caution and avoid military installations.

Germany's Lufthansa on Wednesday said its flights would avoid Iranian and Iraqi airspace "until further notice" after the US threats against Iran.

Trump has threatened to intervene militarily in Iran several times since the protest movement that has shaken the country began in late December. The protests are the largest since the Islamic Republic was proclaimed in 1979.

Rights monitors say that under cover of a five-day internet blackout, Iranian authorities are carrying out their harshest repression in years against demonstrations openly challenging the theocratic system.

Iran's judiciary chief vowed fast-track trials for those arrested, stoking fears authorities will use capital punishment as a tool of repression.

In Tehran, authorities held a funeral for more than 100 security personnel and other "martyrs" killed in the unrest, which officials have branded "acts of terror."

**'Unprecedented level of brutality'**

G7 nations said Wednesday they were "deeply alarmed at the high level of reported deaths and injuries" and warned of further sanctions if the crackdown continued.

Monitor NetBlocks said Iran's internet blackout had lasted 144 hours. Despite the shutdown, new videos, with locations verified by AFP, showed bodies lined up in the Kahrizak morgue south of Tehran, wrapped in black bags as distraught relatives searched for loved ones.

Amnesty International accused authorities of committing mass unlawful killings "on an unprecedented scale," citing verified videos and eyewitness accounts.

The US-based Institute for the Study of War said authorities were using "an unprecedented level of brutality to suppress protests," noting reports of protest activity had sharply declined.

A senior Iranian official told journalists there had been no new "riots" since Monday, distinguishing them from earlier cost-of-living protests. "Every society can expect protests, but we will not tolerate violence," he said.

Prosecutors have said some detainees will face capital charges of "waging war against God." State media reported hundreds of arrests and the detention of a foreign national for espionage, without giving details.

Iran Human Rights, based in Norway, said security forces had killed at least 3,428 protesters and arrested more than 10,000.

AFP





# ASEAN IN THE BALANCE

**"W**hat is really important... is the fact that [the Burmese people] are being seen, right?!" exclaims Lilianne Fan, a long-time Myanmar policy expert who serves as a member of the Malaysian Advisory Group on Myanmar and as an adviser to the ASEAN Special Envoy on Myanmar. She frames ASEAN's regional response to the post-2021 crisis as one that has often been misunderstood from the outside. Drawing on her decades of work experience, Fan explains that what appears to many Myanmar observers as paralysis or indifference has in fact involved significant internal shifts in how ASEAN understands legitimacy, inclusion, and its own institutional limits.

She anchors her analysis in ASEAN's structure, noting how it operates through consensus. Its public statements reflect only what all member states can agree upon, not the views of its individual, constituent governments. Fan acknowledges that this policy frequently results in language that feels inadequate when measured against the scale of violence and civilian suffering in Myanmar. Yet within ASEAN's political culture, even modest consensus can mark a substantial departure from precedent, and she insists that ASEAN's response to Myanmar after the coup has represented just such a departure: it resolved to exclude the Myanmar military leadership from ASEAN meetings at the highest levels, a step the organization had never taken before. She characterizes this decision as both innovative and strategically consequential.

For example, Fan unpacks the Five-Point Consensus, which many observers felt was a weak, or even pro-military response by the organization in the wake of the 2021 coup. She explains that it was never designed as a peace agreement per se, or a comprehensive solution to Myanmar's crisis, even if others wanted it to be. ASEAN recognized both its limited leverage over the junta and the need to navigate its own internal dynamics and competing interests among member states, and therefore could not impose punitive measures or enforce compliance. Instead, she says the Consensus functioned as a diplomatic framework that allowed ASEAN to maintain limited, conditional engagement with Myanmar's military authorities at a moment of acute uncertainty, while simultaneously withholding political legitimacy. Agreed in April 2021, the Five-Point Consensus articulated five broad areas: an immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar; inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders; mediation by an ASEAN special envoy; the provision of humanitarian assistance; and the envoy's visit to Myanmar to facilitate these efforts.

The implicit consequence of rejecting or ignoring this framework was not sanctions or suspension, but deeper political exclusion - namely the denial of ASEAN-level representation, voice, and institutional access - something ASEAN already moved to impose early on by excluding the junta from representing Myanmar at summits and high-level meetings. In the end, the junta neither reduced its violence nor engaged in dialogue, and its continued non-compliance reinforced ASEAN's decision to maintain that exclusion and to narrow engagement to the Special Envoy and humanitarian coordination rather than normalize relations. In sum, while the Five-Point Consensus did not resolve the crisis and was widely seen as insufficient, it preserved ASEAN unity and prevented the military from claiming regional legitimacy by default, even as some individual member states continued bilateral dealings outside the ASEAN framework. In this sense, Fan views the Consensus as a success overall, given the limitations within which ASEAN was operating.

## CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2025/12/27/episode-457-asean-in-the-balance>



Photo: Mizzima

## CENTRAL BANK OF MYANMAR EASES MANDATORY EXPORT CONVERSION RATIO TO 15 PERCENT AMID TIGHTENED IMPORT CONTROLS

In a major policy shift effective 1 January 2026, the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) has reduced the mandatory portion of export earnings that must be converted into local currency from 25 percent to 15 percent.

According to Notification No. 2/2026, exporters are now required to sell only 15 percent of their foreign proceeds at the central bank's fixed reference rate of 2,100 kyats per U.S. dollar. The remaining 85 percent can be held or traded through authorized dealer (AD) banks at the online trading rate, which currently hovers around 3,650 kyats per dollar though still significantly lower than the unofficial market rate of approximately 4,000 kyats.

While the relaxation has been welcomed by some exporters as a step toward better liquidity, industry operators warn that the benefits are largely theoretical due to severe structural constraints.

"We can retain more, but the remaining 85 percent cannot be used freely," one Mandalay-based exporter noted, explaining that funds in AD accounts are often trapped or must be sold back to the bank because

transfer capabilities to other importers have been restricted.

Currently, only companies with their own import licenses can effectively utilize these retained funds. The easing of export rules contrasts sharply with a near-total lockdown on the import sector.

Since June 2025, the junta has intensified restrictions, creating what business owners describe as an "almost completely closed" environment for non-essential goods.

This tightening is particularly evident in the energy sector. On 8 January, the junta ordered several major fuel importers, including Denko and Max Energy, to repay over 540 billion kyats (approx. \$257 million) for alleged dollar manipulation.

These mounting pressures, combined with electricity outages and double-digit inflation, continue to stifle the private sector as the junta prioritizes its dwindling foreign reserves for essential military and state-run imports.



Proof of voting. Photo: AFP

# PUBLIC DOUBTS ABOUT MYANMAR VOTER TURNOUT FOR PHASE 2 SHAM ELECTION

**A**s the military-planned Phase 2 election approached last week, many social media users in Myanmar openly questioned whether voter turnout will be any higher than in Phase 1. Discussions on platforms like Facebook, Telegram, and X revealed widespread skepticism, with numerous users predicting that participation will remain low or even decline.

The general sentiment is largely dismissive and distrustful. Many individuals believe there is little reason for people to change their behaviour following Phase 1, which was characterized by poor attendance and a lack of public support. Online conversations indicated that fear, apathy, and political disillusionment are continuing to influence public attitudes toward voting.

Common comments from users include:

"Phase 1 was empty. Phase 2 will be the same."

"People have already shown their stance by staying home."

"Nothing has changed. Why would turnout increase?"

"They will vote on paper, not in person."

Others highlighted ongoing arrests, conflict, and economic hardship as reasons why voting was not a priority for most civilians. There was also significant skepticism regarding how turnout figures will be reported after Phase 2.



# 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.