

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**Myanmar opposition leaders  
reject Military-planned  
election as illegitimate**

**ELECTION UPDATE**

**Myanmar marks 5 years of military rule**



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## DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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

# MYANMAR: RESISTANCE UNITY KEY FIVE YEARS AFTER THE MILITARY COUP

February 1 marked the fifth anniversary of the Myanmar military coup that threw the Golden Land into turmoil. As Senior General Min Aung Hlaing seeks to cloak military rule in civilian garb, following the three-phase “sham” election, the country stands at a crossroads.

Five years ago, the Myanmar military arrested and bundled off the country's top two elected leaders, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, into captivity, eventually framing them under trumped up charges that are likely to see them die in prison.

The coup saw the Myanmar's military's tentative foray into democracy turned upside down, the will of the people thrown into the toilet, a move that sparked widespread protest that degenerated into civil war and the formation of the Spring Revolution.

Myanmar had been given a taste of democratic freedom, from 2010 onwards, and post-coup there is no appetite – particularly amongst Generation Z – to accept military rule. After over six decades of rule by the generals, the majority of the population has had enough.

This battle for the soul of Myanmar is not a struggle for regime change – it is a struggle for system change, the aim being to put a reformed military firmly under civilian control – not the “sham” election and corrupt government-installing process that has taken place over the last month.

As panelists representing the Myanmar opposition on a recent online live broadcast made clear, the military junta-organized election that has crowned the military-proxy Union of Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) as the winner is totally rejected by the opposition. They point out that the voter turnout was low – much lower than the 54% claimed by the junta – and that the people's favourite party, the National League for Democracy and its leaders, were not allowed or willing to stand.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing is banking on obtaining a light veil of

legitimacy that will allow the military to maintain control as puppet-master of the USDP – a party mostly made up of former generals who have exchanged their green uniforms for white attire. China, Russia and Belarus may accept the deceit but many in the international community, including the UN and some members of ASEAN, have rejected this fake election.

That said, Min Aung Hlaing will try by hook or by crook to divide the Spring Revolution resistance and opposition. Five years have past and analysts are questioning whether 2026 could be make-or-break for the Spring Revolution. Many of the leaders and fighters recognize this and are working to set up a more unified front to combat the Myanmar military.

Writer James Shwe, in an article in Asia Times, stresses the importance of resistance unity. He says fragmentation is the resistance's greatest strategic vulnerability. It allows the international community to hedge its bets, treating the junta as the de facto state because the opposition appears to be a chaotic array of armies.

Shwe says that in order to fix this, the resistance must move beyond loose coordination to a hybrid federal structure: a system in which the National Unity Government (NUG) and ethnic authorities agree on a shared federal executive for foreign affairs and defense, while respecting the autonomy of local administrations in education, health and policing.

“We do not need a centralized ‘super-government’ - that fearsome model has failed Myanmar for 70 years,” he writes. “We need a functional federal democratic union where coordination is institutionalized, not ad hoc.”

Five years after the military coup, it is clear that Myanmar's Spring Revolution forces need to double down and pull together to once and for all remove the scourge of the brutal military dictatorship.

## EDITORIAL

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Cover photo of Myanmar election officials  
by AFP





Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing appears to be positioning himself to retain power in the upcoming government. Photo: AFP

# MYANMAR OPPOSITION LEADERS REJECT MILITARY- PLANNED ELECTION AS ILLEGITIMATE

Leaders of Myanmar's opposition and ethnic representatives have condemned the military's election, asserting that it lacks legitimacy and will not lead to peace or political stability in the country.

This criticism emerged during an online public panel discussion last week moderated by journalist Sein Win. The panel included Zin Mar Aung, Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government (NUG); Khun Myint Tun, Chair of the Pa-O National Federal Council (PNFC); and Sithu Maung, a member of the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH).

All three speakers stated that the military's election plan does not reflect the people's will and cannot address Myanmar's ongoing political and armed crisis. They noted widespread public resistance, including nationwide Silent Strikes, as clear evidence of the population's rejection of the elections.

According to the panelists, participation in census collection and election preparations has been remarkably low nationwide, despite threats of arrest and severe punishment. They argued that this lack of public consent undermines the internal legitimacy of the election.

The speakers also pointed out the exclusion of significant political parties that won the 2020 general election, such as the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD). Furthermore, even the parties permitted to participate in the military-organized election have raised complaints regarding voter lists, advance voting procedures, and the absence of an independent electoral body.

Khun Myint Tun emphasized that the Union Election Commission, which is under military control, cannot function as a neutral referee. He cautioned that an election conducted under these conditions would only reproduce authoritarian rule in another guise.

The panelists expressed skepticism that the election would gain international recognition. They highlighted that the process violates ASEAN's Five-Point

Consensus and UN Security Council Resolution 2669, and has already been dismissed by democratic governments and international institutions, including the United Nations and the European Union.

The speakers rejected the notion that participating in the election could facilitate political reform from within the system. They asserted that there is no political freedom under martial law, no space for free campaigning, and no protection for elected representatives. They also mentioned that prior attempts to reform the military-drafted 2008 Constitution through parliament had failed even before the military coup in 2021.

"A criminal election will produce a criminal parliament and a criminal government," Khun Myint Tun stated during the discussion.

The panelists warned that the election would not resolve Myanmar's conflict, insisting that armed resistance, civil disobedience, and public opposition would persist. They highlighted ongoing political

dialogues among revolutionary forces, including the NUG, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), ethnic resistance organizations, and People's Defense Forces, independent of the military.

Zin Mar Aung noted that the NUG's international efforts focus on preventing the military from representing Myanmar abroad, including at the United Nations, while working to strengthen recognition of democratic resistance forces. She contrasted the 2020 election, which took place in 274 townships, with the military's three-phase polling, which covered only a limited number of areas due to ongoing conflicts.

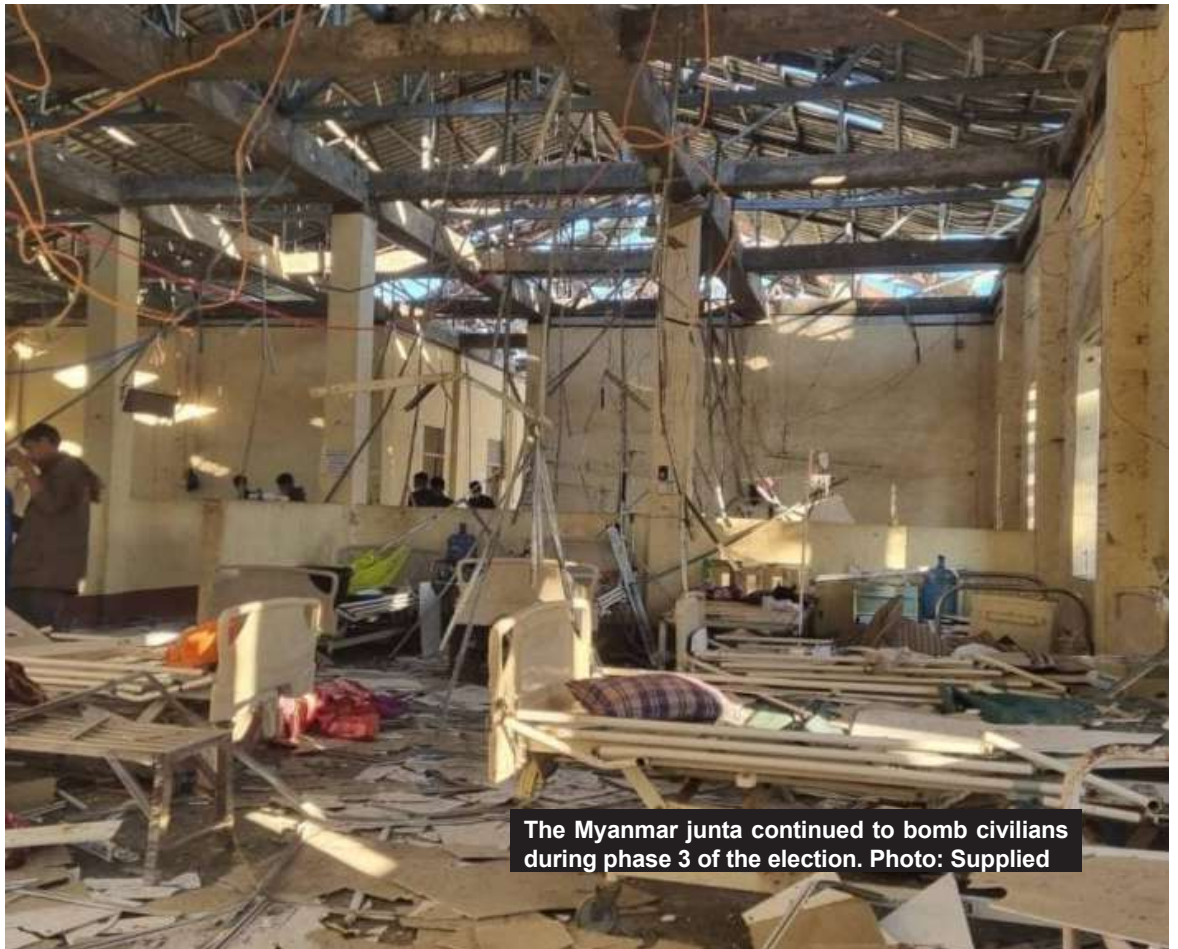
The panelists reiterated that their opposition to the election is part of a broader struggle to end military supremacy and establish a federal democratic system based on civilian rule. They pointed out that in areas under resistance control, efforts are underway to establish local governance and community administration despite continued airstrikes and security threats.



Photo: AFP



## ANALYSIS &amp; INSIGHT

**MYANMAR ELECTION PHASE 3 SEES VIOLENCE**

**P**hase three of the Myanmar's junta-organized elections was again overshadowed by violence and security concerns, mirroring patterns seen during the first two phases. While the military authorities attempted to confine polling activities to urban centres and militia-controlled areas, armed clashes, airstrikes, and artillery attacks were reported across rural and contested regions on the last election day.

In Mandalay Region, the junta conducted airstrikes in areas where no active fighting was reported. Military aircraft targeted Pan Aing village in Mahlaing Township and Yonesigy village in Taungtha Township, according to local sources. A 30-year-old resident from Mahlaing town told Myanmar Pressphoto Agency that voter turnout was extremely low. "I voted early in the morning, and there were almost no voters at the station. Even the polling staff were worried about possible attacks. Paramotors from Meikhtila were flying overhead constantly," the resident said.

In Sagaing Region, junta forces fired 120-mm artillery shells into areas sheltering internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Salingyi Township, a known stronghold of resistance forces. The area, locally known as Phowintaung, was hit despite the absence of reported clashes, leaving three displaced civilians wounded. In neighbouring Kani Township, junta paramotors reportedly dropped bombs in rural areas, while voting was limited to two polling



stations in the town centre and one village under militia control.

Revolutionary forces also carried out attacks on election day. In Myingyan Township, Mandalay Region, local People's Defense Forces (PDF) launched a drone strike on a militia camp in Lethit village. A polling station located near the camp was subsequently closed, leading to the cancellation of voting in that area. Although elections proceeded in Myingyan's urban wards and militia-controlled villages, turnout remained minimal. Local residents reported that few voters appeared even after 7:30 am, prompting authorities to use loudspeakers to broadcast election-promoting songs. Meanwhile, three heavily armed junta columns equipped with RPGs and machine guns were seen patrolling the town.

In Hpakant, Kachin State, artillery exchanges between junta forces and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and allied groups had been ongoing prior to election day. On the day of voting, junta artillery struck

a civilian ward, damaging several buildings. No civilian casualties were reported.

Overall, phase three of the elections underscored persistent insecurity, limited public participation, and the widening gap between the junta's electoral claims and realities on the ground.

## **Junta-imposed restrictions and pressure put on people to vote**

Phase three of Myanmar's junta-organized elections was marked not only by insecurity but also by widespread reports of coercion, forced participation, and administrative irregularities across multiple regions, according to local residents, political parties, and independent media.

In Mandalay Region, authorities attempted to address extremely low voter turnout by publicly urging residents to vote through loudspeaker announcements.



According to local sources, junta authorities began broadcasting messages encouraging participation at around 8:00 am in Mandalay metropolitan areas, including Pyigyitagon and Amarapura townships. The announcements were reportedly repeated twice during the day. A Mandalay resident told local media that the loudspeakers were used again at 11:00 am, but many residents still refused to participate. "They were urging people to vote at 8 am and again at 11 am. I didn't go, just like my neighbours," the resident said, highlighting public reluctance despite official pressure.

In Muse, a key border trading town in northern Shan State, authorities reportedly used access to cross-border travel documents as leverage to compel voter participation. Local residents told Shan News that authorities warned individuals they would be unable to apply for or renew the border pass, commonly known as the "red book," if they failed to vote.

Since mid-December, ward administrators, election commission members, and police have conducted

door-to-door visits urging residents to participate in the election. A Muse resident said that even native residents risked being unable to extend passports without proof of voting, while migrants from other regions were required to present their voting serial numbers to apply for border passes. Under existing rules, border-area residents can apply for one-year border passes, while visitors from other regions are limited to one-week passes.

In Karen State, similar coercive practices were reported in Kawkaeik Township. On phase three election day, village heads and clerks from at least eleven villages reportedly cast ballots on behalf of entire communities, effectively replacing individual voting. In Innshay village, the village head Kyaw Win allegedly told residents not to go to polling stations, citing the risk of drone attacks. A villager told the Karen Information Center (KIC) that the village head and clerk voted on behalf of all residents. "He said there could be drone attacks, so we should not go. He and the village clerk went and voted for all villagers," the resident said,



Billboard calling on people to vote. Photo: Supplied



adding that similar practices occurred in neighbouring villages.

Irregularities were also reported in Bago Region, where some polling stations opened ahead of the scheduled election date of 25 January, reportedly due to security concerns. On 22 January, nine polling stations in Gyobingauk and Okpho townships, located in the foothills of the Bago mountain range, conducted voting early, according to locals and participating political parties. Yan Naing Win, vice-chairman of the Bago Region-based Federal Democratic Party, told Mizzima that authorities framed the early voting as part of advance voting procedures. "We cannot say the election happened earlier than the scheduled date. When advance voting and regular voting happen at the same time, it can be described as advance voting," he said.

A separate controversy emerged in Thegon Township, where the regional election commission initially announced that voting would be held on 20 January instead of 25 January. However, a central committee member of the Union Peace and Unity Party, Saw Yu Mar, objected to the decision. Following the objection, the election commission reversed its earlier announcement at around 10:00 pm on 19 January and allowed the election to proceed according to the original schedule, rather than holding it in advance.

## Arrests linked to the election

Several political parties contesting Myanmar's junta-organized elections have faced serious disruptions following the arrest, prosecution, and restriction of candidates and party leaders, further highlighting the constrained political environment surrounding the polls.

In Taunggyi, Shan State, People Pioneer Party (PPP) candidate Sai Shwe Htee and his son, Sai Kyaw Soe Moe, were arrested for allegedly killing a neighbour following a dispute over a stolen chicken. Local sources said the incident occurred in the early hours of 5 November 2025, when the two allegedly beat Sai Htun Tsar to death after accusing him of theft. The date coincided with the full moon day of Tazaungmone, when

youths traditionally catch and cook chickens as part of festivities. A local told Shan News that many residents disputed the allegation, saying the victim was returning home through a back lane when the candidate's son shouted "thief" and attacked him. Locals also alleged the son had a history of drug use and minor offenses. Both were charged with murder-related offenses, and the PPP could not replace the candidate after the nomination deadline closed.

In a separate case, a candidate from the People's Party was sentenced to one year in prison with hard labour under the Election Protection Law after using the word "revolution" during campaign activities. According to party sources, the candidate used the term on 12 November 2025, prompting an inquiry by the Union Election Commission (UEC). Although the UEC initially released him following questioning, he was later arrested by Military Security Affairs on 17 December. The Thingangyun Township Court charged him under Section 58(c) of the Election Protection Law. His first court hearing took place on 23 December, and he was sentenced to one year in prison on 8 January 2026, after phase one of the elections, despite having been allowed to compete in the polls prior to sentencing.

Meanwhile, the chairperson of the People Pioneer Party, Dr. Thet Thet Khaing, also faced interrogation and electoral suspension. According to BBC Burmese, she was questioned for meeting diplomats from the British Embassy at a restaurant in Yangon on 18 December while wearing a face mask. Separately, she was suspended from the election due to an outstanding debt related to a luxury condominium project linked to her business. Military Security Affairs reportedly took her for interrogation on 13 January and released her the following day under restrictive conditions.

A source close to Dr. Thet Thet Khaing told Mizzima that she is prohibited from speaking to the media, posting on social media outside of election-related content, and traveling without prior permission. "There are no police stationed at her home, but the restrictions function more like control measures than formal house arrest," the source said.



Philippines Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro meets Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw on 6 January. Photo: AFP

## ASEAN'S POSITION ON THE DISPUTED MYANMAR ELECTION UNCLEAR

**T**he Philippines, now the ASEAN chair, issued a statement on 29 January that neither rejected the Myanmar military's election, nor recognized it. The statement, covering ASEAN's main challenges, was released by Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro at a press conference after the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Cebu.

The text of the statement is as follows.

We had candid, thoughtful, constructive, and in-depth discussions on the follow-up to the 47th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits and ASEAN's external relations, as well as regional and international developments with a view to ensuring continuity and advancing ASEAN unity and Centrality.

We reaffirmed our shared commitment to maintaining and promoting peace, security and stability in the region, as well as to the peaceful resolution of disputes, including full respect for legal and diplomatic processes, without resorting to the threat or use of

force, in accordance with international law, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

We reiterated our strong commitment to upholding regionalism and multilateralism, as well as ASEAN Centrality in the evolving regional architecture, and emphasised the importance of adhering to international law, shared values and norms enshrined in the UN Charter, the Declaration on Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ Treaty), the 2011 Declaration on the East Asia Summit on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

We welcomed the adoption of the ASEAN Community Vision (ACV) 2045 and its Strategic Plans last year and noted that this year marks the first year



of its implementation. We underscored the importance of ensuring timely and coordinated implementation across all three Community Pillars in order to translate this Vision into concrete outcomes for ASEAN and its people. In this regard, we noted the convening of the 3rd ASEAN Future Forum this year in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, which would complement ASEAN's collective efforts in the realisation of the Vision.

We expressed confidence and support towards the Philippines' priorities and deliverables in 2026, guided by its theme "Navigating Our Future, Together," and its three main priorities, namely Peace and Security Anchors, Prosperity Corridors, and People Empowerment, which are in line with the goals of ASEAN Community building and in continuing to build upon the previous ASEAN Chairships' priorities and achievements. We emphasised the importance of realising these priorities in advancing ASEAN's shared vision of a resilient, innovative, dynamic, people-centred community, and in ensuring ASEAN's continued role as a key player in the global community and in charting the future of the region. We looked forward to the implementation of these initiatives with pragmatism and determination under the Chairship of the Philippines.

We welcomed Timor-Leste's full and active participation as a Member of ASEAN, underscoring its first year of participation during the Philippines' Chairship. We acknowledged Timor-Leste's continued efforts towards the fulfilment of the remaining milestones following its admission to ASEAN. We reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to supporting Timor-Leste's integration into ASEAN processes.

We underscored the continued relevance of the TAC as a foundational code of conduct for interstate relations in the region and a cornerstone of regional peace and stability. We noted the growing number of High Contracting Parties (HCPs) to the TAC, reflecting the Treaty's enduring value not only within our borders but also beyond the region. We remained committed to promoting and upholding the principles enshrined in the TAC, and emphasised the responsibility of all HCPs to fulfill their Treaty obligations.

We looked forward to the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia this year, reaffirmed the shared values enshrined in the TAC's principles, and renewed our collective

commitment to peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and mutually beneficial cooperation. In this regard, we looked forward to the finalisation of the ASEAN Paper Outlining the Guidelines on the Modalities for HCPs' engagement with ASEAN as one of the outcome documents of the commemoration. We further looked forward to organising commemorative initiatives for the 50th Anniversary and the signing of new HCPs to the Treaty.

We took note of the pending applications of Slovenia, Austria, and the Slovak Republic for accession to the TAC and looked forward to the completion of the necessary steps towards their accession. We concurred with the ASEAN Secretariat's recommendation to consider the application of Belgium positively. We also took note of the timeline of 2 years, with a possible extension of one more year, for prospective High Contracting Parties (HCPs) to the TAC to sign their Instrument of Accession and tasked the ASEAN Secretariat to incorporate the agreed timeline in the Guidelines for Accession to the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) accordingly. We looked forward to the signing of the Instruments of Accession of countries approved to accede to the TAC at the earliest opportunity.

We underscored the continued relevance of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as the leading regional security forum in the Asia-Pacific region, with a view to build mutual trust and confidence, advance preventive diplomacy, develop capacity and expertise, and foster constructive dialogue and cooperation on political and security matters and emerging challenges of common interest and concern, with ASEAN as the primary driving force. We welcomed the adoption of the Recommendations to Revitalise the ARF and looked forward to its gradual implementation starting this year. We also looked forward to the conclusion of the Manila Plan of Action 2026-2036 and adopting it during the 33rd ARF in July.

We welcomed the Philippines' proposal to adopt an ASEAN Declaration on Maritime Cooperation at the 48th ASEAN Summit, which will identify specific maritime cooperation initiatives.

We reaffirmed the importance of the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) for promoting maritime cooperation through dialogue and consultations. We

looked forward to the publication of the second edition of the ASEAN Maritime Outlook and the implementation of initiatives under the EAMF this year.

We also reaffirmed the roles of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus in promoting strategic dialogue and enhancing practical cooperation including through the seven ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Groups. We looked forward to the issuance of the Joint Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the Establishment of the ADMM. We also welcomed the upcoming ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group Combined FTX, Exercise Trident Resolve, to be held from 20 to 26 September 2026 in Banten, Indonesia.

We acknowledged the vital role of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and its subsidiary mechanisms in advancing ASEAN's law enforcement cooperation and in spearheading cross-sectoral and cross-pillar coordination in addressing the multi-dimensional aspects of transnational crimes, particularly the growing threat of cybercrime and online scams and trafficking in persons (TIPs) in the region, including people smuggling. We also welcomed the convening of the International Conference on the Global Partnership against Online Scams in December 2025 in Bangkok. We looked forward to the convening of the 20th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and the adoption of its outcome documents, including the 1st ASEAN Trafficking in Persons Report.

We reiterated our commitment to preserve the Southeast Asian region as a nuclear weapon-free zone and free of all other weapons of mass destruction as enshrined in the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) and the ASEAN Charter. We stressed the importance of the full and effective implementation of the SEANWFZ Treaty, including through the Plan of Action to Strengthen the Implementation of the SEANWFZ Treaty (2023-2027). We noted that the Executive Committee of the SEANWFZ Commission is continuing to explore the possibility of allowing individual Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) which are willing to sign and ratify the Protocol to the SEANWFZ Treaty without reservations and provide prior formal assurance of this commitment in writing to go ahead with the signing. We welcome any NWS that are ready to do so. We reaffirmed our commitment to continuously engage all the NWS

including those with reservations, and intensify efforts to resolve all outstanding issues in accordance with the objectives and principles of the SEANWFZ Treaty.

We also reaffirmed our commitment to enhancing the profile of the SEANWFZ Treaty globally, including through engaging other nuclear weapon-free zones (NWFZs). In this connection, we welcomed the adoption of the ASEAN-sponsored biennial resolution (80/47) on the SEANWFZ Treaty at the 80th Session of the UNGA on 1 December 2025, which reiterates the importance of the Treaty in contributing to international peace and security and supporting global efforts on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We stressed that progress on nuclear disarmament is urgently needed and reiterated the need for strengthening the commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons amidst the heightened geopolitical tension.

We looked forward to the finalisation of the ASEAN contribution to the Chapter IV of the Comprehensive Study of the Question of Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones in All Its Aspects to the Treaty of the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone and the Memorandum on Activities Related to the SEANWFZ Treaty for the NPT Review Conference.

We recognised the role and continued contribution of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR) in advancing peace and stability in the region.

We welcomed the appointment of H.E. Ma. Theresa P. Lazaro as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar for 2026. We expressed our full support for the Special Envoy in carrying out her mandate in facilitating mediation of the dialogue process towards an inclusive, durable, and peaceful solution to the political crisis in Myanmar in line with the Five-Point Consensus (5PC).

We had candid discussions on the evolving developments in Myanmar and reaffirmed our commitment to advancing the implementation of the 5PC. We noted that any meaningful political progress can only take place in an environment of peace, security, and inclusivity, supported by the cessation of violence and inclusive dialogue among all relevant stakeholders. We reiterated our united position that the 5PC remains our primary reference to address the



political crisis in Myanmar and further affirmed the corresponding Leaders' decisions. We emphasised ASEAN's commitment and role to assist Myanmar in charting a future and a peaceful and lasting solution to the crisis which is both Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-led, while reaffirming that Myanmar remains an integral part of ASEAN. We reaffirmed ASEAN's position on the importance of free, fair, peaceful, transparent, inclusive, and credible general elections in Myanmar. We noted the conclusion of the three phases of the general elections.

We expressed support for the continuous delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar without discrimination through the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre), in line with the 5PC. We expressed appreciation for the resources contributed by ASEAN Member States, external partners, and the private sector, which includes the construction of pre-fabricated schools and religious buildings in affected communities. We reiterated our commitment to expand the scale and reach of humanitarian aid by leveraging ASEAN's partnerships and engaging relevant parties in the process.

We acknowledged the importance of the Informal Consultation on the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus, as well as the Extended Informal Consultation, in ensuring continuity and sustainability in ASEAN's efforts to address the situation in Myanmar. We looked forward to the conclusion of deliberation of the ASEAN Senior Officials on the proposal of a longer-term ASEAN Special Envoy on Myanmar to ensure continuity in the role in line with the mandate given by the ASEAN Leaders.

We welcomed the Joint Statement of the 3rd Special General Border Committee (GBC) Meeting between the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Kingdom of Thailand of 27 December 2025, and called for its full and effective implementation, with a view to promoting the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, thereby contributing to peace and stability between the two countries and in the wider region. We underscored the importance of the ASEAN Observer Team (AOT) in verifying and ensuring the effective implementation of all measures based on its mandate. We further welcomed the extension of the mandate of the AOT and noted the steps taken

by Malaysia to ensure a smooth transition of the coordinator role to the Philippines as the ASEAN Chair.

We emphasised the importance of ASEAN Centrality and unity in our engagement with external partners through ASEAN-Plus One, ASEAN Plus Three (APT), East Asia Summit (EAS), ARF, and ADMM-Plus in line with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). We underscored the importance of a coherent, principled, and strategic approach to ASEAN's partnerships. We reiterated that our external engagements are ASEAN-driven, relevant, strategic, mutually beneficial, and responsive to current and emerging challenges while ensuring ASEAN Centrality, adheres to existing ASEAN processes and procedures, support our community-building, and contribute to regional peace, stability, and sustainable development. We highlighted that effective coordination, transparency, and alignment with ASEAN's priorities under the ACV 2045 are essential to ensure that ASEAN's External Relations continue to serve ASEAN's long term goals and interests.

We underscored the value and relevance of the AOIP in promoting regional peace, security, stability, and prosperity in light of geopolitical tensions affecting the region, including in building mutual trust and confidence as well as reinforcing an open, transparent, resilient, inclusive and rules-based regional architecture with ASEAN at the centre that upholds international law. We reaffirmed our commitment to promote the implementation of concrete AOIP projects and activities, under the four priority areas in our engagement with external partners, through the various ASEAN-led mechanisms.

We noted the broad, in-principle support expressed by ASEAN Member States at the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur for Türkiye's application to become an ASEAN Dialogue Partner, as well as the Assessment Paper on ASEAN's Formal Partnerships prepared by the ASEAN Secretariat, which includes a recommendation to decide by 2026 on the future of the moratorium on new Dialogue Partnerships. We looked forward to the continued discussions at the CPR and at the SOM in this regard.

On Papua New Guinea's engagement with ASEAN, we noted the general support for the recommendations regarding Papua New Guinea's role as a Special Observer to ASEAN. We tasked our relevant officials to

continue discussions and work towards consensus on the remaining pending items at an appropriate time.

We also exchanged views on regional and international issues. We acknowledged that the global environment we face today is marked by overlapping pressures, including intensifying geopolitical competition, growing economic uncertainty, and the erosion of multilateral systems and the rules-based order through unilateral actions. We noted that these are compounded by transnational challenges such as climate change, misuse of emerging technologies including artificial intelligence, and other increasingly complex security risks that no country can address alone.

We discussed the situation in the South China Sea, during which concerns were expressed on land reclamations, activities, serious incidents in the area, including actions that put the safety of all persons at risk, damage to the marine environment, which have eroded trust and confidence, increased tensions, and may undermine peace, security, and stability in the region. We reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability and avoid actions that may further complicate the situation. We further reaffirmed the need to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with international law, particularly the 1982 UNCLOS. We emphasised the importance of self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants and all other states, including those mentioned in the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) that could further complicate the situation and escalate tensions in the South China Sea.

We reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea and recognised the benefits of having the South China Sea as a sea of peace, stability, prosperity, and sustainable development. In this regard, we underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the DOC in its entirety. We welcomed the positive momentum and progress achieved in the ongoing negotiations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC). We will endeavour to conclude the negotiation of an effective and substantive COC that is in accordance with international law, particularly the

1982 UNCLOS, within 2026. We emphasised the need to maintain and promote an environment conducive to the COC negotiations, including the situation in the South China Sea, and thus welcomed practical measures that could reduce tensions and the risk of accidents, misunderstandings, and miscalculation. We stressed the importance of undertaking confidence building and preventive measures to enhance, among others, trust and confidence amongst parties, and we reaffirmed the importance of upholding international law, particularly the 1982 UNCLOS.

With regard to the situation in the Middle East, we reaffirmed our long-standing support for the two-state solution, which envisions a future where two independent states living in peace and security and each with recognized borders. We welcomed the resolution passed by the United Nations Security Council in November 2025, endorsing the US peace plan, and viewed the development as a positive step towards ending the humanitarian crisis and providing security in Gaza. We reiterated our view that peace initiatives in the Middle East should not, in any way, diminish the prospect for Palestinian statehood, as well as undermine the inalienable right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, in accordance with international law. We maintain that these conditions are imperative to achieving a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the region.





Photo: AFP



## CSOS URGE ASEAN TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS ON MYANMAR

A coalition of civil society groups, including the CSO Working Group on Independent National Human Rights Institutions (Burma/Myanmar) and the Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI), released a statement on 30 January expressing solidarity with Malaysia's Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM), condemning attacks by the Myanmar junta-controlled MNHRC and reaffirming that the Myanmar junta-led elections lack credibility and violate democratic and human rights standards.

The statement is as follows.

We echo SUHAKAM's calls for upholding democratic values, fair and free elections, and the rule of law across the region.

On 22 December 2025, SUHAKAM expressed serious concerns over the junta-led sham elections in Myanmar, which took place from 28 December 2025 to 25 January 2026.

We extend our full support and solidarity to SUHAKAM's statement, which reflects a clear and principled commitment to international human rights standards and recognizes the grave reality that conditions in Myanmar do not permit the conduct of a genuine, inclusive, or credible democratic process.

SUHAKAM's commitment to democratic values, including its strong stance in advising the Malaysian Government to disengage from the junta's sham elections, is crucial given its role as the convening Chair of the Southeast Asia National Human Rights Forum (SEANF) in 2026.

### MNHRC's retaliatory response

On 15 January 2026, the military junta-controlled Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) issued a retaliatory statement against SUHAKAM. The statement merely protects the military junta and its agenda for a sham election.

The MNHRC has consistently aided and abetted the Myanmar military and acted as an accessory to the junta's crimes.

Such a response further underscores the MNHRC's fundamental lack of independence, credibility, and willingness to engage in good faith with regional human rights mechanisms. Rather than addressing SUHAKAM's concerns, the MNHRC has sought to deflect criticism and undermine legitimate scrutiny, in clear contradiction of the Paris Principles governing National Human Rights Institutions.

MNHRC's lack of independence from the military junta has led to its discreditation and expulsion from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) in March 2025, followed by its expulsion from the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF) in May 2025.

Efforts are currently underway to advocate for the removal of MNHRC from SEANF, alongside strong calls for SEANF members to disengage from the discredited institution.

### **SUHAKAM's leadership of SEANF**

We reiterate our solidarity and support for SUHAKAM as it serves as the new SEANF Chair in 2026. We are confident that SUHAKAM's leadership will strengthen the integrity of SEANF and reaffirm its commitment to democratic norms, human rights protection, and the independence of national human rights institutions in Southeast Asia.

Khin Ohmar, Chairperson of Progressive Voice, member of the Working Group, said: "We hope to see the removal of the junta-controlled MNHRC from SEANF during the leadership of SUHAKAM. All other SEANF's members – all of whom hold 'A' status – have the responsibility to not only protect, but also strengthen the Forum's institutional integrity and

credibility. Removing the junta-controlled MNHRC is the principled and necessary next step for SEANF. It is also imperative that SEANF also shows its acknowledgement on the principled action taken by GANHRI and APF as they removed MNHRC from their NHRI networks."

Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA, which serves as the Secretariat of ANNI, said: "We urge all SEANF members to continue and intensify efforts to review, remove, and disengage from MNHRC. Continued engagement with MNHRC without accountability erodes the credibility of SEANF and undermines regional human rights cooperation."

Bo Bo, Executive Director of Generation Wave, member of the Working Group, said: "The military will try every means to gain international legitimacy after the sham election. It is certain that they will continue to drag the puppet MNHRC along to seek legitimacy and recognition from the international community. Following our consistent advocacy efforts, MNHRC has been removed from GANHRI and APF. We will continue to advocate for the SEANF to remove the junta-controlled MNHRC from its network as soon as possible. We believe SUHAKAM will do its best within the capacity as the Chair of the SEANF, together with other SEANF members, to remove junta-controlled MNHRC from the SEANF without further delay."

The Working Group and ANNI stand ready to support SUHAKAM, together with like-minded institutions and civil society partners, in advancing a principled, people-centred human rights agenda for Southeast Asia.





Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS URGE ASEAN TO SET HARD DEADLINE FOR ENDING VIOLENCE UNDER PHILIPPINE CHAIRMANSHIP

A coalition of 11 Myanmar revolutionary organizations has formally called on ASEAN to adopt a "time-bound strategy" to halt the military junta's escalating atrocities, including indiscriminate airstrikes and forced conscription.

The joint statement, released on 27 January 2026, follows a landmark Stakeholder Engagement Meeting (SEM) held in Tagaytay last week, led by the Philippines' Foreign Affairs Secretary and ASEAN Special Envoy.

This was highlighted in relation to the SEM meeting involving ASEAN, Myanmar revolutionary forces, political groups, and civil society organizations.

The group which includes the National Unity Government (NUG), the All-Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), and the Rohingya Consultative Council (RCC)—urged the regional bloc to establish specific benchmarks for stopping village burnings and heavy artillery shelling.

The SEM meeting was led by the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs and the ASEAN Special Envoy to Myanmar, with representatives from the

National Unity Government (NUG), ethnic armed organizations (EOs), and civil society organizations in attendance.

Furthermore, the statement explicitly declared that any political or electoral processes conducted amidst the violence do not align with ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and urged ASEAN not to recognize them.

Shortly after taking over the ASEAN chairmanship from Malaysia for this year, the Philippines, as the host, formally invited revolutionary forces and pro-democracy groups to convene this Stakeholder Engagement Meeting.

In their statement regarding the meeting, the revolutionary forces pointed out that the Myanmar issue is no longer just an internal affair; it directly threatens the security of neighbouring countries due to online scams, human trafficking, and drug issues. Consequently, they pressured ASEAN to adopt a "more decisive strategy."



Myanmar PDF fighters.  
Photo: Supplied

## MYANMAR RESISTANCE CONDEMNS MILITARY'S FAKE ELECTIONS AND CALLS ON ASEAN TO REJECT OUTCOME

On 29 January, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) condemned the Myanmar military junta's elections as illegitimate and urged the international community and ASEAN not to recognize the results, warning that doing so would worsen the political and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar.

The text of the statement is as follows.

We have already officially declared our position that the illegitimate military junta, having unjustly seized power in Myanmar, possesses no mandate to conduct an election; therefore, the sham election they organized lacks legitimacy. In addition, the results of the 2020 General Election remain politically valid, and the revolutionary forces will continue to fight until the objectives of the revolution are fully realized.

Based on the scenes and information regarding all three phases of this recently conducted sham election, it is evident that was carried out through various unjust methods including threats and oppression against the public to prolong the military dictatorship, regulations aimed solely at retaining their power, vote rigging such as the manipulation of advance votes, and forced voting. However, the entire populace did not cooperate and overwhelmingly opposed it. This clearly demonstrates that these were illegitimate sham elections devoid of any public support.

We respectfully record and honor every single individual who, amidst the brutal oppression of the terrorist military junta, exercised their fundamental human rights, stood on the side of truth and wish, and expressed their opposition by boycotting these illegitimate sham elections.

If the international community recognizes and cooperates with the results of these illegitimate sham elections, it will not resolve Myanmar's crisis but rather push it into a more complex and vicious cycle. Therefore, we demand that the international community refuse to accept the illegitimate outcomes emerging from the terrorist military's sham elections. We further urge them to refrain from any actions that would lend legitimacy as the government of Myanmar to the 'military-dominated scam government' that will emerge from these illegitimate results.

We also earnestly urge ASEAN, as a regional organization, to issue clear and firm declarations completely rejecting the results of the terrorist military's illegitimate sham elections and the resulting 'military-dominated scam government,' given the junta's total disregard for the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus.





## THAI FOREIGN MINISTER HOPES MYANMAR POLLS 'START OF TRANSITION' TO PEACE

Thailand's foreign minister said on 29 January that he hoped Myanmar's recent election would be the "start of a transition" that could lead to sustainable peace in the civil war-torn country.

Myanmar's pro-military party declared victory Monday in junta-run elections widely labelled a "sham" by rights groups.

Critics say the poll was stacked with army allies to prolong its grip on power after a 2021 coup that saw massively popular democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi detained and her party dissolved.

Speaking on the sidelines of an ASEAN retreat in the central Philippines, Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said he hoped the polls might pave the way to peace.

"It's not a perfect election, but we hope that it will be the start of the transition," he told reporters, with the end goal of a "sustainable solution".

Phuangketkeow later told AFP that Thailand had proposed what it termed "calibrated engagement", saying the country needed to be proactive given its status as Myanmar's next-door neighbour.

"It's not engagement that is meant to accord immediate legitimacy to the new government that will come to power after the election," he said in an interview, conceding the recent polls did not meet expectations "for many of us".

"But we hope that by way of engagement and by way of their positive response ... we can bring about positive changes. We have to try."

Theresa Lazaro, foreign minister of current ASEAN chair the Philippines, said "a good number" of the bloc's members held similar views, which she called "pragmatic".

"It's not an expression of support, but ... a view that these elections might be something positive," Lazaro said at a press briefing that concluded two days of meetings in Cebu.

"As far as the ASEAN collective, there is no endorsement at this time," she added.

### 'Sea of confrontation'

ASEAN foreign ministers had huddled a day earlier in a two-hour meeting devoted to the ongoing conflict in Myanmar.

The bloc's efforts to defuse Myanmar's ongoing civil war have centred around a five-point plan that Myanmar agreed to in 2021 but has borne little fruit.

But it is just one of several issues on Manila's plate during its year in the ASEAN chair.

The clock is also ticking on a proposed code of conduct between the 11-nation block and China in the South China Sea, where the Philippines, along with member states Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam, have contesting claims.

The crucial waterway has been the site of repeated clashes between Chinese and Philippine vessels.

With negotiations over the code having dragged on for more than two decades, Lazaro was asked Thursday if the aim of securing a deal this year was feasible.

"I would love to say (I have) a high level of confidence... but being a pragmatist, I would say that I cannot really predict," she said, adding issues of contention included the code's geographic scope and to what degree it would be legally binding.

Analysts have previously suggested that any pact China would agree to would likely lack teeth.

Thailand's Phuangketkeow told AFP that Beijing typically had shown little interest in negotiating with ASEAN members collectively.

"They don't like ASEAN to get together collectively and negotiate," he said.

"(The Chinese) should feel that it's in their interest to have the early conclusion of a code of conduct, which shows we're able to manage the issues, work towards a solution ... that prevents the South China Sea becoming the sea of confrontation."

AFP

## SAC-M CALLS FOR END TO TERROR IN MYANMAR FOLLOWING ELECTIONS

The Special Advisory Council-Myanmar (SAC-M) released a statement on 24 January calling for an end to the oppression and violence in Myanmar in the wake of three rounds of voting in the country's sham election process.

The text of the statement is as follows.

The junta's hollow spectacle has been staged in a desperate bid to attract international legitimacy. Yet no amount of electoral pageantry can refashion the junta as anything other than a fraudulent criminal enterprise.

According to calculations based on the junta's projections, at least 7.5 million people have been excluded from its process given the junta's limited territorial reach. Adding to this number, the junta this week announced that it had cancelled voting at a number of phase three polling stations.

In the areas where voting has gone ahead, turnout has been abysmally low. Widespread voter boycotts reflect deep public contempt for the junta and its ballot, which consists almost entirely of handpicked junta candidates. The country's most popular political parties have been deregistered or otherwise barred from participating in the junta's poll, and many prominent democratic leaders continue to languish in junta arbitrary detention.

The junta also continues to intensify its persecution of perceived opponents. On Tuesday, it announced that over 400 people had been prosecuted under its draconian Election Protection Law, which carries extreme penalties, ranging from prison sentences to the death penalty, for any act deemed critical of the process.

Civilians in vast areas of the country outside junta control face daily aerial bombardment by junta aircraft and artillery. Throughout the entire sham election process, schools, hospitals and homes have been targeted and scores of civilians have been killed by junta mass atrocity attacks from the air.

Significantly, ASEAN has confirmed that it will not certify the junta's sham process. Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan said the conditions for a credible election in Myanmar, set out by ASEAN leaders in October 2025, have not been met.

The junta's sham elections have lived up to all expectations in their absurdity, said Ben Lee, Executive Director of the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M). Any state, UN entity or company that legitimises the junta through engagement or recognition is complicit in its crimes.

Concrete action is urgently needed to hobble the junta and finally end its violence. States must tighten the screws on the junta through an expanded suite of targeted financial sanctions and arms embargoes, while expanding support to legitimate democratic actors including ethnic organisations, the National Unity Government and civil society organisations.

International action is also needed to hold junta members, including accused war criminal Min Aung Hlaing, accountable for their atrocities. States must encourage the International Criminal Court to expand its Myanmar investigation and to expedite its issuance of arrest warrants, endorse the ongoing genocide case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice, and support efforts by domestic courts using universal jurisdiction.



Photo: AFP

## HRM SAYS MYANMAR ELECTIONS FAIL INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

**M**yanmar's military-organised elections fail to meet basic international legal standards and cannot be considered genuine polls, a new report by Human Rights Myanmar (HRM) released on 26 January said.

The assessment by HRM stated that the vote breached five core principles required for legitimate elections under international human rights law. These include freedom of choice, universal suffrage and equality of the ballot.

The report evaluates the process against General Comment No. 25 of the UN Human Rights Committee, which outlines minimum criteria for credible elections.

The report acknowledged that while Myanmar has not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the standards within reflect binding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

According to the report, genuine political competition was impossible due to the dissolution of major opposition parties, including the National League for Democracy (NLD) – the winner of the 2020 election.

Prominent opposition leaders, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, remain jailed or in exile, preventing voters from choosing among competing political alternatives.

The analysis also documents widespread coercion,

alleging that the junta pressured civil servants, factory workers and displaced people to vote. This occurred through threats of job loss, loss of aid or military conscription. Polling stations were heavily militarised, undermining ballot secrecy, it said.

Millions were disenfranchised by ongoing conflict, with voting cancelled in at least 65 townships and no special provisions made for an estimated 3.5 million internally displaced people. Long-standing citizenship restrictions were also cited as excluding the Rohingya from participation.

Where voting did take place, the report said, equal suffrage was structurally impossible because Myanmar's 2008 constitution reserves 25 percent of parliamentary seats for unelected military appointees, ensuring continued dominance by the armed forces regardless of the outcome.

In addition, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party dominated the vote.

Human Rights Myanmar urged international governments to refuse recognition of the results, downgrade diplomatic engagement and expand targeted sanctions. They warned that accepting the process would "abandon the core principles of international law".



## AT LEAST 170 CIVILIANS KILLED IN MYANMAR AIR STRIKES DURING ELECTION: UN

**A**t least 170 civilians were killed in more than 400 military air strikes in Myanmar in the weeks surrounding its widely-criticised elections, the United Nations said 30 January.

Myanmar's month-long, three-phase vote, which wrapped up on Sunday, was imposed by the military in what democracy watchdogs dismissed as an attempt to rebrand army rule.

The UN rights office, which has been harshly critical of the elections, warned Friday that they had failed to respect fundamental human rights and that military attacks on the population had continued unabated.

"These elections did not prevent violence from continuing throughout 2025," James Rodehaver, head of the rights office's Myanmar team, told reporters in Geneva.

Speaking from Bangkok, he highlighted that 2025 was "the year in which more civilians died from airstrikes than any other since 2021", and that "air strikes continued even through election days".

The UN said "credible sources" had verified that at least "170 civilians were killed in some 408 military aerial attacks reported by open sources during the voting period", the nearly two months from early December.

Rodehaver warned though that the numbers could rise, pointing out that their verification was complicated since communications are cut off and due to "the fear of individuals in some of these locations to speak to us".

### 'Forcing people to the ballot box'

The UN rights office pointed to initial reports of a military air strike "on a populated area with no reported presence of combatants" that killed up to 50 civilians in Bhamo Township, in Kachin State on January 22.

To curb any dissent, the military had also arrested 324 men and 80 women under its unilaterally-adopted election protection law, including for minor online activity, the office said, decrying the "grossly disproportionate penalties" doled out.

In one case, it said a 49-year sentence was handed down for posting anti-election materials.

Five years after the coup that swept Myanmar's junta to power, UN rights chief Volker Turk warned that "the profound and widespread despair inflicted on the people of Myanmar has only deepened with the recent election staged by the military".

He pointed out that "many people chose either to vote or not to vote purely out of fear, flatly at odds with their internationally guaranteed civil and political rights -- and with ripple effects on their enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights".

"The conflict and insecurity continued unabated in large parts of the country. Opposition candidates and some ethnic groups were excluded," he said.

His office pointed out that the elections were held in only 263 of 330 townships, often exclusively in urban centres under military control, and limited in conflict areas.

"As a result, large segments of the population, especially the displaced and minorities, such as the ethnic Rohingya, were excluded," it pointed out.

Voter coercion was also reported nationwide.

In one incident on January 6, more than 100 villagers in the Sagaing region were arbitrarily detained and compelled to cast advance ballots, the rights office said.

Turk decried that five years of military rule in Myanmar had been "characterised by repression of political dissent, mass arbitrary arrests, arbitrary conscription, widespread surveillance and limitation of civic space".

"Now, the military is seeking to entrench its rule-by-violence after forcing people to the ballot box," he said.

AFP





Ko Ko Gyi, chairman of the People's Party.  
Photo: AFP

## PEOPLE'S PARTY CHAIRMAN LOSES LANMADAW SEAT AS USDP DOMINATES FINAL ELECTION PHASE

**K**o Ko Gyi, the prominent Chairman of the People's Party (PP) and a former leader of the 88 Generation Students, has been defeated in his bid for the Lanmadaw Township Pyithu Hluttaw seat, party officials confirmed on Monday.

"Ko Ko Gyi has lost. As usual, Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) secured victory with a strong lead from advance votes. The exact number of votes for Ko Ko Gyi is still being counted, so we do not yet know the final figures," Party Secretary 1 Kyaw Kyaw Htwe told Mizzima.

Yan Myo Aung Thein of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) secured the seat, reportedly bolstered by a significant margin of advance votes – a factor the People's Party has flagged as a source of "many controversies."

The defeat in Lanmadaw was part of a broader sweep by the USDP in Yangon's third phase election, where the People's Party also lost contested seats in Kyauktan and Sanchaung townships. While the PP managed to secure a total of eight seats during the first two phases, the final round on 25 January saw the party struggle against the USDP's well-funded and military-supported machinery.

The PP, USDP, National Unity Party (NUP), and People's Pioneer Party (PPP) contested the constituency. Detailed vote counts for each party have not yet been released.

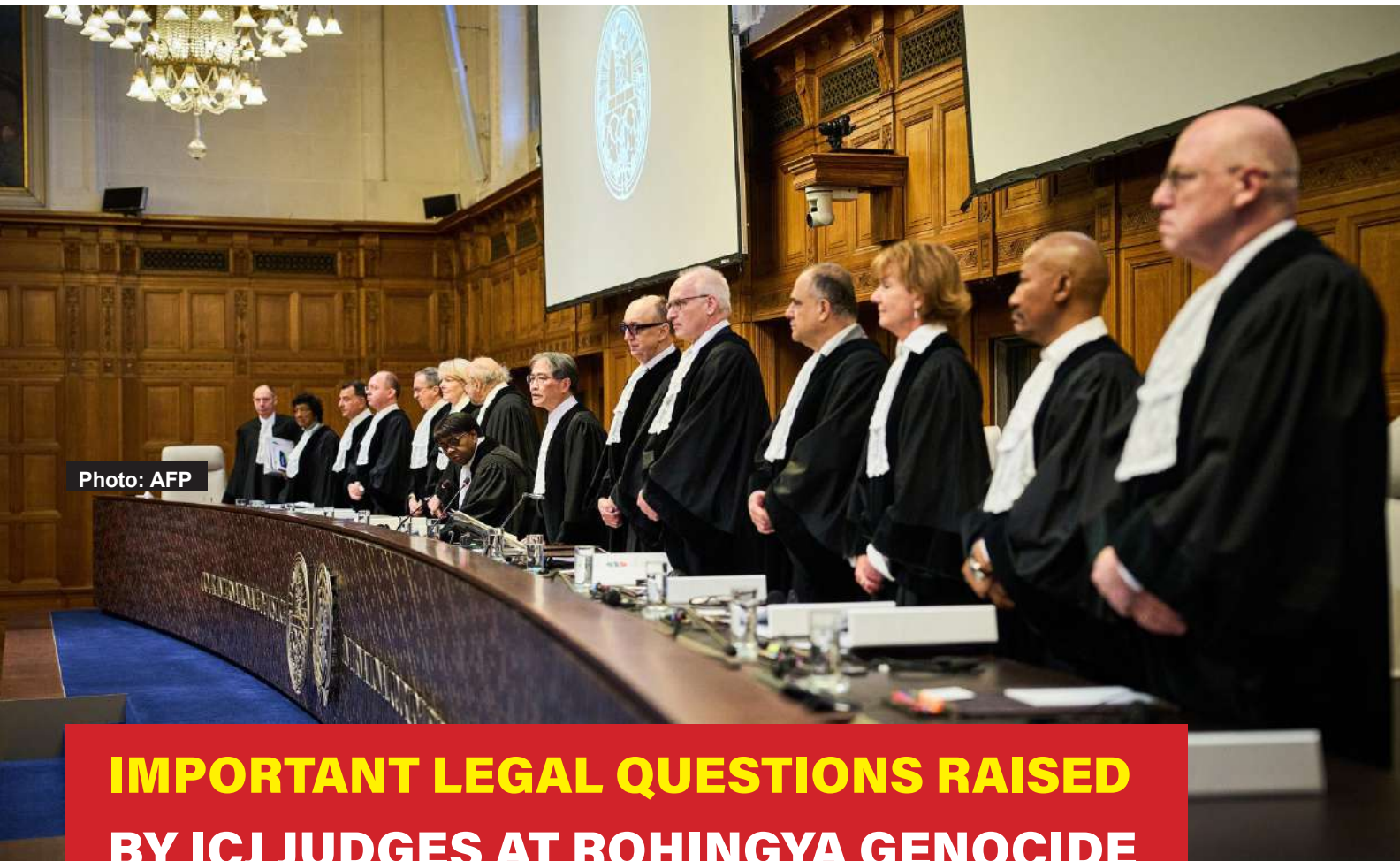
The third round of elections organized by the junta was held on 25 January in 61 townships. Residents in Yangon reported low voter turnout.

In the first and second rounds of the elections, held on 28 December and 11 January, the People's Party won one seat in the Amyotha Hluttaw Assembly and seven seats in regional and state Hluttaws.

The military-backed USDP won the majority of seats in the elections. According to the junta's Union Election Commission (UEC), the party has won 181 seats in the Pyithu Hluttaw, 52 seats in the Amyotha Hluttaw, and 238 seats in regional or state Hluttaws.

Political parties have said the elections were marred by problems related to voter lists and advance voting.

U Ko Ko Gyi, a former 88 Generation student leader, also contested the 2020 general election for the South Okkalapa Township seat during the National League for Democracy (NLD) government but was unsuccessful.



## IMPORTANT LEGAL QUESTIONS RAISED BY ICJ JUDGES AT ROHINGYA GENOCIDE HEARINGS

**O**n 27 January, the Legal Aid Network (LAN) released a statement calling attention to the important legal questions raised by judges to the Myanmar military and junta at the Rohingya genocide hearings before the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Judge Leonardo Nemer Caldeira Brant raised the following questions together with Judge Hilary Charlesworth and Judge Sarah Hull Cleveland. Judge Brant is a Brazilian jurist and international law scholar, Judge Charlesworth is an Australian international lawyer, and Judge Cleveland is an American judge, lawyer, law professor of Human and Constitutional Rights at Columbia Law School, New York, USA, and former State Department official

The text of the statement regarding the questions and LAN's analysis is as follows.

(1) "How does each Party characterize the nature of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), particularly with regard to its representativeness within the Rohingya population, its strength, its estimated size (including the number of individuals it considers to be members and/or effective participants), its organizational and hierarchical structure, and its military and weapons capabilities? In this regard, can Myanmar indicate the number and nature of the casualties and the extent of the material damage that it attributes to ARSA during the relevant periods, as an element informing its assessment of ARSA's operational and military capacity?"



(2) "Can Myanmar explain, with specificity, how it defined a 'supporter' of ARSA for purposes of its military operations?"

(3) "What specific criteria were used by soldiers on the ground during the military operations to identify persons considered to be lawful military targets, and how [were they] distinguished from civilians?"

(4) "How many of the casualties in the various villages, according to Myanmar's own records, were (using Myanmar's characterizations), members of 'ARSA or its supporters', how many were 'collateral casualties of the fighting' and how many of them were 'innocent civilians'?"

In summary, as a member of the Court, Judge Brant's work appears to be a part of the ICJ's broader contribution to interpreting and applying Law of War/ IHL, or international humanitarian law, particularly in the context of armed conflict, occupation, the principle of distinction and civilian protections.

The Law of War/ IHL primarily centers on the principle of distinction, requiring parties to always differentiate between civilians/civilian objects (protected) and combatants/military objectives (targets), and to direct attacks only at the latter, prohibiting attacks on people or things not involved in hostilities. This core rule aims to spare the civilian population, complemented by other principles like proportionality (limiting incidental harm) and precaution (taking care to avoid civilian casualties).

There lacks strong evidence indicating that the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) has systematically provided adequate training on the Law of War/ International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to its combatants,

particularly during its long history of internal conflicts and military rule since the 1962 coup.

Evidence confirms that the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) operates through a strict, top-down chain of command that prioritizes internal hierarchy and the suppression of opposition over the protection of civilians. Since the February 2021 coup, the military has engaged in a systematic campaign—often described as a "four cuts" doctrine—that disregards international humanitarian law (IHL), resulting in widespread, frequent, and brazen violations against civilian populations, including mass killings, sexual violence, and the deliberate obstruction of aid.

Based on findings from the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (UN-IIGFMM), Amnesty International, and other human rights reports, the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) operates with a pervasive culture of impunity, characterized by a lack of adherence to International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and a complete absence of political will to uphold democratic practices and to protect civilians. As such, for the military junta primarily led by Min Aung Hlaing, it is virtually impossible to respond to the above questions, raised by the ICJ Judges, appropriately, reasonably and truthfully in line with the Law of War/ IHL.



Paul Reichler. Photo: AFP

## GAMBIAN COUNSEL URGES ICJ TO REJECT MILITARY NARRATIVE AS LANDMARK ROHINGYA GENOCIDE HEARINGS CONCLUDE IN THE HAGUE

In a final push before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Gambian legal counsel Paul Reichler delivered a searing closing argument, asserting that Myanmar's military operations were a calculated attempt to destroy the Rohingya as an ethnic group rather than a legitimate response to insurgency.

Reichler stated that testimony from 42 witnesses collected by the UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) further substantiated the conclusions of the UN Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). He cited evidence showing that the military surrounded civilians in locations such as Chut Pyin village in northern Rakhine State, ordered that "every house be burned," and carried out brutal killings of pregnant women and children.

Reichler also included the names of witnesses in his case addressing military atrocities in Rakhine State, a move that responded to earlier criticisms raised by Myanmar's own lawyers. He argued that the systematic sexual violence against women was a deliberate strategy to force the Rohingya population to flee. He added that the military's actions were aimed not merely at expelling the Rohingya from the country but at the destruction of the entire ethnic group.

Reichler emphasized that the findings of the Fact-Finding Mission were not the work of a single body but were consistent with investigations conducted by numerous international organizations, including the US State Department, PILPG, Fortify Rights, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Amnesty International, the International Crisis Group, and Save the Children. He stressed that while each organization conducted its own independent investigation, all reached the same conclusion.

Myanmar has claimed that its military operations were aimed at suppressing the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), but Reichler argued that in reality the response targeted the entire civilian population. He also criticized arguments put forward by Myanmar's legal team, noting that they rely heavily on the military's own reports, statements from military officers, and coverage by military-controlled media, which he said lack credibility. Reichler urged the court to exercise particular caution when evaluating such evidence, warning that much of the information presented by Myanmar is under the direct control of the military.





Yangon. Photo: AFP

## WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF BURMA LOOKS BACK ON THE MYANMAR CONFLICT IN 2025

The Women's League of Burma (WLB) is launching a report entitled "Looking Back on 2025," which highlights the impact of ongoing armed conflict and the deepening political, economic, and humanitarian crisis in Burma/Myanmar on women, according to a press release 1 February.

The report sheds light on the challenges faced by WLB's member organizations working on the ground despite extreme security, financial, and operational constraints. It also presents key data from their work through infographics and some highlights of both WLB member organizations and WLB as an umbrella organization in 2025.

In 2025, WLB member organizations documented 209 cases of sexual and gender-based violence. They provided support to internally displaced persons (IDPs), Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) members, women human rights defenders (WHRDs), and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), as well as emergency assistance to those affected by the March 2025 earthquake.

- At least 54,311 IDPs (Female 31,382+ and Male 22,929+) in Bago, Sagaing, Tanintharyi regions, Karen, Karenni (Kayah) Mon and Shan states, Manipur State on the India Border and the Thailand Burma/Myanmar border area.

- 108 women CDMs in Kachin, Karenni (Kayah) states and Manipur State on Indian Border, 310

women's human rights defenders in Sagaing and Tanintharyi regions, Karenni (Kayah) and Shan states, and Manipur State on the Indian Border;

- 1,212 women survivors in Bago, Sagaing, Tanintharyi regions, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni (Kayah), Mon and Shan states, and the Thailand -Burma/Myanmar border area.

- 10,202 people affected by the earthquake in March 2025.

"Through this sham election, the junta will 'legitimate' itself and continue its military offensives across the country, committing war crimes against the people. So, we have to work harder to continue what we have been doing for decades," said Mye Ngei.

The report, "Looking Back on 2025," reiterates WLB's calls to the international community to reject the military junta's sham electoral process, pursue accountability through international justice mechanisms, implement a global arms embargo, protect and resource women's rights defenders, ensure meaningful political space for women-led organizations, and end impunity for violence against women and girls.

"Without decisive international action and sustained support for local actors, the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Burma/Myanmar will continue to deepen, with devastating consequences for millions of civilians," said Poe Dah



## ONE-MONTH-OLD INFANT AMONG EIGHT FAMILY MEMBERS KILLED IN DEVASTATING 500-POUND BOMBING OF LEYBO VILLAGE

**A** late-night airstrike by the Myanmar military has wiped out an entire family in Indaw Township, Sagaing Region, claiming the lives of eight local residents, including a one-month-old infant. At approximately 9 pm on 29 January, 2026, a junta jet fighter dropped two 500-pound bombs on Leybo Village, located near the resistance-held town of Mawlu.

"One bomb landed on the road in front of the house, and the other struck the back of the house. The bomb on the road damaged two houses facing each other," a local said.

According to the Indaw Revolution group, seven of the eight victims were from the same household,

with witnesses describing the impact as so severe that many bodies were found dismembered.

Residents of Leybo Village and neighbouring communities targeted by the airstrike fear further attacks, with some reportedly fleeing the area, local sources said.

The Voice of Mawlu group said the Military Commission is carrying out airstrikes, incitement, and propaganda in Mawlu to destabilize the area and erode public trust in the National Unity Government's (NUG) PDF and administrative bodies.






Photo: Minbu District People's Defense Force (PDF) Battalion 6

## **RESISTANCE FORCES DESTROY MINBU POLICE STATION IN RAPID ASSAULT TARGETING HOMETOWN OF MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER**

**R**evolutionary fighters from the Minbu District People's Defense Force (PDF) Battalion 6 seized and destroyed the Mong Taung village police station on 16 January, 2026, in a swift 15-minute operation.

After the assault, police personnel under the Military Commission who had fled the area later returned and began carrying out intensive inspections and checks on residents of Mong Taung village and surrounding villages, according to an official from Minbu District Battalion (6) of the People's Defense Force. Minbu is in Magway.

The attack, which targeted a strategic administrative hub in the birth district of junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, reportedly forced the entire police garrison to flee before resistance members confiscated weapons and supplies.

"After returning with a force of around 20 police personnel, they have been entering villages to carry out inspections and question residents," an official from Minbu District People's Defense Force Battalion (6) said.

Police personnel aligned with the Military Commission returned to the village on the morning of the attack and have been carrying out stringent checks on local residents through 30 January.

A statement issued by Minbu District People's Defense Force Battalion (6) said that all police officers fled the area immediately after revolutionary forces launched the assault.

The police station was seized within 15 minutes, as junta-aligned police reportedly fled immediately after the attack began. Revolutionary forces confiscated police equipment and various items that were said to have been looted from local residents, according to the statement.

Minbu District Battalion (6) said the attack was launched in response to repeated abuses by police at the Mong Taung station, including extortion, arbitrary arrests, and the forced conscription of young people.

The military commission's Light Infantry Battalions LIB (10) and LIB (88) are also located within Minbu Township.

The assault on the Mong Taung Police Station was carried out by Minbu District People's Defense Force Battalion (6), which stated that it neither accepted donations nor extorted money from any individuals, including business owners, in connection with the operation.



## **MYANMAR'S DISPLACEMENT CRISIS DEEPENS AMID ILLEGITIMATE ELECTIONS, LEAVING MILLIONS WITH NOWHERE TO FLEE**

**T**he Jesuit Refugee Service Asia Pacific (JRS Asia Pacific) and the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) have raised serious concerns over illegitimate elections held in Myanmar amid mass displacement and widespread human rights violations, as the country enters its fifth year of a deepening forgotten crisis.

Five years after the February 2021 military takeover, Myanmar remains under entrenched repression, with civilian harm continuing to escalate. The military has concluded an election process that lacks legitimacy, carried out amid active conflict, widespread insecurity, and the absence of conditions for the free expression of the Myanmar people's political will. At the same time, the military has intensified coercive measures, including repeated rounds of forced conscription of young people. These actions have gone hand in hand with increased airstrikes, rising civilian casualties, and mass displacement. The collapse of civilian protection

mechanisms, combined with severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms, economic breakdown, and worsening food insecurity, is driving an expanding humanitarian crisis. As protection and essential services are dismantled, millions are being pushed into life-threatening conditions, with no means of safety or relief.

As of January 2026, Myanmar's displacement crisis has reached an estimated 3.6 million internally displaced persons. In parallel, at least 204,300 people have fled to neighbouring countries since February 2021, including approximately 62,400 people displaced to India and an estimated 141,900 people displaced to Bangladesh, alongside continued displacement to Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

"Since the election timeline was announced, many camp residents have said that the junta's organised



election is just a political act without real meaning," says a humanitarian worker supporting refugees in Thailand. "The election does not represent my political will at all. There are no genuinely competitive candidates or independent political parties. It feels like the election is only among SAC and SAC-backed individuals or parties. If the SAC gains legitimacy through this election, they will continue to hold power and create even more problems for civilians."

"I am deeply worried that our displacement will last even longer. Displaced people are already exhausted. This situation has continued for five years now. Many of us are tired of living in uncertainty. We want to go home. I want to go home and live in peace," says a person displaced within Myanmar.

Since the military takeover, widespread and systematic violations of international human rights and humanitarian law have been documented across Myanmar. According to the Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar (ISP Myanmar), data last updated in May 2025 shows that since the 2021 coup, the State Administration Council (SAC) has carried out at least 11,916 airstrikes nationwide. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reports more than 30,351 arrests and at least 7,736 verified civilian deaths, including 1000 children and 2,033 women.

Education has been severely impacted by the conflict. Schools have been damaged or destroyed, and the use of landmines and other explosive ordnance has put children at heightened risk. According to UNICEF Myanmar, data shows that during the first half of 2025, at least 357 casualties from landmines and other explosive ordnance were recorded nationwide, including 96 children. Health care has also been deliberately targeted. Insecurity Insight documented at least 1,820 incidents of violence against health care in Myanmar between 1 February 2021 and 11 November 2025.

The enforcement of the People's Military Service Law has become a significant driver of forced displacement. By 10 February 2026, the law will have been in effect for two years, during which the military has opened 20 training batches of an estimated 5,000 recruits each, amounting to an estimated 100,000 individuals forcibly conscripted as of December 2025. The threat and implementation of compulsory military service have triggered widespread flight, particularly among young people, as civilians seek to evade recruitment, further intensifying displacement.

The electoral process was deliberately engineered as a managed electoral exercise that excludes meaningful participation and cannot confer democratic legitimacy. As of January 2026, the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) reported that, based on the junta's own projections, at least 7.5 million people have been excluded from the electoral process due to the junta's limited territorial control. The exclusion of millions of internally displaced persons and refugees was compounded by the dissolution of opposition political parties and the crackdown on freedom of expression. Over 400 people have been prosecuted under the junta's Election Protection Law, further entrenching an environment in which no electoral outcome can reflect genuine political participation.

## Recommendations

ASEAN Member States must move beyond declaratory commitments under the Five-Point Consensus by supporting verifiable measures to secure an immediate ceasefire. ASEAN's engagement must be grounded in direct consultation with local civil society organisations, exclude the military junta from all ASEAN mechanisms and forums, ensure that dialogue on humanitarian action is shaped by voices from affected communities, and further facilitate an inclusive political consultation aimed at sustainable resolution of the Myanmar crisis.

Thailand should strengthen the implementation of its existing refugee and asylum frameworks to expand equitable access for refugees residing in the nine temporary shelters along the Thai-Myanmar border. Access to the right to work remains constrained by procedural and administrative barriers. This effort should be accompanied by targeted support for safe and sustainable transitions to lawful employment, including labour rights orientation, skills development, and language training. The government should also address persistent protection gaps affecting the most vulnerable groups and mitigate heightened risks resulting from reduced humanitarian assistance and growing reliance on external aid. This must also include newly arrived asylum seekers residing outside formal camp settings, ensuring access to humanitarian assistance and protection services.

ASEAN Member States, including the Philippines, are urged to refrain from engagement with Myanmar's military in all forms, including in relation to electoral processes, and to ensure that all bilateral and multilateral engagement does not legitimize military rule. Such engagement undermines accountability efforts and contributes to impunity for ongoing and future human rights violations.

ASEAN Member States should strengthen regional cooperation to prevent and respond to trafficking in persons, including exploitation in scam operations, through a human rights-based and victim-centred approach. States should ensure, through appropriate legal and procedural safeguards, that victims of trafficking are not subject to criminal liability for acts committed as a direct consequence of their exploitation.

ASEAN Member States must address transnational repression linked to Myanmar, including forced return, expulsion, deportation, abduction, enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest or detention, as well as threats, intimidation, coercion, and reprisals against refugees, asylum seekers, and members of diaspora

communities. States must uphold the principle of non-refoulement and refrain from any conduct that would expose individuals to a real risk of torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, or violations of the rights to life, liberty, and security of a person, with particular attention to the protection needs and best interests of children.

UN Member States must take concrete action to end impunity for war crimes in Myanmar by supporting accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court (ICC), International Court of Justice (ICJ), and Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), through information-sharing, facilitating investigations, backing the ICC's ongoing proceedings, supporting the ICJ case under the Genocide Convention, enabling universal jurisdiction, and considering Article 14 referrals and interventions in The Gambia's case, while scaling up sustained support for human rights monitoring and documentation, including civil society and community-led efforts, and strengthening enabling conditions and access at all levels.

All States, including UN Member States and international and regional actors, should neither recognise nor engage, directly or indirectly, with any military-controlled electoral process or staged event in Myanmar, nor with any outcome, successor authority, or related mechanism arising from such processes. Electoral processes conducted amid violence, mass displacement, and restrictions on fundamental freedoms cannot be considered free, fair, or representative. Participation under such conditions is systematically constrained by fear and coercion, including the effective disenfranchisement of displaced and conflict-affected populations.



Myawaddy. Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA JET FIGHTERS DROP 500-POUND BOMBS NEAR MYAWADDY AS BATTLE FOR STRATEGIC SCAM HUBS INTENSIFIES

**P**owerful explosions from 500-pound bombs dropped by Myanmar military jet fighters shook the Thai-Myanmar border on the morning of 28 January as intense fighting continued between junta forces and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)-led joint forces.

Local residents in Mae Sot, Thailand, reported that the vibrations were strong enough to rattle windows and move furniture across the town, with the sounds of heavy artillery making sleep "impossible" for several days.

"The entire house shook, especially the windows. Since yesterday and the night before, we have been hearing what sounded like heavy artillery," a Mae Sot resident said.

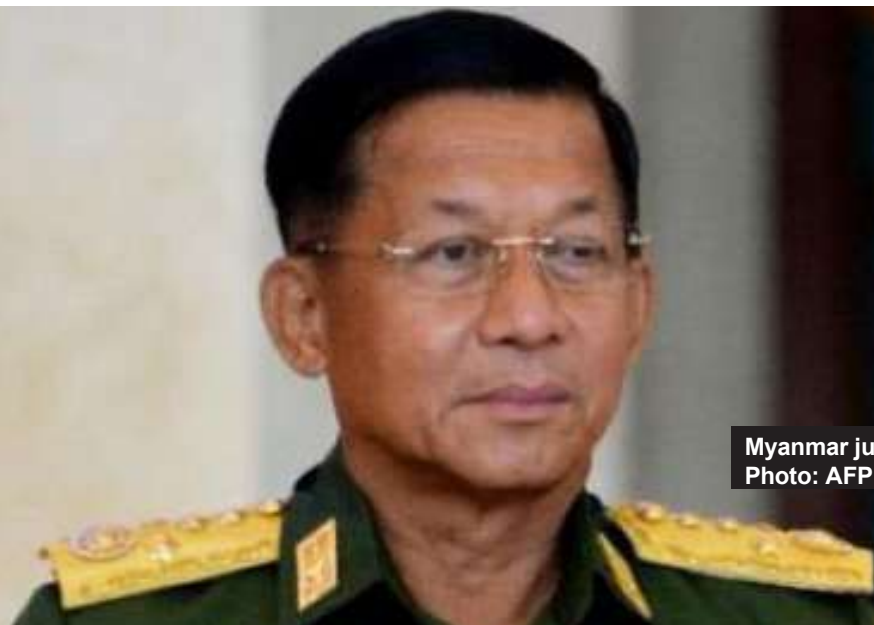
A migrant worker in Mae Sot said, "Where I live, the noise was so intense, it had made sleep impossible. It has become noticeably worse over the past two or three days. Heavy artillery fire is frequent at night, but today was the most violent."

The current escalation is cantered in the southern Myawaddy area between Phalu and Min Let Pan villages.

Clashes between junta forces and the KNLA-led joint forces have intensified in the area over the past week. The junta has been carrying out a military offensive in the area since November 2025.

According to a military analyst, the primary objective of the junta's advance toward Min Let Pan is to retake online scam compounds that were previously seized, adding that the border area is strategically important for maintaining territorial control.

As a result of the fighting and junta attacks, many residents from nearby villages including Min Let Pan, Ingyin Myaing, Phalu, and Phalu Lay have been forced to flee their homes.



Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.  
Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR ACTING PRESIDENT EXTENDS STATE OF EMERGENCY, MARTIAL LAW ACROSS 63 CONFLICT-HIT TOWNSHIPS

In a move that further tightens military control following the conclusion of the three-phase general election, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, in his dual capacity as Acting President and Commander-in-Chief, has extended the state of emergency and martial law in 63 townships for an additional 90 days.

The order, officially signed on 29 January, 2026, delegates full executive and judicial authority in these areas to the Commander-in-Chief, effectively bypassing civilian administrative channels as the junta transitions toward a new government framework.

The affected townships span 10 states and regions, representing territories where resistance forces have made significant territorial gains or where active conflict remains intense. This marks the second extension of the emergency measure since it was initially declared on 31 July, 2025, to "effectively maintain regional peace, stability, and the rule of law" during the election period.

In Kachin State, the affected townships are Sumprabum, Shwegu, Ingyanyan, Sawlaw, and Chipwe. In Karenni (Kayah) State, the declaration applies to Shadaw, Hpasawng, and Mase townships, while Kayin State includes Kawkareik and Kya-in-Seikkyi townships.

The order also covers Chin State, including Kanpetlet, Thantlang, Paletwa, Tonzang, Mindat, Matupi, and Falam townships. In Sagaing Region,

the designated areas are Htigyaing, Kawlin, Pinlebu, Khin U, Wetlet, Kani, Debayin, Pale, and Indaw, while Magway Region includes Pauk, Myaing, Saw, Htilin, and Yesakyo townships.

Additionally, the state of emergency extends to Mandalay Region, covering Mogok, Singu, and Ngazun townships. In Rakhine State, the affected townships are Ramree, Pauktaw, Ponnagyun, Rathedaung, Gwa, Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Kyauktaw, Minbya, Myebon, Mrauk-U, Thandwe, Ann, and Taungup.

In Shan State, the declaration applies to Namtu, Mabein, Kutkai, Namhkam, Hsenwi, Kunlong, Namhsam, Mantung, Hopang, Laukkai, Kongyan, Moe Meik, Kyaukme, Hsipaw, and Mongla townships.

The humanitarian impact of the ongoing conflict remains severe. According to the latest UN OCHA and UNHCR data released on 26 January, 2026, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has reached a record 3,685,200, with approximately 3.6 million displaced specifically since the 2021 coup.

Despite the military's claims of a "pivotal year" and the successful conclusion of polls, the extension of martial law signals that vast swaths of the country remain outside the regime's effective administrative control as it prepares to convene the new Parliament in March.



Photo: Mizzima

## **MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER APPROVES PAY HIKE FOR LAWMAKERS AS USDP PREPARES TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT**

Following the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party's (USDP) claimed landslide victory in the recent three-phased general election, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has signed a directive increasing daily allowances for the incoming parliamentarians and regional administrators.

Under the new order issued on 28 January, daily accommodation allowances for national and regional Hluttaw representatives will rise from 5,000 to 8,000 kyats, while miscellaneous expenses will increase to 7,000 kyats and daily honoraria will double to 20,000 kyats benefits that remain separate from their monthly salaries of 1,000,000 kyats for national MPs and 500,000 kyats for regional representatives.

This financial adjustment comes as the USDP secures an overwhelming supermajority, with early data showing the party won at least 471 of the 607 seats declared by the end of the second phase, alongside the military's guaranteed 25% legislative bloc.

A former lawmaker from the National League for Democracy (NLD) government said that during their term, representatives received a combined total of 20,000 kyats per day to cover expenses and travel or accommodation costs on days they attended parliamentary sessions.

"These amounts are paid only on days when parliament is in session. Sessions are not continuous, sometimes they run for about two and a half months, while at other times there may be no sessions for several months. Travel costs also depend on how far a representative has to travel," said a former Yangon Region lawmaker.

Data from Data for Myanmar show that of the 607 representatives declared winners as of "Phase 2" of the junta's elections, 471 are members of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

The junta conducted the elections in three phases: Phase 1 on 28 December across 102 townships, Phase 2 on 11 January in 100 townships, and Phase 3 on 25 January covering 63 townships.

While the junta leader has pledged to convene the new Parliament in March and transfer "state responsibilities" to the winning government by April, the National Unity Government (NUG) and international observers continue to denounce the polls as a sham designed to formalize military dominance under a civilian facade.



Photo: Supplied

## LT. GEN. PHONE MYAT APPOINTED HOME MINISTER IN MAJOR CABINET RESHUFFLE FOLLOWING MYANMAR GENERAL ELECTION

In a significant leadership change following the conclusion of the three-phase general election, the military junta's National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) has appointed Lt. Gen. Phone Myat as the new Union Minister for Home Affairs.

The announcement, published in state-controlled newspapers on 28 January 2026, follows Order No. 4/2026 signed by Executive Chief Aung Lin Dwe.

Lt. Gen. Phone Myat, an alumnus of the Officers Training School (OTS-73), transitions to this key role from his most recent positions as Adjutant General and Commander of the Bureau of Special Operations 5 (BSO-5). He replaces Lt. Gen. Tun Tun Naung, who has been reassigned to his original military duties after serving as Home Minister since January 2025.

This reshuffle is seen as a move to consolidate high-level military oversight within the Ministry of

Home Affairs as the junta prepares to transition to a new government framework in April 2026.

Lt. Gen. Tun Tun Naung, who was removed from his post, graduated from the 25th intake of the Defence Services Academy and was in the same batch as the current junta Minister of Transport and Communications, former Gen. Mya Tun Oo, and former Gen. Aung Lin Dwe, a member of the junta.

The junta has also recently reshuffled the deputy minister posts within the Ministry of Home Affairs.

On 23 January, it was announced that Deputy Home Affairs Minister Maj. Gen. Aung Kyaw Kyaw was returned to his original military duties and replaced by Maj. Gen. Min Thu, the Deputy Chief of the Office of the Chief of Military Security Affairs.





## MYANMAR JUNTA AIR FORCE LAUNCHES 11 AIRSTRIKES IN FALAM AS REINFORCEMENT COLUMNS STRUGGLE TO RETAKE STRATEGIC BORDER TOWN

The Myanmar military has intensified its aerial campaign over Falam Township, launching 11 separate airstrikes on 27 January 2026, in a desperate attempt to support ground columns that have been stalled by Chin resistance forces for over three months.

The confrontation began after a military convoy arrived from Kalay Township in Sagaing Region on 20 January. The convoy later engaged Chin forces between Bar Lone and Zaung Lay villages, about 40 miles from Falam, on 26 January. The following day, on 27 January, the air force carried out repeated strikes, dropping 58 bombs in 11 separate attacks between 10:07 am and 10:46 am, Chin military source said.

“Air strikes happen almost daily with Y12 aircraft. If they are not bombing, they are dropping supplies such as food and ammunition for their troops,” a Chin military source told Mizzima.

The source added that junta troops may have suffered casualties during the fighting, but the number and details have not yet been confirmed.

Since the end of October 2025, two military columns of around 500 troops each have been advancing toward Falam from the Kalaymyo–Thaing Ngin–Kalay Wai Bula route. Falam Township is under Chin resistance control, and clashes with Chin joint forces have continued. After three months of fighting, the junta columns have reportedly been unable to advance beyond the villages

of Khuangli and Sumhrang, located more than 10 miles from the town.

Due to heavy losses, arrests during the fighting, and cases of soldiers switching sides and taking refuge with Chin resistance forces, the junta is now sending additional reinforcements. Another column of about 200 to 300 troops, along with vehicles, is being deployed to strengthen the offensive.

“If the next column is coming along the road, it is about halfway between the previous two columns. If it can continue to advance, we need to see if it will merge with the previous columns or not,” said Salai Tin Mi Htut, spokesperson for the Falam-based Chin National Defence Force (CNDF), on the evening of 27 January.

Military observers warn that if the junta manages to retake Falam, it could open the way for further offensives toward Rikhawdar and Hakha, key trading towns along the India–Myanmar border.

Falam was captured by the Chin Brotherhood and allied forces in April 2025. It is currently defended by the Chin State Council and its armed groups, including the Chin National Army (CNA).

Meanwhile, the fighting has displaced more than 10,000 residents across the township. Aid workers say urgent assistance is needed, including food, medicine, and shelter for those forced to flee.



Photo: Supplied

## NUG AND ETHNIC GROUPS DISCUSS FORMATION OF "FEDERAL COUNCIL" TO UNITE MYANMAR REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP

The National Unity Government (NUG), along with major ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs), is in active negotiations to establish a new joint coalition aimed at providing unified leadership for the resistance in 2026.

U Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson for the NUG Prime Minister's Office, confirmed to Mizzima that this unified body is a "necessary requirement" to address the shifting political landscape and the junta's recent electoral manoeuvres.

As discussions with the relevant revolutionary forces are still underway, the name of the proposed new body cannot yet be disclosed, he said, adding that the public would be informed once concrete outcomes emerge.

According to sources close to the negotiations, high-level meetings were held from 23 to 25 January involving the NUG, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), and the Mandalay Region Interim Administration Council. While the official name is being kept confidential until a formal announcement, the term "Federal Council" is reportedly being used as a working title.

"I heard the proposed name is the Federal Council. As the name is still temporary and subject to ongoing negotiations, I believe they do not want it made public at this stage," the source said.

The coalition is expected to consolidate the diverse governance and military structures of the NUG and the NUCC with the territorial authorities of federal units in Kachin, Kayah, Karen, and Chin states.





## RIGHTS GROUPS WARN OF RISING JUNTA ATROCITIES FIVE YEARS AFTER MYANMAR COUP

On 29 January, Amnesty International, Fortify Rights, and Human Rights Watch issued a joint statement calling attention to the escalation of atrocities in Myanmar by the military junta since the military coup five years ago. They called for urgent accountability and support for the people of Myanmar, citing widespread war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The statement is as follows.

United Nations Security Council members, governments in the region, and other concerned states should better support Myanmar's people and act to hold the junta accountable for its crimes. The heavily controlled elections, held in three phases between December 28, 2025, and January 25, 2026, have been widely dismissed as fraudulent and organized to ensure the military-backed party's electoral victory.

"It's no accident that this election has been made possible through increased human rights abuses, from arbitrary detention to unlawful attacks on civilians, which has been the military's modus operandi for decades," said Ejaz Min Khant, human rights specialist at Fortify Rights. "As this crisis stretches into its sixth year, governments should focus on accountability and justice efforts for the many crimes committed by Myanmar's military, without which the country cannot move forward."

Since the coup, the junta has systematically banned dozens of political parties and detained more than 30,000 political prisoners. In January, the junta reported

that it had taken legal action against more than 400 people under an "election protection" law passed in July criminalizing criticism of the election by banning speech, organizing, or protest that disrupts any part of the electoral process.

The elections have served as a centerpiece for the junta's attempts to crush all political opposition, derail efforts to restore civilian rule, and entrench the military-controlled state. As expected, and by design, preliminary election results indicate a landslide victory for the military proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party.

China and Russia, the junta's primary suppliers of aircraft and arms, both sent election observers to the polls. The two countries have long supported the junta while blocking international action on military atrocities at the UN Security Council. Malaysia, last year's chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, said the bloc has not sent observers to certify the polls.

In expanded military operations ahead of the elections, the junta in 2025 ramped up its use of airstrikes, including deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure in violation of international humanitarian law. Airstrikes have hit schools, hospitals, religious sites, and camps for displaced people, killing thousands over the past year.

The military has also increasingly used armed drones, paramotors, and gyrocopters in unlawful

attacks, creating new threats to civilians. On October 6, a military paramotor attack on a Buddhist festival in Sagaing Region killed at least 24 people, including three children. More than 135 paramotor attacks have been reported since December 2024. Myanmar is one of very few countries that continue to use internationally banned cluster munitions and antipersonnel landmines.

"The past five years are a bleak illustration of the Myanmar military's failed strategy to assert control by killing and terrorizing civilians," said Joe Freeman, Myanmar researcher at Amnesty International. "Military air and drone strikes reached new highs in 2025 as the junta intensified its already brutal campaign against opposition areas, leaving more and more people living in fear of bombs falling from the sky."

Since enacting a conscription law in February 2024, the junta has used abusive tactics such as abducting young men and boys and detaining family members of missing conscripts as hostages. The military's recruitment and use of child soldiers has surged since the coup.

Since the coup, more than 2,200 people have reportedly died in junta custody, although the actual figure is likely higher. Torture, sexual violence, and other ill-treatment are rampant in prisons, interrogation centers, military bases, and other detention sites, with reports of rape, beatings, prolonged stress positions, electric shock and burning, denial of medical care, and deprivation of food, water, and sleep. In July, Ma Wutt Yee Aung, a 26-year-old activist, died in Insein prison due to reported lack of medical treatment for long-term head injuries from torture.

Following the March 2025 earthquake that struck central Myanmar, the junta obstructed access to lifesaving services in opposition-held areas. The junta's years of unlawful attacks on healthcare facilities and health workers severely hampered the emergency response. Despite announcing a ceasefire, the military carried out more than 550 attacks in the two months following the quake.

Military abuses and spiraling fighting have internally displaced at least 3.6 million people. Foreign aid cuts, skyrocketing prices, and restrictions on medical care and humanitarian supplies have exacerbated malnutrition, waterborne illness, and preventable deaths. Over 15 million people are facing acute food insecurity, with Rakhine State especially impacted.

Millions who have fled the country face increasing threats and risk of forced returns.

Since late 2023, Rohingya civilians have been caught amid fighting between the junta and ethnic Arakan Army forces. The Arakan Army has imposed oppressive measures against Rohingya in northern Rakhine State, including forced labor and arbitrary detention.

Since the coup, trafficking, scam centers, unregulated resource extraction, drug production, and other illicit operations have proliferated. Online scam centers along Myanmar's border with Thailand—run by global criminal syndicates led by Chinese nationals—largely rely on human trafficking, forced labor, and torture to run their scams, which are part of a multibillion-dollar industry across the region.

The military's widespread and systematic abuses have been fueled by decades of impunity and insufficient international efforts to end its violations.

Accountability measures underway at the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court (ICC) are vital but remain limited to atrocities prior to the coup. In November 2024, the ICC prosecutor requested an arrest warrant for commander-in-chief Sr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing for alleged crimes against humanity committed in 2017; the judges have yet to issue a public decision on the request.

The UN Security Council has been largely deadlocked, failing to follow up on its December 2022 resolution, which denounced the military's post-coup abuses, with tangible measures due to opposition from China and Russia.

Security Council members should outline targeted accountability measures to be taken against the junta for its refusal to comply with the council resolution and numerous other international calls. Holding regular open meetings on Myanmar can help build momentum for a follow-up resolution referring the whole country situation to the ICC and instituting a global embargo on arms and jet fuel.

"Five years after the coup, Myanmar's human rights and humanitarian catastrophe faces dwindling foreign assistance and attention," said Shayna Bauchner, Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch. "Ending this crisis requires sustained international pressure, meaningful accountability, and concrete humanitarian, political, and technical support for those in Myanmar and the millions forced to flee."



The defendants in court.  
Photo: AFP

## CHINA EXECUTES 11 LINKED TO MYANMAR SCAM COMPOUNDS

China executed 11 people linked telecom scam operations, on 29 January, state media reported, as Beijing toughens its response to the sprawling, transnational industry.

Fraud compounds where scammers lure internet users into fake romantic relationships and cryptocurrency investments have flourished across Southeast Asia, including in the lawless borderlands of Myanmar.

Initially largely targeting Chinese speakers, the criminal groups behind the compounds have expanded operations into multiple languages to steal from victims around the world.

Those conducting the scams are sometimes willing con artists, and other times trafficked foreign nationals forced to work.

In recent years, Beijing has stepped up cooperation with regional governments to crack down on the compounds, and thousands of people have been repatriated to face trial in China's opaque justice system.

The 11 people executed Thursday were sentenced to death in September by a court in the eastern Chinese city of Wenzhou, state news agency Xinhua said, adding that the court also carried out the executions.

Crimes of those executed included "intentional homicide, intentional injury, unlawful detention, fraud and casino establishment", Xinhua said.

The death sentences were approved by the Supreme People's Court in Beijing, which found that the evidence produced of crimes committed since 2015 was "conclusive and sufficient", the report said.

Among the executed were "key members" of the notorious "Ming family criminal group", whose activities had contributed to the deaths of 14 Chinese citizens and injuries to "many others", Xinhua added.

### Fighting fraud 'cancer'

Fraud operations centred in Myanmar's border regions have extracted billions of dollars from around the world through phone and internet scams.

Experts say most of the centres are run by Chinese-led crime syndicates working with Myanmar militias.

The fraud activities -- and crackdowns by Beijing -- are closely followed in China.

Asked about the latest executions, a spokesman for Beijing's foreign ministry said that "for a while, China has worked with Myanmar and other countries to combat cross-border telecom and internet fraud".

"China will continue to deepen international law enforcement cooperation" against "the cancer of gambling and fraud", spokesman Guo Jiakun told a regular press conference.

The September rulings that resulted in Thursday's executions also included death sentences with two-year reprieves to five other individuals.

Another 23 suspects were given prison sentences ranging from five years to life.

In November, Chinese authorities sentenced five people to death for their involvement in scam operations in Myanmar's Kokang region.

Their crimes had led to the deaths of six Chinese nationals, according to state media reports.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime warned in April that the cyberscam industry was spreading across the world, including to South America, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and some Pacific Islands.

The UN has estimated that hundreds of thousands of people are working in scam centres globally.

AFP





## FACEBOOK DELETES 270 ACCOUNTS TIED TO MYANMAR MILITARY'S BUSINESS AND PROPAGANDA EFFORTS

Justice For Myanmar release a statement on 27 January that Facebook removed 270 military-linked pages and profiles in January, urging other tech companies to ban accounts supporting war crimes.

The statement is as follows.

The majority of the accounts taken down were selling Mytel products and services, with additional accounts relating to other subsidiaries and brands of the military conglomerates Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) and Myanma Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL). These included accounts related to the telecom network MECtel, Innwa and MWD banks, Sinnmin Cement, Myanmar and Dagon beer brands, Nan Myaing Cafe and Indoor Skydiving.

Facebook also removed the military propaganda accounts a Light for Justice 3, News Service Station and Myanmar Information Community.

These accounts were supporting a military that is committing war crimes and crimes against humanity with total impunity.

Justice For Myanmar had reported the military related accounts in recent days and thanks all those who shared information with us.

We demand Alphabet, Apple, TikTok and Telegram ban Myanmar military business and propaganda accounts now!



## **FORTIFY RIGHTS REPORT DESCRIBES MYANMAR JUNTA'S INCREASED USE OF PARAMOTORS AND GYROCOPTERS IN ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS**

**M**yanmar's military junta has sharply increased aerial attacks on civilians using low-cost paramotors and gyrocopters, marking a deadly shift in tactics ahead of its disputed elections, rights group Fortify Rights said in a report on 26 January.

In a new investigation, the group documented at least 304 attacks involving the ultralight aircraft between December 2024 and mid-January 2026. The attacks were largely concentrated in Sagaing, Magway and Mandalay Regions of central Myanmar.

Paramotors and gyrocopters are small, slow-flying aircraft normally used for recreation, but have been adapted to drop unguided explosives at low altitude in Myanmar. This has allowed for what Fortify Rights described as relatively precise strikes on civilian targets. The attacks have hit schools, hospitals, monasteries and residential areas, the report said.

One of the deadliest incidents occurred on 6 October 2025, when a paramotor bombed a candle-light vigil marking the Buddhist festival of Thadingyut

and protesting elections planned for later in the year. The bombing killed at least 24 civilians, including children.

Fortify Rights said the spike in attacks coincided with the junta's efforts to assert control and intimidate communities ahead of the multi-phase polls, which began on 28 December. The group warned that the tactics appeared deliberately aimed at unarmed civilians in areas lacking air defences. Used in this way potentially constitutes war crimes under international humanitarian law.

Former air force personnel interviewed by Fortify Rights said the aircraft were cheap, easy to assemble and could evade existing jet fuel sanctions, making them attractive for prolonged use.

"The Myanmar military has found new ways to kill civilians from the sky," said Chit Seng, a researcher at Fortify Rights, calling on governments to tighten sanctions on weapons, aviation fuel and dual-use technologies.





## MYANMAR JUNTA FORCES RESPOND TO 'SITTAUNG RIVER VALLEY VICTORY OPERATION' WITH INTENSIFIED ARSON AND LOW-ALTITUDE AIR ATTACKS IN PHYU TOWNSHIP

A joint force of military junta troops, including the Southern Command, Light Infantry Division (LID) 77, and Military Operations Command 6, has launched a wide-scale scorched-earth campaign across the west bank of the Sittaung River, torching homes in Ywa Thit, Kyein Kha Kone, and Mau Bin villages.

The offensive, which began on 11 January, has displaced an estimated tens of thousands of civilians from at least 12 villages, including Nat Laung, Kanyin Chaung, and Nga To Khin, as residents flee into open fields and wooded areas to escape near-daily bombardments.

"The number of people fleeing the fighting is likely in the tens of thousands, though the exact figure is unknown," a resistance military source said, adding that those assisting IDPs can only help nearby residents as people flee in groups into fields outside the village.

No local residents were reported killed in the arson attacks, but numerous homes were destroyed.

The column has forced residents to flee from Kyein Kha Kone, Thanee Kaung, In Kone, Mau Pin, Nat Laung,

Thaphan Pin, Thayet Oak, Kanyin Chaung, Ywa Thit, Hle Done, Za Lote and Nga To Khin villages.

Resistance military sources report that the junta has integrated unconventional low-altitude tactics into their assault, deploying gyrocopters and paramotors alongside Mi-35 helicopters and jet fighters from the Taungoo airbase.

In addition to these air strikes, Light Infantry Battalion 439 and Infantry Battalion 307 are reportedly using 122mm howitzers and 120mm mortars to target areas around Nat Than Kwin and Kanyutkwin, while kamikaze drones are being used extensively to strike resistance-held pockets.

This surge in violence is part of a desperate push by the military to regain territory following the "Sittaung River Valley Victory Operation" launched by joint resistance forces earlier this month, which shifted frontline positions across 26 townships in Bago Region and resulted in the reported deaths of over 50 junta soldiers.





The handover. Photo: AFP

## THAI ARMY RETURNS 68 ESCAPEES FROM KARENNI RESISTANCE-RUN PRISON TO MYANMAR MILITARY

**T**he Thai Army has repatriated 68 inmates who escaped from a resistance-run prison in Karenni State last week. They were handed over to the Myanmar military at the No. 2 Thailand-Myanmar Friendship Bridge on the afternoon of 26 January, 2026.

"Yesterday morning, they departed Mae Hong Son and were turned over in the afternoon. Thailand adheres to the policy that these people must be returned to their home country if they are members of a certain Myanmar military or unit due to bilateral agreements in place," a source said.

The group was part of a mass jailbreak on 18 January of 81 inmates from Prison No. 2 in Mese Township, an area largely controlled by anti-junta forces.

According to the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC), the escapees included high-profile prisoners of war (POWs), among them a middle-ranking junta officer holding the rank of major. While 13 prisoners were recaptured by Karenni forces within Myanmar territory, 68 others managed to cross the border into Mae Hong Son, Thailand.

Thai authorities reportedly justified the handover based on bilateral agreements, identifying the returnees as members of Myanmar's military or specific units. The move has sparked concern among humanitarian groups, as those returned – many of whom were former junta soldiers held as POWs – will likely be re-conscripted or face military discipline upon their return to junta-held territory.



UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper. Photo: AFP

## UK FOREIGN SECRETARY HIGHLIGHTS MYANMAR CRISIS ON 5TH ANNIVERSARY OF MILITARY COUP

**T**he UK government has marked the fifth anniversary of the Myanmar military coup, calling for a resolution of the crisis.

In a statement, Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper said: Five years on from the military's coup, the people of Myanmar face a deepening crisis. By overthrowing Aung San Suu Kyi's democratically elected government, the will of the people was overturned and their political freedom taken away.

Amidst this crisis, the UK remains committed to supporting a stable future for the people of Myanmar. In the past year we have supported over 1.4 million people with humanitarian assistance and provided 1.3 million people with essential health services. We will continue to stand by those most affected.

Yet conditions on the ground remain dire. Half of Myanmar's children are now out of school, while women and girls face persistent violence. Crimes that affect us in the UK, like drug production and cyber scams, have flourished.

The recent military-run elections were neither free nor fair. For the aspirations of the Myanmar people to be met, there is much that still needs to be done.

We continue to urge all parties to protect civilians. We call on the military regime to end its airstrikes; to allow unhindered humanitarian access; to release all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, and to engage in genuine dialogue towards a democratic and peaceful transition.

Today and always, we stand in unwavering solidarity with the people of Myanmar.

Wider background:

Since the coup, the UK has provided more than £190 million in life-saving humanitarian assistance, emergency healthcare and education support, and work to support civil society and local communities.

The UK consistently uses its role as penholder at the UNSC to maintain a spotlight on Myanmar, convening five UNSC meetings in 2025 - most recently in December -addressing human rights violations and calling for humanitarian action.

The UK has co-sponsored a number of Human Rights Council resolutions on Myanmar, including most recently in April 2025. The resolution condemned human rights violations against the people of Myanmar, including the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities.

The UK continues to push for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi as well as other political prisoners and maintain international awareness on the topic. In November 2025 we co-sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution on Myanmar and delivered a statement calling for the release of those unduly detained by the military regime.

We continue to support ASEAN's leadership on the crisis, including the full implementation of the Five Point Consensus and the work of the Special Envoy.





The late Dr. Myint Htwe

## FORMER NLD HEALTH MINISTER DR. MYINT HTWE PASSES AWAY IN BANGKOK AT AGE 77

**D**r. Myint Htwe, the former Union Minister for Health and Sports under the National League for Democracy (NLD) government, passed away on 26 January 2026, at approximately 5:43 pm, local time at Bumrungrad Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand.

His family confirmed the news through social media, noting that the 77-year-old public health veteran had been receiving medical treatment in Thailand prior to his passing.

"I would like to inform relatives and friends that my eldest brother, Dr. Myint Htwe, passed away at Bumrungrad Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand, on 26 January 2026, at 5:43 pm local time," posted family member U Min Han Htay.

A distinguished epidemiologist and international health expert, Dr. Myint Htwe spent 16 years with the

World Health Organization (WHO) before joining the civilian government in 2016. He is best remembered for his steady leadership during the initial waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar, where he gained public trust for his focus on evidence-based prevention and transparent communication.

On the morning of the 1 February 2021 military coup, Dr. Myint Htwe posted a final message to the Ministry's Facebook page, stating he could no longer perform his duties and urging the public and health workers to remain dedicated to pandemic safety measures.

Although briefly detained by the military following the takeover, he was released shortly thereafter and had remained largely away from the political spotlight while managing his health.

The ongoing Buddhist peace march in the USA. Photo: AFP

## GLOBAL BUDDHIST CONVENTION FOCUSES ON UNITY, PROTECTION

**SUBIR BHAUMIK**

**T**he first Sakyan International Convention in Buddhism's holiest town attended by top monks and scholars on Wednesday called for bringing together of the various Sakyan clans and unity amongst various Buddhist denominations. Lord Buddha, born Prince Siddhartha Gautam, was from the Sakyan clan 2500 years ago but different branches of the clan migrated to different parts of the Eurasian landmass over the centuries.

"In many countries, where Buddhists are a minority, the Sakyan descendants face persecution from majoritarian regimes. The best examples of such persecution is the one faced by the Chakma Buddhists, who trace their lineage to the Sakyan clan, in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Muslim-majority Bangladesh," said scholar Mrinal Chakma, one of the lead organisers.

The Chakmas and other Indigenous tribes, mostly Buddhists, formed 97 percent of the population in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) but now state-sponsored settlement of Muslims have caused huge demographic change and reduced them to less than half the population of this border region with India and Myanmar.

Assembled monks and scholars expressed the apprehension that a future Islamist government may scrap the British-era CHT Regulations, 1900 and abrogate the CHT peace accord that ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government signed with tribal insurgent groups in CHT.

They said that if that happens, it will deprive the Indigenous tribes of constitutional protection to pursue

their unique lifestyle and traditions that is so different from the majority Bengali Muslims.

Vietnamese monk Thay Huyen Dieu (popular as Dr Lam) called for unity amongst all Buddhist denominations to protect the 'descendants' of Sakyas from persecution.

"I don't care anymore about Mahayana or Hinayana, but am only interested in Buddhyaana," Dr Lam said during the concluding address.

Japanese monk Junsei Terazawa called for efforts to track down the different branches of the Sakya clans.

Prof Abhay Singh, former vice chancellor of the Nalanda University (oldest Buddhist University now revived by India) called upon powerful countries like Japan and South Korea to help vulnerable Buddhist communities in countries where they were in trouble.

"These countries should particularly help Buddhist students get quality education so that they can go back and serve their people," Prof Singh said.

The Convention ended with an appeal to the Indian government and other Buddhist countries to help develop Bodh Gaya into a 'Buddhist Vatican'.

"That will help India in its outreach to the Buddhist world and the Buddhist countries to create a global Centre to coordinate their efforts in a world increasingly torn by conflicts," said Mrinal Chakma.

*Subir Bhaumik is a former BBC and Reuters correspondent and author of books on South Asian conflicts.*





## WEAPONISING THE TRAWL: CHINA'S MARITIME MILITIA, DISTANT-WATER FISHING, AND THE STRATEGIC CONTEST IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

**SUN LEE**

As the international order faces simultaneous stress from geopolitical rivalry and climate-induced resource scarcity, China's behaviour in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) reflects a familiar and troubling pattern. Under the guise of civilian economic activity, Beijing is extending its maritime footprint through heavily subsidised distant-water fishing fleets that operate in close coordination with state and military institutions. What appears on the surface as fishing is, in practice, a grey-zone strategy, blending economic exploitation, intelligence gathering, and coercive presence to reshape maritime realities without triggering open conflict. The Indian Ocean is now emerging as the next testing ground for this model.

China has been struggling to maintain food and economic security, which has led it to expand its fishing operations beyond the South and East China Seas and far into the Indian Ocean. Its large 'civilian' distant-water fishing (DWF) fleets, affiliated to varying degrees with Chinese government agencies, are militarily trained, and seen as China extending its maritime power - challenging international rules and using non-traditional maritime forces.

The DWF have been subject to growing international scrutiny for environmental destruction (overfishing, ecosystem damage, shark finning), human rights abuses (forced labour, violence, debt bondage on

vessels), and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. China's claims of responsible behaviour stand in stark contrast to a documented pattern of deception, coercion, and rule evasion.

India will soon have to tackle a swarm of these fisherman fleets in its backyard, used for reconnaissance, swarming, and logistics in the region. These fleets are state-directed tools of maritime revisionism, not incidental overcapacity. China has weaponised its massive fishing fleet to stay under the radar and achieve its goals without escalation or bloodshed. Additionally, China also presents a massive normative threat in an already dismantling world order. While it seems keen on pushing the code of conduct in the South China Sea (SCS), its maritime militia undermines UNCLOS, hollowing out the maritime governance and setting a precedent that rewards coercion over compliance.

China adopted the military-civil fusion strategy to make the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into a "world-class military" force by 2049. This was a state-led, state-directed programme with the primary role of leveraging the state and commercial power to strengthen the PLA and national security. The belligerent spirit of the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) and maritime militia is well-documented, and a procedure and pattern to this approach are evident.

China defines its militia as "an armed mass organisation composed of civilians retaining their regular jobs," a component of China's armed forces, and an "auxiliary and reserve force" of the PLA. Under this modus operandi, People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) became the prime example of civil-military fusion, using civilian fishing vessels to assert territorial claims, gather intelligence, and harass other stakeholders, blending civilian fishing with military-style duties under PLA direction to achieve strategic goals without direct conflict. As per a 2016 report by the Ministry of National

Defence (MND), the regulation outlined the PAFMM as a component of China's "People's Armed Forces System," dual-hatted under civil-military command.

PAFMM operates under the dual leadership of the State Council and Central Military Commission (CMC), with local National Defence Mobilisation Commissions (NDMCs) at provincial/municipal levels managing recruitment, training, and mobilisation. Key provisions include: a) Formation of "professional detachments" from fishing fleets for naval support, surveillance, logistics, and sovereignty enforcement; b) Training

mandates: one-week sessions on advanced navigation, communications (Beidou), and coordination with PLAN/Coast Guard; c) Subsidies for equipped vessels (radar, satcom) to ensure rapid activation during incidents.

**Training:** Fishermen receive subsidised training from provincial governments and the PLA Navy, covering one-week sessions on vessels costing over 100,000 RMB, to perform tasks including but not limited to border patrol, surveillance and reconnaissance, maritime transportation, search and rescue, and auxiliary functions in support of naval operations in wartime. Units are equipped with advanced electronics such as radar, satellite communication, and Beidou navigation for interoperability.

**Strategy:** The reasoning behind the use of non-traditional alternate force is to escape confrontation or escalation in the absence of a direct military involvement. The militia asserts sovereignty through "floating presence" in disputed waters, enabling grey-zone tactics like swarming foreign vessels while maintaining plausible deniability as civilians. It fills intelligence "blind spots" for the PLA, supports logistics, reclamation, and anti-access missions without escalating to open conflict. Beijing subsidises fleets to project power beyond the First Island Chain.

**Patterns and Targets:** The pattern suggests that operations involve massed fleets, hundreds swarming reefs like Scarborough Shoal or Senkaku, harassing patrols, shadowing ships, and protecting illegal fishing. Targets include rival claimants (Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, and recently, IOR). Recent drills show coordinated blockades with thousands of boats. As per a recent report in January 2026, thousands of Chinese fishing boats quietly formed a vast sea barrier in the East China Sea. Notably, 1,400 and 2,000 fishing boats, in a period of two weeks, swarmed the region, 'forming massive floating barriers of at least 200 miles long,' showing a new level of coordination and operational skills.

## Indian Ocean Region Challenge

Similar patterns are underplaying in the IOR, causing deep concerns for Indian maritime security. Chinese fishing fleets maintain a massive presence in the IOR, with activities intensifying around India despite crackdowns, driven by SCS overfishing and strategic expansion. Latest data shows surges in high-risk vessels, IUU incidents, and dual-use ops near Indian EEZs, monitored closely by the Indian Navy.

Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa and Tanzania lost up to USD 142.8 million annually between 2015 and 2021 to illegal fishing of shrimp and tuna. Coastal states like Pakistan, China's "all-weather friend", have formally raised concerns regarding the illegal use of deep-sea trawlers, depleting fish stocks and damage to the ecology. Reportedly, in 2023, the annual economic losses from IUU fishing in the region exceeded USD 5 billion. The assessment of Chinese actions was summarised as small-scale fishermen, unable to compete with heavily subsidised Chinese fleets, are

caught between two choices: either abandon traditional fishing grounds or endure significant income losses.

The patterns suggest that the Chinese focus has intensified in the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, and Andaman EEZ. Around 450 vessels entered the IOR sectors in 2020, but 2025 marked an escalation in Chinese presence in the waters near India. India monitored research vessels like Xiang Yang Hong 01 anchored west of Andamans (March 2025), testing Autonomous Underwater Vehicles (AUVs) and another vessel in "dark mode" (AIS off) 120 NM off EEZ for seafloor/acoustic surveys. In 2025, fishing trawlers shadowed military exercises, encroached on Andaman-Nicobar (572 islands, many uninhabited), and fish nocturnally via the Coco channels. The Indian Navy confirmed that it is tracking "each & every" vessel, and took precautionary action of cancelling BrahMos tests amid incursions to prevent real-time data interception of sensitive weapon systems. In 2025, three research vessels - Shi Yan 6, Shen Hai Yi Hao, and Lan Hai 201 were seen in the Indian waters. What China is exporting to the Indian Ocean is not fishing capacity, but a tested model of maritime coercion, refined in the South China Sea and now adapted for a new theatre.

Therefore, China's growing use of fishing fleets and maritime militia in the Indian Ocean is not an isolated challenge but part of a deliberate strategy to normalise coercive presence and erode maritime norms. By weaponising civilian vessels and exploiting legal ambiguity, Beijing is exporting instability, environmental degradation, and strategic pressure into a region vital to regional security. This represents a direct maritime threat to the IOR rather than a peripheral fisheries issue. *Sun Lee is the pseudonym of a writer who covers Asia and geopolitical affairs.*





# THE CASE FOR ENGAGEMENT

**"W**e still believe that engaging is more useful than not engaging. Lots of countries chose to disengage and imposing sanctions and all of that. I think in case of Myanmar, ASEAN has proven that engaging with Myanmar does more good than harm," stresses Kiat Sittheeamorn, former Thai Deputy Prime Minister and international trade negotiator. In this interview with the Insight Myanmar Podcast, Kiat draws on decades of experience in the private sector, parliament, and multilateral diplomacy to offer hard-won insights on the moral and practical dilemmas facing Southeast Asia today. In this wide-ranging conversation, he discusses integrity, regional diplomacy, and the ongoing crisis in Myanmar.

For Kiat, public service is grounded in his own story, and the force of his personal code, rooted in childhood struggle and self-reliance. He explains how he learned early on that "[a] free lunch is never good. You have to work for it!" Sure enough, by his teenage years, he was earning his own keep. This ethos stayed with him through an early career as an electrical engineer helping build power plants across Asia and the Middle East. Returning to Thailand, he became the director of the Board of Trade of Thailand. Then, by what he refers to as a "chance accident," he came to enter politics. Kiat became acquainted with the then Prime Minister during the country's economic crisis in 1997, who asked for his advice in navigating this period. Then, just a few months later, Kiat was encouraged to run for office, initiating his first of three terms as a Member of

Parliament, and eventually serving one term as Deputy Prime Minister.

Kiat describes how moving from solving concrete engineering challenges to confronting national crises and serving in government provided him a steady resolve that helped him stay principled amid the compromises and moral confusion of politics. "If you cannot withstand all these fancy proposals, although it's all wrong, don't get involved with politics!" he exclaims. "That's my message to the younger generation."

In Thailand as elsewhere, he explains, the destructive effects of power, patronage, and opportunism are not abstract. He points to his own parliamentary work, which he says resulted in dishonest politicians being forced to pay back over 60 billion baht. He says there were personal challenges to this crusade—intimidations, and offers of bribes—which he acknowledges can be challenging to refuse for most, and especially if one is, in his words, "confused."

Kiat returns to this language of "confusion"—and the discipline needed to resist it—throughout the conversation. He repeatedly stresses the importance of maintaining one's internal compass amid constant ethical temptations and pressures in politics, such as bribery or rewards for personal gain. At the same time, he also warns that the decay of public life often happens through more ordinary rationalizations and bureaucratic excuses, like "We don't have the budget," or "There's no way to fight back." For Kiat, these are signs of passive failure: retreating from difficult yet necessary action and avoiding responsibility. "Those politicians who came out and started excusing themselves that, 'Oh, we don't have enough money to do this, and that,' it's all bullshit! I'm sorry for my language!" he says, adding that there are always good policies that do not require much money, but bad influences and pressures can quickly overwhelm politicians who are "confused."

## CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/1/12/episode-467-the-case-for-engagement>



Naypyidaw. Photo: AFP

# FORMER HOME AFFAIRS MINISTER INVESTIGATED AMID MAJOR CABINET RESHUFFLE BY MYANMAR JUNTA

**L**t. Gen. Tun Tun Naung, a former Minister for Home Affairs under the Myanmar junta, is reportedly under investigation for alleged ties to illegal online scam operations. This follows his removal from office in a major cabinet reshuffle ordered by the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC).

The investigation reportedly focuses on allegations that Tun Tun Naung accepted bribes from online scam syndicates. The probe follows an NDSC announcement on 27 January 2026 removing him from his ministerial post and returning him to his original military status, though he has reportedly not been assigned a new role.

The case is particularly disquieting as Tun Tun Naung had also been serving as chairman of the Central Supervisory Committee on Combating Telecom Fraud and Online Gambling, the body tasked with dismantling scam centres which have proliferated along Myanmar's borders. The committee was established in December 2025.

Tun Tun Naung had served as Home Affairs Minister since January 2025, after previously holding the post of Minister of Border Affairs in the early post-coup period.

The Home Affairs Ministry plays a central role in internal security, policing, and administration under Myanmar's military-dominated system.

On 28 January, state-controlled newspapers confirmed that the NDSC had appointed Lt. Gen. Phone Myat as the new Minister for Home Affairs, under Order No. 4/2026 signed by Executive Chief Aung Lin Dwe.

Phone Myat, a graduate of Officers Training School intake 73, previously served as Adjutant General and Commander of the Bureau of Special Operations 5. His appointment is widely seen as part of efforts to tighten military oversight of the powerful interior ministry following the conclusion of the junta's three-phase general election and ahead of a planned transition to a new government framework in April 2026.

The reshuffle also extended to deputy minister positions. On 23 January, Deputy Home Affairs Minister Maj. Gen. Aung Kyaw Kyaw was returned to military duties and replaced by Maj. Gen. Min Thu, formerly Deputy Chief of the Office of the Chief of Military Security Affairs.





# SOCIAL MEDIA USERS UPSET OVER EXTENSION OF EMERGENCY RULE AND MARTIAL LAW ACROSS 63 TOWNSHIPS

**T**he military leader has announced an extension of the state of emergency and martial law in 63 townships for an additional 90 days. This decision has sparked concern and frustration among social media users.

Public sentiment is largely critical. Many users express the belief that the extension indicates that emergency rule has effectively become permanent rather than temporary. Others highlight that the expansion of martial law to areas controlled by resistance groups, ceasefire groups, and even non-conflict zones demonstrates the military's diminishing authority on the ground.

Common comments from users include: "Emergency rule has no end date anymore."

"If martial law keeps expanding, what will happen to the election results?"

"Martial law until a new government takes power means no real change."

Overall, the extension of emergency rule has become a major topic of discussion this week, reinforcing public doubts about political transitions, elections, and the potential for a genuine return to civilian governance.



# 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.