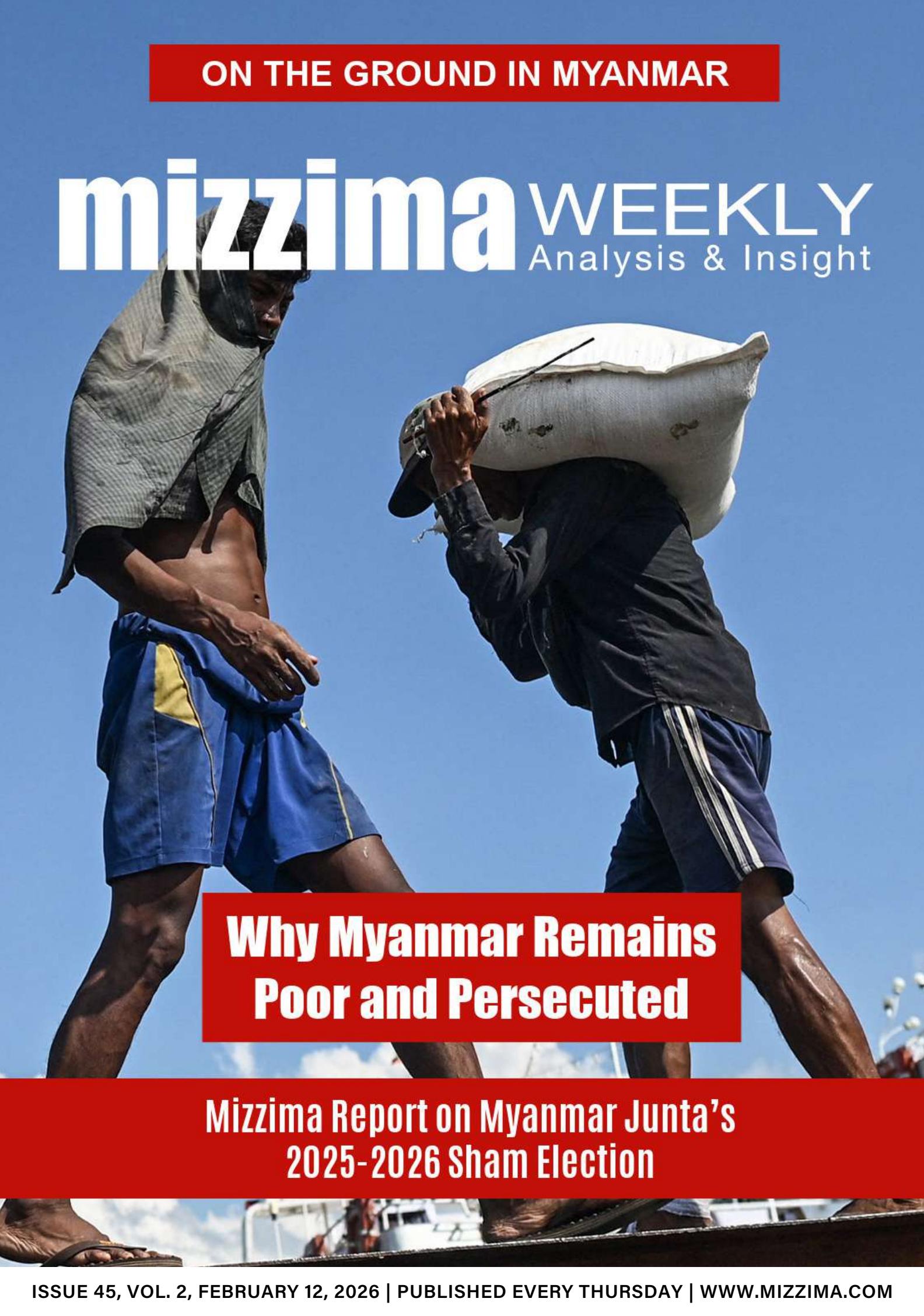


ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

# mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



**Why Myanmar Remains  
Poor and Persecuted**

**Mizzima Report on Myanmar Junta's  
2025-2026 Sham Election**

# 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.

# THE DICTATOR CEMENTS HIS POSITION OF POWER

Our cover story this week is entitled: Why Myanmar Remains Poor and Persecuted. To expand on this issue, it would be wrong to ignore the man who pontificates weekly on how to improve the state of Myanmar, namely Min Aung Hlaing, the country's military chief and coup-maker.

Only last week, he was blaming the fact that a large percentage of his country's population were in poverty due to their failure to pursue self-development.

No mention of the decades of brutal military rule. No mention about Min Aung Hlaing's military coup that turned the country upside down five years ago. Just blame it on the people.

Myanmar is in a quagmire and the situation is only likely to get worse in the wake of the recent sham election that was skewed in a military-proxy party's favour, with clear indications that Min Aung Hlaing will not do the right thing and resign, but instead intends to cement his position through a new office that will hover over the incoming civilian president.

Myanmar's military chief will formally embed his power in the incoming civilian government, even if, as some analysts wonder, he is not given the presidency.

The very fact that the junta has publicly announced this new "advisory" office telegraphs the intention of the man on top.

North Korea has long been considered the worst dictatorship in the world. Now Min Aung Hlaing is sideling up to say "hold my beer" – seeking to cement his position as an evil leader.

Maybe the Myanmar junta leader has not noticed how badly hated he is at home and abroad, with the International Court of Justice seeking to take him to task over the 2017 attacks on the Rohingya, and now a court in Timor-Leste stepping in to charge the man with crimes against humanity for the horror he has caused over the last five years.

Min Aung Hlaing should be in jail while his nemesis Aung San Suu Kyi should be free.

But the dictator lives in a rich, comfortable bubble, largely distanced from any attacks by the resistance and shielded from the scenes of horror he has perpetrated on the Myanmar people, many of them innocent civilians caught in the crossfire or deliberately targeted.

Min Aung Hlaing is not dumb. He is brutal and calculating. So, in the coming weeks, we should keep an eagle eye on him as he sets himself up to control Myanmar, even if takes place behind the curtain or a new advisory office.

Myanmar has a serious problem and that problem is Min Aung Hlaing, and the military system of control that lies in place. As many resistance and opposition figures stress - this is not a matter of regime change. It is a matter of system change. Until that happens, the Myanmar people will not sleep soundly in their beds.

## EDITORIAL

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WEEKLY

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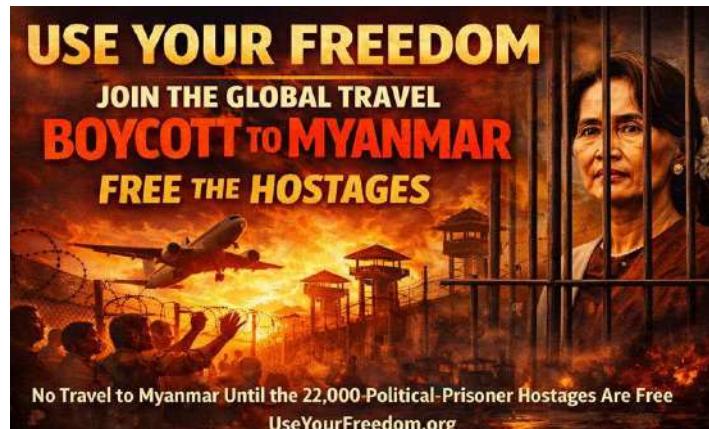
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Cover photo of Yangon port workers by AFP



A tough life for many in Myanmar. Photo: AFP

# WHY MYANMAR REMAINS POOR AND PERSECUTED

***NICHOLAS KONG***

**F**ive years after Myanmar's February 1, 2021, coup, the country—once sprouting toward democracy and prosperity—stands not at the edge of recovery but at the institutionalization of collapse. What began as a military seizure of power followed by brutal crackdowns on peaceful demonstrations has evolved into an economic, regional security, and humanitarian catastrophe marked by nationwide civil war. The junta's latest maneuver—a staged election—does not signal a return to civilian rule, but the formalization of military supremacy under a civilian disguise.

Myanmar's tragedy today is not only domestic. It is the cumulative outcome of international hesitation, geopolitical rivalry, and resistance fragmentation intersecting with a military determined to survive at any cost.

## **The Five-Year Descent**

Since the coup, Myanmar has lost more than lives—it has lost infrastructure, intellectual capital, and generational potential. Nearly 4 million people are internally displaced, while education and healthcare systems have collapsed. The economy has shrunk, informalized, and criminalized. According to international development assessments, Myanmar's GDP remains over 30 percent below pre-coup levels, with inflation repeatedly exceeding 20 percent annually.

Cyber-scams, narcotics, illegal mining, and human trafficking have replaced legitimate commerce. The junta now stages selective raids not to dismantle crime, but to deflect international pressure and erase evidence linking top generals to illicit networks.

The junta governs not through administration, but coercion: aerial bombardment, village burning, forced conscription, and economic extortion. State institutions function primarily as revenue extractors for the military.

Meanwhile, resistance forces—PDFs and ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs)—have transformed large portions of Myanmar into contested or liberated zones, contracting junta control largely to urban centers and airspace dominance. Operation 1027 in late 2023 shattered the myth of military invincibility, stripping the regime of manpower, morale, and territory. Yet battlefield success has not translated into political consolidation, especially after China's intervention forced operational pauses.

## **The Fake Election: Manufacturing Legitimacy**

The junta's election is neither democratic nor about Myanmar's future—it is a calculated survival strategy conceived at the beginning of the coup and bolstered by Beijing.

It is structurally fraudulent. Its objective is recogni-



An internally displaced people's camp in the hills. Millions have been displaced by the Myanmar junta's attacks. Photo: AFP

tion, not governance. By repackaging Min Aung Hlaing from general into “president,” the military seeks to transform dictatorship into a quasi-civilian regime, offering procedural cover for China, Russia, and hesitant ASEAN states to re-engage without confronting legitimacy. It mirrors the old roadmap of military dictators.

It is absurd that an acting President Min Aung Hlaing grants martial law authority to Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing himself. By assembling a rubber-stamp parliament through the USDP, monopolized by loyal generals, and positioning himself for the presidency while retaining military control—likely through a Central Military Commission modeled on the CCP—Min Aung Hlaing seeks permanent authoritarian continuity under civilian camouflage.

## **The International Community: Morality Without Muscle**

The international response condemned the coup, imposed sanctions, delivered aid, and rejected the fake election. Symbolically important, yes—but structurally ineffective.

There was no unified diplomatic strategy converting pressure into transition. Sanctions were not regionally enforced. Myanmar slipped from global attention under Ukraine, Gaza, Iran, Venezuela, and other crises. Aviation fuel and arms pipelines remained porous. Humanitarian aid was often delayed, diluted, or diverted by the military. Families of junta elites continued to shelter assets abroad.

China remains Myanmar’s most consequential external actor. After Operation 1027 threatened collapse, Beijing reversed course—pressuring EROs into ceasefires while propping the junta with financing and weapons. China turned Myanmar into a managed instability zone: stable enough for Belt and Road connectivity and pipelines, unstable enough to remain dependent.

The United States remained principled but constrained—ethical in language, thin in consequence. It sanctioned military-link conglomerates: MEC, MEHL, and generals but lacked ASEAN, Indian, and Japanese enforcement. Humanitarian corridors were promised but rarely operationalized. Myanmar became a strategic blind spot overshadowed by U.S.-China rivalry.

Russia monetized chaos, turning repression into a client relationship. India, the world’s largest democracy, disappointed deeply—viewing Myanmar narrowly through border security, Kaladan access, and China containment while remaining silent on fake elections.

The EU endorsed CRPH and NUG as legitimate representatives but lacked geographic leverage. ASE-

AN’s Five-Point Consensus became a monument to inaction, trapped by non-interference and internal division, allowing dictatorship to normalize.

## **Resistance Forces: Victory Through Unity**

Myanmar’s Spring Revolution transitioned from peaceful protest into armed resistance through PDFs supported by EROs and coordinated under the NUG. It challenged one of Asia’s most entrenched militaries—but stalled politically.

The resistance failed to convert battlefield gains into diplomatic capital. Lack of unified command enabled military regrouping and external manipulation. Diplomacy is as decisive as combat. A protracted war costs not only lives but generational futures.

Myanmar’s history teaches a painful truth: disunity has always been the nation’s downfall. Ethnic fragmentation, exploited by dictators, remains the revolution’s greatest vulnerability. Without unified federal leadership, international confidence erodes and adversaries trade Myanmar’s fate for their interests.

Economically, early boycotts and innovations like NUG-Pay and Spring Development Bank weakened junta revenue. But China’s financial rescue eclipsed these gains. Meanwhile, promised Western assistance including U.S. congressional allocations—such as the \$121 million under NDAA—were rarely operationalized in full scale due to logistics and coordination failures, but ironically culminated with false impression of Western control of the resistance.

The junta wages propaganda warfare globally, while some international media amplify resistance missteps. Transparency, discipline, and administrative credibility are no longer optional; they are strategic weapons.

## **Policy Recommendations: From Condemnation to Conversion**

If Myanmar’s collapse is to be reversed, policy must move beyond moral statements toward coordinated leverage.

### **1. Enforceable Regional Sanctions Architecture**

Sanctions without regional enforcement are symbolic. Myanmar’s economy remains deeply penetrated by military-linked conglomerates and affiliated cronies using regional intermediaries.

The U.S., EU, Japan, India, and ASEAN partners should create a joint sanctions enforcement mechanism targeting:

- Aviation fuel supply chains,
- Dual-use technologies,

- Shipping insurance and re-export hubs,
- Overseas assets of generals and cronies.

Without Thai, Indian, Singaporean, and Malaysian compliance, pressure remains porous.

## 2. Recognize De-Facto Governance in Liberated Areas

Nearly 60–70 percent of Myanmar's territory is contested or outside full junta control.

Instead of treating the conflict as binary, donors should:

- Channel aid through NUG and ERO administrations,
- Support civil registries, taxation pilots, and service delivery,
- Provide satellite communications and early-warning systems against airstrikes.

With nearly 4 million displaced people and millions of children out of school, governance support converts resistance into administration.

## 3. Strategic Bargaining with China, Not Moral Appeals

China's interests are structural: Indian Ocean access, border stability, and CMEC/ BRI protection.

The resistance and partners should pursue strategic bargaining:

- Guarantee infrastructure protection under federal transition,
- Coordinate joint anti-cyber scam operations,
- Demonstrate that prolonged junta survival increases transnational crime.

Cyber-scam compounds generate multi-billion-dollar illicit flows annually, harming regional victims and Chinese citizens alike.

## 4. Convert U.S. Policy from Moral Ethics to National Security Interests

Myanmar now intersects U.S. security through:

- Cyber fraud targeting Americans,
- Narcotics trafficking routes,
- China's Indian Ocean access corridor.

Funding must be operationalized via:

- Cross-border logistics with India and Thailand,
- Secure financial corridors for NUG institutions,
- Intelligence cooperation on transnational crime.

This shifts Myanmar from humanitarian case to strategic node.

## 5. ASEAN: From Non-Interference to Conditional Legitimacy

ASEAN should adopt conditional legitimacy:

- No recognition without inclusive participation,
- No seats for fake-election regimes,

- A permanent implementation unit, not rotating envoys.

Without accountability, ASEAN becomes a shelter for normalization.

## 6. Resistance Reform: From Revolution to State-craft

To win sustained support, the NUG and EROs must demonstrate:

- Unified federal command,
- Transparent finance,
- Consistent assertive diplomacy,
- Civilian protection doctrine,
- Negotiation coherence.

Confidence grows not from heroism, but administrative credibility.

## The Strategic Lesson

Myanmar's war is not merely internal—it is geopolitical. Every actor prioritized stability, rivalry, or risk avoidance over democratic transformation. The junta weaponized elections and monetized chaos.

Liberation will not come from elections staged by generals nor sympathy abroad. It will come when Myanmar's resistance becomes not only morally legitimate but strategically indispensable—through unity at home, bargaining power abroad, and governance on the ground.

Five years after the coup, the military has already failed Myanmar. The unresolved question is whether Myanmar's people and resistance can finally outgrow it—and whether the international community is willing to move from observing collapse to converting leverage into change.

*The original article was published in the Eurasia Review on February 2, 2026. This is Part 3 of a series that looks at the state of Myanmar.*



Photo: AFP

## FINAL TALLY OF MYANMAR MILITARY JUNTA'S SHAM ELECTION

Following the completion of all three phases of voting, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) secured an overwhelming 739 out of 1,025 parliamentary seats—approximately 72 percent of the total—consolidating its dominance in what critics widely regard as a tightly managed electoral process. Among the nationwide parties, the National Unity Party (NUP) won 68 seats, Ko Ko Gyi's People's Party (PP) secured 30, Dr. Thet Thet Khaing's People Pioneer Party (PPP) gained 20, and the Shan and Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP, or "White Tiger") obtained 39. In addition to these six nationwide contenders, 52 other parties competed only in their respective states and regions.

The election was conducted in three phases: 102 townships in phase one, 100 in phase two, and 61 in phase three. Initially, the junta's Union Election Commission (UEC) announced that phase three would cover 63 townships. However, on the eve of voting, two townships were abruptly removed from the list, officially due to "security reasons." In reality, both areas had reportedly been under Kachin Independence Army (KIA) control since January 2025, underscoring the territorial limits of the junta's electoral reach.

Election-day irregularities further fueled skepticism. Malfunctions involving electronic voting machines were reported in multiple locations. In Sittwe, voting receipts were printed

only partially, with some slips showing incomplete information. In Yangon's Mingaladon Township, particularly within military regiments, machines reportedly failed to register party selections, and receipts did not print. In Hinthada Township in Ayeyarwady Region, 20 machines across different polling stations broke down within a single hour, between noon and 1 p.m., raising questions about technical preparedness and transparency.

The USDP itself lodged complaints in certain constituencies, accusing polling station supervisors of directing voters toward rival parties by pointing at specific logos. However, local observers suggested that such complaints emerged primarily in areas where the USDP faced unexpectedly strong competition, particularly from the People's Party.

The junta, for its part, emphasized security disruptions rather than procedural flaws. According to

official statements, there were 54 incidents of "election disturbances," including anti-election pamphlet distribution, poster defacement and burning (23 instances), loudspeaker campaigns urging boycotts, and six attacks on polling station security personnel. These incidents reportedly resulted in the deaths of two election staff members and injuries to two staff and seven civilians. By foregrounding such disruptions, the authorities framed the election narrative around stability and law enforcement rather than administrative credibility.

One of the most contentious aspects of the process was advance voting, particularly overseas ballots. Despite the presence of millions of Myanmar migrant workers abroad, turnout figures appeared strikingly low. Civil society groups estimate that at least five million Myanmar nationals reside in Thailand alone. Yet only 270 voters reportedly cast advance ballots there—an implausibly small fraction that raised concerns



about either access restrictions or opaque counting procedures.

More controversially, advance votes appeared decisive in several constituencies. SNDP chairperson Sai Ai Pao claimed that his party initially led in townships such as Mong Yawng, Mong Yang, and Mong Pan based on polling station results, only to lose once advance ballots were added. "We believed we were going to win according to the station-level counts," he stated. "When the advance votes arrived, we lost—similar to what happened in the 2010 election. It is sorrowful."

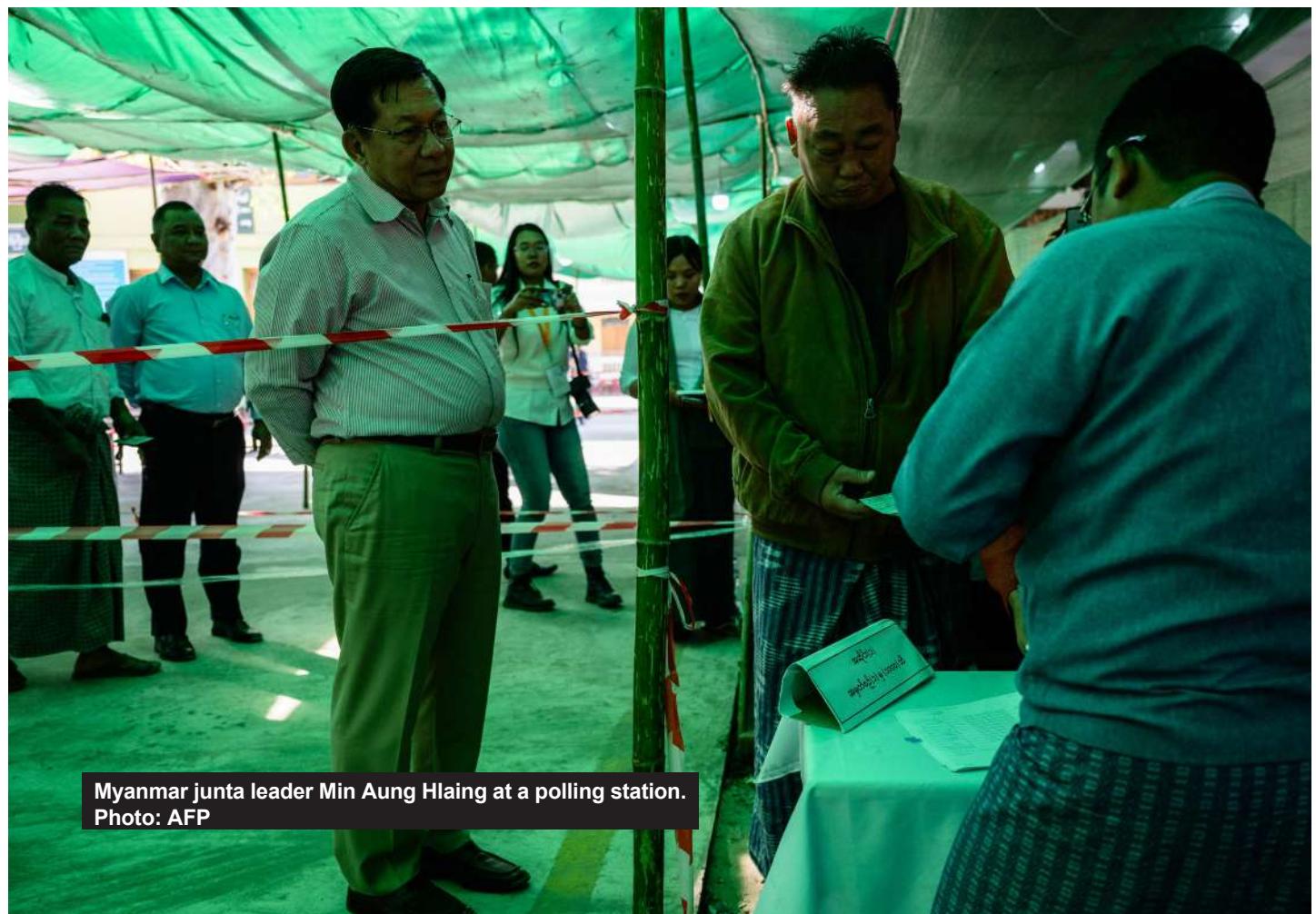
## USDP wins in a landslide of a corrupt election

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) has once again emerged as the principal political vehicle of Myanmar's military establishment, underscoring its enduring role as a proxy of the junta rather than an independent civilian party. In September,

the junta reportedly transferred three generals and six lieutenant generals to the USDP to be placed on its candidate list. These officers did not arrive alone; they were accompanied by their military administrative networks and access to financial resources, reinforcing the party's structural and logistical advantage.

The militarization of the USDP is not limited to newly listed candidates. Its current leadership is deeply rooted in the former junta hierarchy. Party chairman Khin Yi previously served as police chief during the SPDC era and later as immigration minister under President Thein Sein. The vice chairpersons include former senior military figures, including a former commander-in-chief of the air force. The party's executive committee is similarly composed of ex-generals and retired army officials, blurring any meaningful distinction between party and barracks.

Beyond retired officers, several incumbent cabinet members—including ministers of health, foreign affairs,



immigration, environmental conservation, energy, and science and technology—have also contested under the USDP banner. This convergence of active administrators and former military leaders signals a coordinated political strategy rather than routine party competition.

Official results show the USDP winning 739 out of 1,025 seats, cast across three election phases. By contrast, the second-place National Unity Party received just 13.28 percent. Analysts argue that such dominance reflects a carefully managed electoral process designed to consolidate parliamentary control through negotiation and alignment with the junta. In this context, the election appears less a contest of pluralistic politics than a structured transition from military rule to military-managed civilian governance.

## Min Aung Hlaing's next moves to consolidate power over 'civilian' regime

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has announced that a new parliament will convene in the third week of March, a declaration made during his meeting with a Russian Security Council delegation led by Sergei Shoigu. The timing reinforces the junta's determination to project an image of political normalization following its tightly managed election. Yet the formation of a Union Consultative Council on 3 February has added uncertainty over the configuration of the next government. Rather than assuming the presidency, Min Aung Hlaing now appears more likely to position himself as council chair—an arrangement that could allow him to retain overarching authority while delegating formal executive duties to a loyal civilian proxy. Notably, the USDP, which dominated the polls, has remained silent on its presidential nominee.

Against this backdrop, the election dealt a significant blow to politicians who chose participation over armed resistance. Several prominent figures aligned with pro-junta or "legal" politics—including Dr. Aye Maung and Ba Shein from Rakhine, Ko Ko Gyi of the 88 Generation and founder of the People's Party, Sandar Min, Cho Nwe Oo, and Sai Ai Pao—failed to secure seats, even in the absence of the National

League for Democracy (NLD). Another former NLD parliamentarian, Dr. Thet Thet Khaing, who had served in the junta's cabinet during the early coup period, was placed under house restrictions rather than allowed to campaign freely.

For some of these figures, defeat marks a dramatic erosion of political capital. Dr. Aye Maung, for instance, once commanded substantial support in Rakhine State during the 2020 election. However, with the Arakan Army now controlling much of the territory and amid public resentment toward participation in what many regard as a sham process, that support dissipated. Ko Ko Gyi and Sandar Min similarly entered the race with reputations forged through earlier pro-democracy activism, yet their engagement in the junta-organized poll undermined their standing among voters skeptical of its legitimacy.

Widespread allegations of irregularities—including opaque advance voting, malfunctioning voting machines reportedly favoring the USDP, manual tabulation using calculators, and the presence of USDP-uniformed individuals inside polling stations—further eroded confidence. Despite these controversies, rival parties mounted no sustained or forceful public challenge.

Political observers argue that many of these candidates framed participation as a form of non-violent resistance. In practice, however, their strategy resembled passive accommodation rather than principled opposition. By contesting a structurally unequal election without mobilizing strong objections to its flaws, they inadvertently lent credibility to the process. The result was a dual loss: exclusion from parliament and diminished moral authority among a public increasingly polarized between armed resistance and outright rejection of junta-led political frameworks.



Photo: AFP

## MIZZIMA REPORT ON MYANMAR JUNTA'S 2025-2026 SHAM ELECTION

### Key findings

The 2025-2026 election is the fourth general election since 2010. It is the first election to combine Proportional Representation (PR) with the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system, which had been used in all previous elections.

- This election was held after the results of the 2020 election were annulled, and the National League for Democracy (NLD), the main party that won, was dissolved along with some ethnic political parties.

- This election was not held all at once across the country. Instead, it took place in three separate stages: the first stage in 102 townships on December 28, 2025; the second in 100 townships on January 11, 2026; and the final stage in 61 townships on January 25, 2026.

- This election occurred when revolutionary forces controlled 33% of the country, while the military junta held and contested the remaining 67%.

- This election occurred when approximately 3.5 million people were internally displaced due to local battles, armed conflicts, and natural disasters, affecting about 70% of the country.

- Before this election, the military junta passed the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction. From its adoption in July 2025 through January 19, 2026, 404 people were detained under this law, and some were sentenced to prison terms ranging from three to seven years.

- Before this election, the army-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) had already secured 27 seats, and three ethnic parties had gained three seats in parliament as they faced no opposition.

### 1. Background

Using claims of electoral fraud, the Myanmar military, also known as the Tatmadaw, nullified the 2020 election results and took control on February 1, 2021. The next day, the State Administration Council (SAC) was established and led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. They stated that after following procedures under the state of emergency, they would hold a free and fair general election in line with the 2008 Constitution and return power to the elected party.

After the military coup, many individuals were detained, including members of unions, state and regional government officials, civilian political leaders, and election commission officials at various levels. They were sentenced to lengthy prison terms on various charges. Although some were later granted amnesty, most remain incarcerated for the long term.

The military junta extended the state of emergency up to six times, each for six months. Subsequently, they stated they would hold an election in 2025. On January 26, 2023, they adopted a new Law, which would create barriers for major political parties with strong public support from competing in elections. The law was later amended multiple times.

Under Article 412 of the 2008 Constitution, which governs the state of emergency, it can normally be extended twice, each time for six months. However, the military extended it seven times, citing various reasons. After the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) meeting on July 31, 2025, the State Administration Council (SAC) was abolished and replaced by the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC). In this commission, the junta leader, Min Aung Hlaing, assumed dual roles as Acting President and Chair. Several army generals were also demobilized and appointed to lead government agencies.

From the perspective of the public and the international community, the junta's 2025 election was simply an attempt to dodge accountability for the violence during the coup period. According to the Institute for Strategy and Policy (ISP) Myanmar, there were at least 92 incidents where 10 or more civilians were killed at once over four years, resulting in over 1,800 civilian deaths. Of these, 88 were carried out by the SSPC, and more than half reportedly involved airstrikes.

Therefore, given the current military, political, and on-the-ground situation—along with the lack of stability in constituencies, low public trust, and international positions—it is clear that the junta's 2025 election was just a sham.



### 2. The adoption of the new Political Parties Registration Law

Following Myanmar's adoption of the 2008 Constitution, the Political Parties Registration Law was enacted on March 8, 2010. It imposed strict restrictions on political parties and created numerous barriers for major parties with strong public support, such as the NLD. The law was amended on November 4, 2011, before the 2012 by-election, allowing the NLD to participate. The amendments changed three key provisions of the original law: they removed the rule that party members must not be prisoners, relaxed the requirement that a party contest at least three seats in Parliament to prevent restrictions on new parties formed after the election, and changed the phrase "the constitution must be maintained and protected" to "must be respected and followed." As a result of these changes, the NLD competed in the 2012 by-election, winning 43 out of 44 seats and entering Parliament.

On January 26, 2023, the military repealed the 2010 Political Parties Registration Law and enacted a new one. Under the new law, political parties seeking union-level registration must recruit at least 100,000 members within 90 days of approval and open offices in at least half of the country's 330 townships within 180 days. Parties registering at the state or regional level must recruit at least 1,000 members within 90

days and establish offices in at least five townships within their respective states or regions. Union-level parties are required to deposit 1,000 lakh MMK at the state-owned Myanma Economic Bank, while parties at the state or regional level must deposit 100 lakh MMK.

Following the new law's adoption, many parties failed to re-register, and others were automatically dissolved. According to Article 25, parties that did not re-register within 60 days of the law's enactment lost their legal status. This created an additional legal obstacle for the NLD, which had already been dissolved after the coup. Political observers see this as an attempt to influence the electoral environment in the absence of the NLD. The military junta thus took proactive steps to prevent a repeat of the past, when former President U Thein Sein amended the law to allow the NLD to participate in a by-election.

For reasons such as failure to re-register or non-compliance with legal requirements, the Union Election Commission (UEC) canceled several political parties. On March 28, 2023, it announced the dissolution of 40 political parties, including the NLD. As a result, the junta's Political Parties Registration Law greatly restricted political parties' ability to participate in upcoming elections and threatened their continued existence.



After passing the Political Parties Registration Law before the election, the junta amended it three times: on January 30, 2024; July 28, 2025; and September 21, 2025. However, these amendments were not aimed at promoting national reconciliation. Instead, they placed burdens on political parties.

Under the First Amendment, a political party whose registration is canceled must transfer its property to the state. Under the Second Amendment, if the Union Election Commission (UEC) determines that a party has engaged in electoral fraud or illegal conduct, it may be disqualified from holding political party status. This provision is seen as shaping future elections without the NLD. The Third Amendment was adopted one day before the deadline for submitting candidate lists. According to this change, union-level parties are allowed to contest only one quarter of the constituencies, instead of more than half, in the 2025 election. These amendments appear designed to prevent a scenario where the USDP would be the only party remaining eligible to participate due to strict regulations.

One of the most talked-about news items among the public was that the NLD did not re-register under the new registration law. However, significant developments had already taken place before the law was enacted. The Union Betterment Party, led by retired General Thura Shwe Man, was dissolved before the law's adoption and thus avoided the difficulties imposed by the new requirements. Among the parties that did not re-register, some refused to recognize the military junta, while others opposed the new law. Additionally, some parties dissolved to form new parties or to merge with others.

In summary, the core of the junta's Political Parties Registration Law is strategic: to prevent the continued existence of political parties with strong public support, such as the NLD and some ethnic parties; to block the emergence of new powerful opposition parties in the future; and to ensure that only weak, small political parties remain, allowing the USDP to survive in upcoming elections.

### 3. The Union Election Commission (UEC)

A day after the coup, on February 2, 2021, the junta established a new Union Election Commission (UEC). Its chair was former Major General U Thein Soe, who had a controversial reputation for electoral fraud in the 2010 election. He had overseen the 2010 election, organized by the so-called State Peace and Development Council, which resulted in a landslide victory for the army proxy, the USDP. During the previous military regime, he held high positions, including the military judge advocate-general and the deputy chief justice of the Supreme Court. He was also a graduate of the Defence Service Academy (Intake 16). In a meeting with political parties on May 21, 2021, following the coup, he told the media: "We must cancel the registration of the NLD Party for their illegal plan. We must also take action against the individual perpetrators as traitors."

On June 21, 2021, the junta's UEC announced that the 2020 election did not follow parliamentary laws and rules and was neither free nor fair. One month later, on July 26, it cancelled the election.

This raised the question of whether the UEC has the authority to annul election results. According to Article (399) of the 2008 Constitution, the UEC is responsible for organizing and supervising elections, forming and overseeing sub-commissions, managing constituencies and voter lists, postponing elections in areas where they cannot be held, instructing political parties, and establishing election tribunals to resolve disputes. However, it lacks the authority to review or annul the results of an entire election or to call a new one. Similarly, such powers are not specified in Article 10 of the Union Election Commission Law, which outlines the UEC's rights and responsibilities.

Chapter 5 of the electoral laws for the respective parliaments states that only a rival candidate or a voter in the constituency may submit a complaint against an elected candidate. Organizations such as political parties or the Tatmadaw (military) are not permitted to do so. Under the legal provision, such complaints must be investigated by an electoral tribunal, and the

candidate's victory must be canceled if it is determined that the candidate won through unlawful conduct.

Based on the above legal provisions, it is evident that the UEC can establish an electoral tribunal only after receiving a constituency-level complaint and can revoke the victory status of individual candidates only after such a complaint. Consequently, the UEC's annulment of the 2020 election results was clearly contrary to the applicable laws.

On August 11, the junta's UEC issued a directive requiring political parties to notify it in advance and obtain permission before meeting with any foreign organization or individual. Failure to comply could result in the cancellation of the party. This statement indicates that political parties may face such serious consequences for meeting with foreign-based media outlets.

On September 9, the junta's UEC revoked the registration of four political parties—National Democratic Force Party (NDF), Democratic Party of National Politics (DNP), Women Party-Mon, and Union Farmer Labour Force Party—and dissolved them. Additionally, it removed Daw Thet Thet Khine, the chair of the People's Pioneer Party (PPP) and a candidate for No. (2) Yangon Regional Constituency of the Amyotha Hluttaw, from the candidate list, and rejected her appeal.

After the second phase of the election, officials from the junta's Military Security Office took Daw Thet Thet Khine for questioning, claiming she had secretly met with officials from a foreign embassy at a restaurant on Natmauk Street in Yangon while wearing a mask. She was released the next day. However, the UEC announced that it would take legal action against her and Daw Htet Htet Hlaing, an EC member of the PPP, for failing to inform it in advance of the meeting.

Overall, the UEC's role is to oversee the exercise of the right to vote and be elected under the Union Election Law and to supervise political parties. However, the military junta has enforced strict legal restrictions, allowing no political freedom outside of the USDP. The UEC has also gone well beyond its initial responsibilities to appease the junta. It clearly

suppresses political parties through directives that extend beyond mere oversight.

## 4. The state of political parties during the military coup period

The military junta seized power on February 1, 2021, the day the elected MPs from the 2020 election were scheduled to convene their new parliament. They then nullified the election results and imposed strict controls on political parties by enacting a new party registration law.

The UEC cancelled 41 political parties for failing to register on time. Among them were the NLD and Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), which had won a majority in the 2020 election. During the military coup, political parties faced the worst situation in the country's history.

Although some parties applied for registration under the new law, the UEC rejected them. These included the Democratic Party, Chin People's Party, Union Development Party, New Society Party, and Zomi Congress for Democracy. On September 9, 2025, the UEC also revoked the registration of three union-level parties—the NDF, the DNP, and the Women's Party (Mon)—and dissolved them, citing their failure to open the required number of offices. Currently, 57 parties remain officially registered.

## 5. The electoral system

On July 29, 2025, the military junta passed the sixth amendment to the election laws for the three parliaments: Pyithu Hluttaw, Amyotha Hluttaw, and State/Regional Hluttaw. It introduced many changes to the electoral system. The amendment added new eligibility criteria for candidates: a citizen aged 25 or older, born to citizen parents, listed as a voter in the constituency, having completed basic education (high school level), and free from any inappropriate debts or liabilities to the state or private parties. The most recent application of the liability amendment was the removal of Daw Thet Thet Khine, Chair of the PPP, from the candidate list.

### 5.1- The electoral system and constituencies

The 2025 election included 274 constituencies for Pyithu Hluttaw via first-past-the-post (FPTP), 101 constituencies, including six self-administered areas, for Amyotha Hluttaw through both FPTP and proportional representation (PR), 266 constituencies for State/Regional Hluttaw via FPTP, 42 constituencies via PR, and 29 ethnic constituencies for State/Regional Hluttaw via FPTP.

However, due to nationwide fighting, elections could not be held in all of the originally scheduled constituencies. On February 3, the UEC released the final list of elected MPs. Reportedly, elections were only held in 263 constituencies for Pyithu Hluttaw, including six self-administered areas, as well as 73 FPTP constituencies and 26 PR constituencies for Amyotha Hluttaw, and also in 255 FPTP constituencies, 42 PR constituencies, and ethnic constituencies for State/Regional Hluttaw.

During the 2025-2026 election, the junta used only the FPTP system for the Pyithu Hluttaw. For the Amyotha Hluttaw and State/Regional Hluttaw, a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system combining FPTP and proportional representation (PR) was employed. In each state and region, 12 MPs were elected to the Amyotha Hluttaw: six through FPTP and six through PR. To facilitate this, each state or region was divided into six constituencies to elect six MPs via FPTP, while the remaining six MPs were elected from political parties through PR. MPs for the Amyotha Hluttaw in self-administered areas and for the State/Regional Hluttaw in ethnic constituencies were elected through FPTP.

Similarly, in the State and Regional Hluttaw, each township elects two MPs: one under FPTP and one under PR. For the FPTP seat, each entire township is considered a single constituency. For the PR seat, neighbouring townships are combined to form a constituency for political parties.

Reportedly, 4,963 candidates from 57 political parties and independent candidates submitted their names to the UEC. These included six union-level parties and 51 state- and regional-level parties. According

to the UEC, the army-backed USDP fielded the most candidates with 1,018, followed by the National Unity Party (NUP) with 649, the PPP with 672, the Shan and Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) with 584, the MFDF with 428, and the People's Party (PP) with 512.

### 5.2- Myanmar Electronic Voting Machine (MEVM)

In the 2025 election, the military junta introduced a new voting method that had never been used in the country's election history. It replaced the method of stamped paper ballots with electronic voting machines (EVMs). Before the election, repeated propaganda claimed that EVMs would allow voters to cast their ballots easily and conveniently and that results would be counted accurately and quickly.

However, throughout all three phases of the election, many MEVMs experienced repeated technical issues. These included incorrect text on printed paper slips, improperly cut paper slips, green indicator lights not turning on, malfunctioning control machines, and incorrect date and time displays. As a result, reserve MEVMs were required. In Naypyidaw, voting was delayed because there weren't enough MEVMs.

In the first phase of the election, MEVM defects were reported at polling stations in Sittway, Hinthada, Yangon, and Dawei. In Bago Township alone, up to 21 polling stations experienced MEVM defects or damage. In the second phase, similar problems occurred in Wakema, Maukme Township, Kunchangone, and Kawmu. U Kyaw Kyaw Htwe, a PP candidate in Kawmu, reported that at one polling station, when the voting machine was pressed 12 times, six votes were recorded for a major party. In Kunchangone, the switch for the PP candidate failed. Only after the issue was reported did the responsible personnel acknowledge that it was a machine defect.

## 6. The situation of political parties in the pre-election period

The pre-election period of the junta's 2025 election presented many difficulties and challenges, even for official political parties. A total of 63 parties re-registered. Although 57 parties have survived so far,

most continue to struggle with hardships.

A major issue is that under the old law, a union-level party was required to recruit only 1,000 members nationwide. Under the new law, this number has increased 100-fold, to 100,000 members. In addition, the party must recruit this number within 90 days of registration, open party offices in at least half of the 330 townships across the country, and contest in half of the constituencies. If a party fails to submit the required number of members to the UEC on time, its registration will be canceled.

This requirement was for a very short period for union-level parties. Later amendments relaxed some provisions, but many parties refrained from contesting at the union level due to nationwide anti-junta resistance, local instability, rising numbers of displaced people, and cross-border migration. Instead, they focused on contesting in their respective states and regions.

Currently, about 3.6 million internally displaced people are affected. Armed conflicts continue in Northern Shan, Karen State, Kayah State, Kachin State, Mon State, Sagaing Region, and Magway Region. Additionally, the military junta has declared martial law in 63 townships across nine states and regions. Under these conditions, political parties face significant challenges in campaigning freely and opening party offices. For these reasons, apart from the six major parties, most others only contested at the state level.

The six union-level parties were the USDP, the NUP, the PPP, the MFDP, the SNLD (White Tiger Party), and the PP. Some of them couldn't open party offices in Kayah State, Chin State, and Rakhine State because of ongoing fighting. Besides the USDP, none of the others won any seats in the 2020 election.

## 7. Legal measures to prevent election disturbances

On July 31, 2025, the military junta dissolved the SAC and replaced it with the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC). One day earlier, on July 30, 2025, they announced that the Cybersecurity Law, adopted on January 1, 2025, had gone into effect. It restricts the use of virtual private networks (VPNs) without authorization and enhances existing internet controls

under the Telecommunications Law and the Electronic Transactions Law, which was adopted in 2013.

Furthermore, the military junta suspended Articles 5, 7, and 8 of the Protection of Personal Liberty and Personal Security of Citizens Law, which was enacted by the Union Parliament under the NLD government on March 8, 2017. Article 5 mandates the presence of at least two responsible ward or village administrators during a house search or a citizen's arrest. Article 7 restricts detention to no more than 24 hours without a court order. Article 8 prohibits searches, property seizures, and arrests without a legal warrant. By suspending these provisions, the junta created conditions that prevent any interference with their 2025 election.

However, this alone did not fully satisfy the junta's goal of ensuring the success of their election. Unable to tolerate any criticism of the electoral process, they enacted the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction, which imposes harsh sentences, on July 29, 2025.

According to this law, even minor criticism related to the junta's election could lead to severe imprisonment and fines. If a crime results in someone's death, all involved could face the death penalty. Public acts such as speaking, campaigning, protesting, or writing that harm the electoral process carry 3 to 7 years in prison, and 5 to 10 years if committed during a gathering. Threatening, preventing, disturbing, or harming voters, polling staff, election commission members, or candidates during campaigning or official duties can result in 3 to 20 years in prison, and 5 years to life if committed in a gathering. Destroying or damaging ballot papers, polling boxes, MEVMs, commission offices, or polling buildings carries a term of 5 to 10 years in prison and a fine.

Throughout the country's election history, freedom of expression has been permitted to some degree to facilitate free and fair elections. Electoral crimes and their penalties were already outlined in prior electoral laws, including those for various parliaments. However, the junta's Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections states that, regardless of existing laws, any offense related to this law will be prosecuted under this law.

If a citizen in the country reacts to a social media post about the election, they can face arrest, lawsuits, and imprisonment under this law. From July 2025 to January 19, 2026, 404 people were detained under this law, and some received sentences of at least 3 to 7 years in prison.

## 8. Election observations

Observing an election involves monitoring whether it is free and fair. It evaluates the conduct of the entire election process against the constitution, electoral laws, and international standards. Election observation is not limited to election day; it encompasses the entire election period. However, during the 2025 election, the junta restricted freedom of information. They invited only a few delegations from countries with which they have relations, and neither permitted nor cooperated with independent international election observation organizations. This made it clear that the junta's election could not be properly assessed for fairness or freedom.

According to the junta propaganda media, observers from Russia, China, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Cambodia, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and India watched the first phase of the election on December 28. The military junta reported that a delegation from India, led by retired General Arun Kumar Sahni, was present. However, sources told The Wire that the Indian government did not send any official delegation to observe the election in Myanmar, and the individuals mentioned participated in a private capacity. Sahni also confirmed from Naypyidaw that he and another Indian participant, strategic affairs commentator Atul Aneja, attended the election "on the invitation of the Myanmar Election Commission."

During the third phase on January 25, observers from Belarus, Cambodia, Vietnam, Nicaragua, India, Indonesia, and Nepal, as well as the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP), monitored the election. Analyzing the observing countries shows that many maintain power by suppressing opposition forces or operate under single-party systems.

## 9. Situation on the election days

Local and international media reported very low voter turnout and a climate of fear during the first phase

of the election. International media outlets, permitted to report on Election Day, included The New York Times, ABC News Australia, CNN, and The Straits Times. They observed that the December 28 election differed markedly from those in 2015 and 2020, when the NLD won. Voters seemed overwhelmed by fear. This election was held only after the arrest and imprisonment of MPs elected in 2020, including NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

On the one hand, some people voted because they supported the junta's election. On the other hand, others voted because of unavoidable pressure. Specifically, some feared issues involving family members of conscription age, while others were threatened that households would not be allowed to re-register overnight guests if they did not vote. Under these various pressures and hardships, many voters had no choice but to cast their ballots.

### 9.1- Voting conditions on the election day

In Myanmar, there is no specific requirement regarding the number of voters who must participate for an election to be valid. However, under international standards, voter turnout exceeding 50 percent is often regarded as indicating public representation. At a junta meeting on August 12, 2025, the junta leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, stated that the election law does not specify a required turnout and that if 50 percent or more of voters participate, the election can be considered to reflect the will of most people.

Subsequently, the junta's spokesperson, Major General Zaw Min Tun, stated that during the first phase of the election on December 28, voting took place in 102 townships, with over 6 million of the more than 11 million eligible voters participating, resulting in a 52.13 percent turnout. He claimed this made the election successful even before the detailed results for individual townships were released.

However, an investigation by Mizzima cross-checked the figures for all 102 townships in the first phase with accounts from local residents. The UEC was found to have strictly controlled information, with some local commissions refusing to provide data or referring inquiries to the central commission. In most townships, voter turnout was significantly lower than reported and

differed from the officially released figures.

In Naypyidaw, where the junta's control is strongest, as well as in some towns with significant military influence and areas supportive of the USDP, voter turnout averaged around 66%. However, in most states and regions, the highest turnout ranged from over 47% to 30%. Notably, voter turnout was 22.18% in Chin State and 10.31% in Tedim Township. In Tedim, there were 3,980 registered voters but 4,235 valid votes, indicating 255 more valid votes than registered voters. In the Yangon Region, among 12 townships, turnout was 30.63% in Ahlone Township, while the others were around 30%. High turnout was reported primarily in Naypyidaw and in areas with a strong military presence. In reality, voter and valid vote counts did not match; information was concealed, and many discrepancies arose when compared with media investigations. As a result, the election outcomes were highly controversial.

Overall, the average voter turnout on the first phase election day was no more than 40%. Although a candidate predicted a turnout of 50-60%, the actual turnout was approximately 40%. According to Data for Myanmar, voter turnout in the first phase was reported as 52.13%.

In response to media inquiries on January 26, 2026, the junta's spokesperson, Major General Zaw Min Tun, stated that over 24.22 million eligible voters participated across all three phases of the 2025 election. In the first phase, more than 6.09 million of 11.69 million eligible voters cast their ballots, representing a 52.13% turnout. In the second phase, 4.24 million of the 7.59 million eligible voters cast ballots, resulting in a 55.95% turnout. In the third phase, more than 2.79 million of 4.94 million eligible voters cast ballots, accounting for 56.48%.

### 9.2- Targeted attacks on election days

Even before the junta's election, anti-junta democratic forces, armed groups, and international organizations criticized the election as a sham used for political legitimacy. On election days, there were many targeted attacks, which were reported by both media outlets and armed groups.

According to the junta, after all three election phases, a total of 54 disturbance cases were reported across 41 townships. These included the distribution and placement of anti-election propaganda leaflets in public places, campaigning and graffiti calling for no voting, hanging posters, shouting slogans, swearing, using loudspeakers to urge boycotts, and damaging or burning voter education signboards and posters (up to 23 incidents). There were also four attacks on polling station security staff, six bomb attacks, two homemade sound bomb explosions, six grenade and homemade mine attacks, three rocket attacks, three armed threats against election staff and candidates, and six arrests. As a result, two election staff members were killed, and two others plus seven civilians were injured.

### 9.3- Advance voting issue

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Myanmar citizens living abroad queued and cast advance votes at embassies. According to the 2024 census, more than 1.12 million citizens were residing abroad, with 69% living in Thailand. Currently, many young people are migrating to neighbouring Thailand, both legally and illegally, due to the coup and conscription policies. Civil society organizations estimate that roughly 5 million Myanmar nationals may now be living in Thailand.

The junta's Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized early voting for citizens abroad by setting up polling stations at 50 embassies, permanent missions, and consulates general. Embassies encouraged citizens to vote early for the December 28 election. However, turnout was very low compared to previous elections. According to citizens in Thailand, Korea, and Japan, most voters were embassy staff and their families. An associate from the Bangkok Embassy mentioned that although more than 1,000 people applied for early voting, only about 100 civilians actually cast ballots. The total number of early voters was just over 270, including more than 100 embassy staff and scholarship students.

While advance voter turnout abroad was very low, advance voting was the most widely criticized issue across all three phases of the election in the country. After the first phase in Sittway Township, Kyauk Phyu Township, and Man Aung Township of Rakhine State, the chair of the Arakan Front Party, Dr. Aye Maung, told

CNI that he had indeed lost the election but claimed that the voter list was inaccurate until election day and kept changing. He also said he did not receive advance votes from the army and Muslim voters, which contributed to his defeat. Additionally, the chair of the PP, U Ko Ko Gyi, criticized problems related to advance voting and voter lists on social media. A former general, U Hsan Hsint, an independent candidate from Yekyi Township in Ayeyarwady Region, also stated that controversial irregularities and rule violations were found during advance vote counting at the sub-commission. Despite widespread public criticism of advance voting, people were unable to express it openly because of severe penalties under laws enacted to protect the election.

In election townships of the Yangon Region, residents listed as overnight guests were not required to vote in person, and ward administrators automatically recorded advance votes, according to people who experienced this. Additionally, students at universities, degree colleges, and colleges nationwide faced threats of being denied enrollment if they did not vote. As a result, nearly 30,000 students were compelled to cast advance votes against their will.

Regarding advance voting, the PP, SNDP, and MFDF claimed that the collection of advance votes lacked transparency and had serious flaws. They submitted letters of complaint to the junta leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. In response to these allegations, the UEC stated on January 2 that advance voting was conducted in accordance with existing legal provisions.

As seen in the 2010 election, advance voting once again played a crucial role in 2025. The USDP won all three phases in most areas with large numbers of advance votes. Nearly all of these votes came from the military, government departments, and the junta's supporters. Additionally, local administrators, acting as loyalists to the junta, collected advance votes in their areas through various means, including threats and improper practices, to please the junta authorities. In Myeik Township and Chaungsone Township, the USDP initially lost but later secured victory under controversial circumstances. Political parties were hesitant to file complaints with the UEC under current laws and bylaws. Instead, they seemed forced to appeal directly to the junta leader. This clearly demonstrates that the junta's election was conducted under fear,

lacked freedom and fairness, and failed to reflect the will of the people.

According to Data for Myanmar, USDP candidates received significantly more advance votes than any other candidates in 81 townships included in the first phase of the election. In this phase, 17% of all valid votes earned by the USDP were advance votes. Notably, USDP candidates won with 83% advance votes in Thandaunggyi Township, 79% in Bawlake Township, 52% in Ha Kha, and 47% in Kyauk Phyu Township.

The same pattern was observed for USDP candidates in 92 out of 94 townships included in the second phase, with the exceptions of Setoattara Township and Sisai Township. Reportedly, advance votes accounted for 14.65% of all the valid votes received by the USDP. Notably, the USDP candidate in Fruso Township received 74% of advance votes. Similarly, USDP candidates received 54% of advance votes in Demoso Township, 45% in Tanintharyi Township, 48% in Paukkaung, 42% in Pantaung Township, 45% in Ye Township, and 41% in Cocokyun Township. In Natmauk Township, Kalaw Township, and Maipan Township, although rival candidates initially won at the polling stations, they later lost due to the advance votes cast for the USDP.

## 10. International response

Throughout the coup period, ASEAN has expressed opposition to the election organized by the military junta. The association has consistently emphasized two key elements of the Five-Point Consensus: the cessation of violence and the conduct of inclusive dialogue before holding any election. However, several ASEAN member states, including Cambodia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Laos, and Indonesia, sent delegations to observe the junta's election.

In Parliament, Malaysia's Foreign Minister, Mr. Mohamad Hasan, stated that ASEAN does not recognize the election. Additionally, they will not send any observer delegations.

The EU spokesperson also stated that the election organized by Myanmar's military junta did not meet international standards and could not be considered

free, fair, inclusive, or credible due to widespread violence in the country, restrictions on basic freedoms, mass arrests, exclusion of major political figures, and ongoing armed conflicts.

During the third phase of the election, in a meeting with the media after inspecting voting in Chanmya Thazi of Mandalay Region, the junta leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, responded to a journalist's question about claims from the experts of the United Nations and some countries. He said he did not know whether the international community recognized the election; he only recognized the public vote.

Russia, Belarus, and China expressed their support for the junta's election. Among ASEAN members, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos also supported it. However, during a press conference after the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Cebu City, Philippines, Foreign Minister Theresa "Tess" Parreño Lazaro stated that ASEAN did not endorse all three phases of Myanmar's junta election. The Myanmar public and the international community, including the UN, see the election as a sham.

## 11. Election results

Starting January 3, the UEC began announcing the elected MPs for various parliaments in each phase. The final list was released on February 3. According to the UEC, the winners are as follows:

For the Pyithu Hluttaw, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won 231 seats; the National Unity Party (NUP) secured 4 seats; the Shan and Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) earned 7 seats; the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) gained 5 seats; the Mon Unity Party (MUP) secured 5 seats; the Naga National Party (NNP) received 4 seats; the Karen National Democratic Party (KNDP) obtained 1 seat; the Rakhine Nationalities Party earned 1 seat; the Shan-ni Solidarity Party (SSP) captured 1 seat; the Danu Nationalities Democratic Party (DNDP) secured 1 seat; the Inn National League Party (INLP) gained 1 seat; the Kachin State People's Party (KSPP) received 1 seat; and there was 1 independent MP, bringing the total to 263 MPs.

For the Amyotha Hluttaw, the elected MPs elected through the FPTP and PR systems were as follows: USDP 108 seats, NUP 16 seats, SNDP 1 seat, People's Party (PP) 5 seats, People's Pioneer Party (PPP) 1 seat, PNO 2 seats, MUP 5 seats, NNP 1 seat, the Arakan Front Party (AFP) 3 seats, KNDP 3 seats, Zomi National Party (ZNP) 3 seats, RNP 1 seat, DNDP 1 seat, Tai-Leng Nationalities Development Party (TNDP) 1 seat, Kayah State People's Party (KysSPP) 1 seat, KSPP 1 seat, Pa-O National Unity Party (PNUP) 1 seat, Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party (PSDP) 1 seat, National Interest and Development Party (NIDP) 1 seat, and Wa National Party (WNP) 1 seat, totaling 157 seats.

## 12. Controversial issues

### 12.1- The naming issue of the Parliamentary term

In Myanmar, four elections have been held under the 2008 Constitution. Typically, parliamentary terms are called the First Hluttaw, Second Hluttaw, and so forth. Therefore, the Hluttaw formed after the junta's fourth election should be considered the Fourth Hluttaw. However, at the first Central Committee meeting to convene the Hluttaw, held on January 29, it was announced that the upcoming Hluttaw would be treated as the Third Hluttaw, and regular meetings were scheduled accordingly. This suggests that the military junta does not recognize the 2020 election. Although it was the third election held under the 2008 Constitution, the 2020 election was accused of electoral fraud, and the military seized power on this basis. This issue has since become a major point of controversy in Myanmar's politics.

### 12.2- Designating PR constituencies

The junta's 2025 election introduced proportional representation (PR) for the first time, alongside the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. In 2014, discussions on PR took place in both the Amyotha Hluttaw and the Pyithu Hluttaw. After a debate in Amyotha Hluttaw, the proposal to adopt PR was approved by a vote. However, when the issue was discussed in Pyithu Hluttaw, the Chair of Pyithu Hluttaw referred the matter to the Constitutional Court to determine whether PR was compatible with the Constitution. The Court ruled that

it was not. As a result, the discussion of PR in Pyithu Hluttaw ended, and the FPTP system continued to be used until 2020.

The military junta implemented a mixed FPTP-PR system for the Amyotha Hluttaw and State/Regional Hluttaws by amending election laws and by-laws. Under these amendments, in states where the junta had lost control of most areas, MPs were elected without direct public voting. For example, in Chin State, elections were only held in Hakha and Tedim out of the nine townships. However, for the nine PR seats, all townships were allocated proportionally among the three parties contesting in Hakha and Tedim. This arrangement undermined the democratic principle of public choice. Similar practices appeared in other states and regions. Such a PR designation is highly controversial regarding constitutional compliance and democratic legitimacy.

### 12.3- The future of People's Pioneer Party (PPP)

On January 13, following the second phase, the Chair of the PPP, Daw Thet Thet Khine, was brought in for questioning by officials from the Military Security Chief Office. Although she was released the next day, the UEC issued a statement emphasizing that any political party that fails to comply with the Constitution and the Political Parties Registration Law could have its registration revoked. According to the UEC, the case involved her alleged secret meeting with officials from a foreign embassy at a restaurant on Natmauk Street on December 18, 2025. The UEC stated that legal action would be taken against her and another EC member of the PPP, Daw Htet Htet Hlaing, and hinted at the possible cancellation of the party's registration. Consequently, public opinion suggests that the PPP may face deregistration, similar to the situation of the Unity Democratic Party, commonly known as the Rose Party, which had planned to contest the 2020 election with the second-largest number of candidates.

## 13. Summary

In the 2015 general election, voter turnout was 69.82%, and in the 2020 election, it increased to 71.89%. In contrast, voter turnout in the junta's 2025

election, the fourth election since 2010, was the lowest of all post-2010 elections. Although the military junta officially claimed a total turnout of 54%, evidence suggests the actual turnout was likely much lower. This discrepancy highlights widespread public opposition to the junta-organized election.

The junta's election represented the lowest point in dignity, public will, and representation in the country's electoral history. Except for Naypyidaw and the Yangon Region, elections were only partially held in other states and regions. Public interest in the election was also the lowest ever, as fear and anxiety dominated the electoral environment.

An election is considered legitimate only when held under free and fair conditions. However, this election occurred amid widespread fighting in most regions, administrative collapse, and millions of internally displaced people caused by armed conflict. Therefore, it is evident that the junta's 2025-2026 election was aimed at maintaining power rather than seeking a genuine political solution. In other words, it was a sham election designed to extend military rule while maintaining the appearance of a civilian government.

Additionally, according to the Special Envoy for Asian Affairs at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Deng Xijun, during a ceremony where international observers spoke, the junta's implementation of the election was based on an agreement between Chinese President Xi Jinping and the junta leader, Min Aung Hlaing. China's preferred political setup for Myanmar includes 25% military representation and an additional 26% of civilian representatives who support the military. Therefore, China's strong backing for the junta's election is not aimed at promoting a democratic transition, but rather at securing its investments and boosting economic cooperation by maintaining influence over the military junta.



Photo: AFP

## **MILITARY-ALIGNED USDP DECLARED WINNER OF 2025-2026 ELECTIONS BY MYANMAR'S MILITARY JUNTA**

**T**he Myanmar junta's Union Election Commission (UEC) announced the winners of the 2025-2026 parliamentary elections on 3 February.

According to the statement, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) secured the largest number of seats, winning 231 out of 263 constituencies in the Pyithu Hluttaw.

Among political parties contesting nationwide, the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), widely known as the White Tiger Party, won seven seats, while the National Unity Party (NUP) gained only four.

Three other parties, the People's Party (PP), the People's Pioneer Party (PPP), and the Myanmar Farmers Development Party failed to win any seats.

At the state and regional level Pyithu Hluttaw contests, the Pa-O National Organisation (PNO) and the Mon Unity Party each won five seats. The Naga National Party (NNP) secured four seats, while the Karen National Democratic Party (KNDP) won one.

Several other ethnic parties won single seats, including the Rakhine Nationalities Party (RNP), Shanni Solidarity Party (SSP), Danu National Democracy Party, Inn National Development Party (INDP), and the Kachin State People's Party (KSPP). One seat was also won by an independent candidate.

In the Amyotha Hluttaw elections conducted under both the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) systems, the USDP won 108 seats, the NUP secured 16, the SNDP gained one, the People's Party won five, and the People's Pioneer Party won one.

Of these, PR representatives included 45 from the USDP, 16 from the NUP, one from the SNDP, five from the People's Party, and one from the People's Pioneer Party.

The remaining 16 PR seats were won by ethnic political parties. The Myanmar Farmers Development Party did not win any PR representation.

The junta held elections in 330 townships across three phases. Phase 1 took place in 102 townships on 28 December 2025. Phase 2 was held in 100 townships on 11 January 2026. Phase 3 covered 61 townships on 25 January 2026.

No voting was conducted in 67 townships.

These elections were held after the military annulled the results of the 2020 general election and dissolved several ethnic parties, as well as the main opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), which had won the 2020 vote.

Several opposition leaders have been imprisoned under various legal provisions since the coup.

Ahead of the elections, the junta enacted the "Law on the Protection of Multi-Party Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction." Between July 2025, when the law was introduced, and 19 January 2026, authorities arrested 404 people. Some received prison sentences ranging from three to seven years.

The military-run election was widely condemned by the public and the international community, who described it as a sham lacking legitimacy.



Photo: AFP

## **JUNTA-ALIGNED USDP ACCUSED OF USING EARLY VOTING TO WIN SOME FPTP SEATS IN MYANMAR**

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which won a total of 537 seats in the 2025 elections under the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system, is facing allegations that it secured victories in many constituencies through early voting, similar to the methods it reportedly used in the 2010 elections.

According to the parliamentary representative list released by the junta's Union Election Commission (UEC) on 3 February, the USDP secured the highest number of seats under the FPTP system, totaling 537 constituencies.

However, criticisms and analyses suggest that in some constituencies, the USDP's victories were achieved through early voting.

Nearly all of these early votes came from military personnel, government department staff, and supporters of the USDP. Additionally, township administrators and village heads in certain areas reportedly pressured local residents and used improper methods to secure early votes in favour of the military-backed party.

According to the UEC's constituency-level results, USDP candidates reportedly benefited from early voting in Kyaukphyu, Myitkyina, Muse, Hpa-An, Tedim, and Monyin townships.

Furthermore, in FPTP constituencies for the Amyotha Hluttaw such as Rakhine (2), Tanintharyi (1 and 4), and state and regional Hluttaw FPTP constituencies like Chaungzon, Tachileik, Muse, and Langkho (Linkhay), USDP candidates also reportedly won through early voting.

Ko Ko Gyi, chairman of the People's Party (PP), criticized early voting and voter list irregularities via his social media. U San Sint (Retired General), PP candidate for Yegyi Township, also reported discrepancies in early vote counts at the township election commission office, stating issues inconsistent with regulations and procedures.

However, due to the severe offenses and penalties stipulated in the military commission's "The Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction," people were unable to voice their criticisms publicly.

Major nationwide parties such as the People's Party, Shan & Nationalities Democratic Party (White Tiger Party), and Myanmar Farmers Development Party (MFDP) indicated that early voting was non-transparent and flawed, yet they did not formally submit legal complaints to the Election Commission.

Instead, they submitted letters of grievance to junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, highlighting that the military's election was characterized by intimidation, lack of freedom and fairness, and a lack of true representation of the people.

Independent analysis by Data for Myanmar of constituency-level results released by the Election Commission showed that the USDP candidates outperformed other party candidates in terms of early votes in 81 townships in Phase (1) of election.

In Phase (1), 17 percent of the total votes obtained by USDP candidates were early votes. Similarly, in Phase (2), aside from Sidoktaya and Hsihseng townships, the USDP candidates received more early votes than other party candidates in 92 out of 94 townships. And 14.65 percent of the USDP's total votes were early votes.

In the military junta's election, which was conducted in three phases, the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system was applied to the Pyithu Hluttaw and Ethnic constituencies, while a hybrid of both FPTP and Proportional Representation (PR) systems was utilized for the Amyotha Hluttaw and the State and Regional Hluttaws.

The PR system allocates seats to political parties based on individual candidate votes in each constituency.

In the 2025 military-backed elections, the USDP secured 231 seats in the Pyithu Hluttaw, 108 seats in the Amyotha Hluttaw including PR allocations, and 379 seats in state and regional parliaments including PR allocations, totaling 739 seats overall.

Photo: Mizzima

## MYANMAR JUNTA FOUNDS OFFICE TO COUNSEL POST-POLL GOVERNMENT

Myanmar's junta announced a new office advising the president on 4 February, a role which may allow the military chief to formally embed his power over the incoming civilian government.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has ruled Myanmar by force since staging a 2021 coup deposing the democratic government of Aung San Suu Kyi and plunging the country into civil war.

The military concluded a heavily restricted election last month in the limited areas it controls, saying the vote will return power to the people when parliament convenes in late March.

With Suu Kyi detained and her party dissolved, rights experts say the junta orchestrated the vote to secure a walkover win for its civilian allies.

Analysts say the incoming government will prolong military rule in a civilian guise, with lawmakers tethered tightly to the will of the top brass.

State media published a notice on Wednesday announcing the formation of the Union Consultative Council to advise the president on "security and the rule of law, international relations, peacebuilding and legislation".

While no names have been announced for the council, analyst Naing Min Khant said armed forces chief Min Aung Hlaing could opt to chair it, potentially giving him a formal perch in the civilian government.

"This structure appears to be the senior general's strategy to consolidate power", the analyst of the Institute for Strategy and Policy Myanmar think tank told AFP.

Being chair would allow "Min Aung Hlaing to retain

his role as commander-in-chief while wielding supreme civilian authority", and "the president's role will likely be reduced to mere administrative execution", he said.

Myanmar has been ruled by the military for most of its post-independence history. Even during its tentative decade-long experiment with civilian politics starting in 2011, generals wielded immense power.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Suu Kyi was blocked from serving as president by military-drafted legislation forbidding the office to those whose spouses or children are foreign citizens.

But she founded a "state counsellor" office, making her the power behind the throne of the president.

Naing Min Khant said the junta-founded council is a "dark mirror" of that arrangement.

"Both were engineered to circumvent constitutional barriers to leadership -- one created for a civilian barred from the presidency, the other for a general who refuses to relinquish military command."

"The fundamental difference is accountability," he added, arguing the new council would operate "in a vacuum without any legislative oversight or democratic checks and balances".

The pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party won a landslide victory in Myanmar's elections, allowing it to pick the president.

Min Aung Hlaing has not ruled out taking over that role directly, although that would require him to surrender his command of the armed forces -- historically the nation's most powerful institution.

AFP

# JUNTA'S SHAM ELECTION IS OVER. NOW COMES THE REAL TEST

## KHIN OHMAR



Min Aung Hlaing is planning to hang on to power. Photo: AFP

The Myanmar military junta's sham election is over. Phases one, two, and three have come and gone. And despite the military's desperate attempt to manufacture legitimacy, the people of Myanmar have once again categorically rejected them.

From start to finish, this so-called "election" was nothing more than a violent and cynical performance designed to produce a pre-decided outcome: the consolidation of military rule under the thin guise of an election. This was not a transition. This was not a reform. It was just a different style of war.

And yet, we are already seeing signs that some governments may fall into the same trap they did in 2010. Japan's recent statement of "serious concern," while welcome in tone, risks becoming just that: concern, and little more. If concern is not matched with decisive action, it is worthless.

We say to the world: do not be fooled. Not again. Not this time.

### Violence, repression, and criminalized dissent

Weeks before the first phase of voting, the junta launched airstrikes, ground assaults, and arson campaigns across Sagaing, Magwe, and Mandalay—regions in which large swath of areas have been liberated by the democratic resistance and thus not under military control. Thousands of people were forcibly displaced, villages were shelled, and homes destroyed as a form of collective punishment for lack of consent at the ballot box in places where there were no ballot boxes.

Between phases two and three alone, hundreds of clashes and attacks were recorded, including

widespread aerial bombardment across dozens of townships. In several cases, airstrikes targeted civilians gathered at funerals, prayer ceremonies, and public spaces. This was not collateral damage. This was terror, deliberately deployed to break resistance.

At the same time, the junta weaponized its so-called "election protection laws" to criminalize dissent. At least 404 people—324 men and 80 women—were arrested under election-related charges, including for criticizing the process or alleged links to resistance forces. These arrests were not about law enforcement or public order; they were about silencing opposition and enforcing submission through fear.

### Propaganda, coercion, and a pre-decided outcome

Over three phases of "voting," the junta also deployed every tactic in its playbook—bribes, intimidation, threats, surveillance, propaganda—to coerce people into participating. Civil servants under junta control were compelled to vote. Citizens were pressured to have their photographs taken outside polling stations to be used for propaganda in junta media. Evidently, this was enforced performance under surveillance.

The outcome was, of course, pre-decided. The military's proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), claimed a manufactured victory. Nearly all other political parties, even

those who tried to play by the junta's rules, were eliminated from the race at the last minute. The USDP, filled with ex-military generals, swept the civilian seats, while the military's 25% bloc of unelected seats remains untouched.

What we now face is a sham parliament preparing to install a sham government. It is 2010 all over again—but this time, far worse.

### Let us not repeat the mistakes of 2010

After the 2010 election, the military initiated the so-called peace process with ethnic resistance groups while starting “power sharing” with the democratic opposition led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The world was too quick to believe the then military regime’s “transition” narrative.

Governments rushed in to lift sanctions. Aid flowed in. Foreign investors lined up to strike deals with military-owned or -linked crony companies. All the while, the military continued to dominate through violence, through resource extraction, through divide-and-rule games with ethnic and democratic forces alike.

But the post-2010 opening was a mirage. And the consequences of that mistaken embrace are still being paid for by our people today.

This time, the situation is different. In 2025, over 70% of the country’s territory is no longer under junta control. The Spring Revolution, the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), the People’s Defense Forces (PDFs), and ethnic resistance organizations (EROs) are building a functioning bottom-up federal democratic governance rooted in solidarity, inclusion, and human rights values. The year 2026 is not the beginning of a junta-led transition. It is the continuation of a people’s revolution.

### The real test begins now

In the coming months, the junta will escalate its campaign to gain international recognition. It will use its authoritarian allies like China, Russia, Iran, and Belarus to push the sham government onto the world stage. It will attempt to claim Myanmar’s UN seat. It will seek validation through ASEAN summits. And it will try to exploit any opening left by the silence or weakness of democratic governments.

This is the real test for Japan, for ASEAN, for the EU, for the United States, for the UN. Will you recognize the military’s sham parliament? Will you allow the junta to sit at the table under the false banner of legitimacy?

If so, the consequences will be devastating—not only for Myanmar people’s future, but for the credibility of every international commitment to human rights and democracy.

### Reject, refuse, and disengage

We are calling on the international community to take a clear and coordinated stance:

- Reject the results of the junta’s sham election

in full, including the illegitimate parliament and government it produces.

- Refuse recognition at all regional and multilateral forums, including the upcoming ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meetings and Summit under the chairship of the Philippines.

- Disengage politically and economically from all junta-controlled institutions, companies, and state mechanisms.

We also call for urgent, practical support:

- Humanitarian aid channeled through the border must be scaled up urgently and immediately, in line with the 2025 October ASEAN Summit decision on the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus (point 25) to deliver humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons affected by the ongoing armed conflicts through cross-border efforts, including from Thailand, India, and Bangladesh into liberated areas.

- Global coordination to stop aviation fuel shipments into Myanmar must be prioritized. The junta’s most lethal weapon remains its air force. Without fuel, its capacity to bomb villages, hospitals and schools will be severely limited.

- Clear communication with ASEAN must continue to ensure no junta official is invited under the pretense of representing Myanmar.

### We ask you to stand with the people’s revolution

Myanmar’s people have endured five years of horror—if we count from the February 2021 illegal and brutal coup attempt by the military—with little more than statements of concern from the international community. Yet we have built an inclusive, intersectional movement committed to justice, freedom, and federal democracy.

We are doing the work of dismantling military dictatorship, with or without your help. But the world’s actions still matter.

To those governments tempted to re-engage with any of the junta’s post-sham election entities, we ask: Will you repeat the same mistake? Will you be complicit in the junta’s atrocity crimes and allow your reengagement to aid and abet the military as it continues to commit violence against the people of Myanmar? Or will you finally stand with the people for justice and humanity?

*(Khin Ohmar is a Myanmar human rights activist who was involved in organizing the 1988 nationwide pro-democracy uprising. She is also the founder and chairperson of human rights organization Progressive Voice.)*



## **TIMOR LESTE OPENS LEGAL PROCEEDINGS AGAINST MYANMAR JUNTA FOR WAR CRIMES AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY**

**O**n 2 February, the Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO) and the Myanmar Accountability Project (MAP) released a statement announcing the opening of legal proceedings by judicial authorities in Timor Leste against the Myanmar junta, including its leader, Min Aung Hlaing, regarding alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. This is the first time a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has begun actions of this nature against a fellow ASEAN member state.

The joint statement continues as follows.

A senior Timorese prosecutor has been appointed to look into the criminal file presented two weeks ago in Dili by the Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO). "I welcome the move", said Salai Za Uk, Executive Director of CHRO, "and we look forward to working with the Timorese authorities, as well as civil society groups in Timor Leste, on pursuing justice for the Chin People and all people in Myanmar. Given Timor Leste's history, and the indignities the Timorese people suffered in their struggle for independence, there is a real sense of solidarity with the people of Myanmar, against whom the junta is inflicting appalling barbarities on an almost hourly basis".

The opening of proceedings in Dili comes amid widespread international condemnation of the recent "sham" election in Myanmar, including from ASEAN, which refused to send election observers, and confer any legitimacy on the poll. It also comes as Myanmar marks the fifth anniversary of the failed coup, in which the self-appointed Senior-General, Min Aung Hlaing, attempted to seize power from the democratically elected government. Today, after what the UN calls a

"reign of terror" on the Burmese people, his isolated clique controls, a mere forty per cent of the country and has lost control of hundreds of kilometers of Myanmar's international borders.

"The rule of law is a priority issue for Timor Leste", said Jose Teixeira, from the Timorese law firm Da Silva Teixeira & Associados Lda, representing CHRO, "and it is vital that the independence of the Timorese judiciary is respected and that the legal process runs its course. We firmly reject any outside interference, particularly from the Myanmar junta, in Timor Leste's court system".

The criminal file presented to the Timorese Prosecutor includes irrefutable evidence of the gang rape of a seven-month pregnant woman in front of her husband; the massacre of ten people, including a journalist and a 13-year-old boy, who was among eight people who had their hands tied behind their backs and their throats slit; the deliberate killing of a Christian Pastor and three Deacons; a disproportionate and indiscriminate aerial attack on a hospital, which killed four medical staff and four patients, and a series of attacks on Christian churches, civilian infrastructure protected under international law.

Chris Gunness, Director of the Myanmar Accountability Project (MAP), which supports legal cases against the Myanmar junta said "this is a significant milestone on the Burmese people's long march to justice, freedom and dignity. The road ahead will be fraught with obstacles, but this case sends a powerful signal. The Burmese people are saying loud and clear that justice and accountability are an indispensable part of their struggle against dictatorship and tyranny".



Myanmar envoy Kyaw Moe Tun.  
Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR ENVOY URGES UN ACTION AS JUNTA ATROCITIES DEEPEN SOCIAL CRISIS

On 4 February, Myanmar's UN representative, Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, warned that the military junta's atrocities and sham elections are worsening the humanitarian crisis. He urged the United Nations to take decisive action against the junta.

Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun's statement is as follows.

Madam Chair,

The world is counting down the remaining 1,791 days until we meet our deadline for the SDGs. Yet, we continue to face multifaceted crises increasing in their scale and scope. People across all walks of life, especially the most vulnerable ones, have been enduring these unprecedented challenges as a consequence.

Amongst these challenges, the reversal of global social development is predominant.

Women and children, older persons, people with disabilities, refugees, migrants and those facing the climate crisis as well as those living in conflict situations, to mention a few, are bearing the burdens of our shortcomings.

My country, Myanmar, is a stark example.

The previous elected government prioritized measures to eradicate poverty through economic liberalization, inviting foreign investments, improving rural infrastructure, creating employment opportunities and building individual capacity. These efforts bore fruit during the government's tenure and people's living standards were uplifted.

Regrettably, the elected government was overthrown by the illegal military coup on 1 February 2021. This year, we are already marking the 5th year of this unlawful coup attempt.

As our people resisted the coup, the military junta waged a war of terror against the population, and they are committing war crimes and crimes against humanity across the country.

Over 7700 people were killed by the military junta since the coup. 2,600 women, 1,300 children and 2,700 youths are among them.

Today, over 3.6 million people are being displaced, and almost 22 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance in Myanmar. Among them, nearly 10.4 million are women, girls and LGBTIQ+ individuals.

There is no equality but discrimination, no inclusion but exclusion, no protection but persecution, no decent work but unemployment, no education but indoctrination, no access to fundamental healthcare but a breakdown of the health system. And most of all, it has set the stage for extreme poverty where half the population is living below the national poverty line.

All foundational sectors and pillars of a country have been weaponized in Myanmar under the military dictators, a group of perpetrators who are now organising a sham election to deflect international pressure regarding their brutalities.

It is crystal clear that the sham elections and its manufactured results by the military junta will only prolong the crisis and violence in Myanmar.

Simply put, atrocities are the everyday reality for the people of Myanmar, while social development and social justice seem like a luxury.

However, our people continue to cling to hope.

The National Unity Government of Myanmar together with EROs and CSOs have been carrying out measures to mitigate the people's suffering through internal coordination, engagement with diverse stakeholders and external support.

Founded on the principle of leaving no one behind, justice and inclusivity, human rights and protection, humanitarian assistance and health and social services, education and youth laid down in our federal principles are placed at the heart of our work.

Therefore, in line with the Doha Programme of Action's call to invest in people, we have been providing humanitarian assistance to those in need

and implementing programmes for capacity building of the existing human resources. Nevertheless, limitations and challenges are on the rise.

In this regard, support from the UN system remains crucial.

The UN must not continue failing the people of Myanmar.

Although time is long overdue, we request once again that the UN act boldly in addressing the issue of Myanmar.

Last but not least, Madam Chair, social development cannot thrive in a vacuum of legitimacy. We cannot talk about 'resilient economies' or 'social contracts' while the very perpetrators of destruction are allowed to act with impunity. The military junta and its affiliates must be held accountable for atrocities they committed throughout the country.

Only by doing so can we step up to building a federal democratic union in Myanmar that is committed to serving the interests of our people and the world.

Importantly, the UN needs to make principled decisions and translate words into actions.

I thank you.



## **ELEVEN SHAN GROUPS CALL FOR RELEASE OF NINE CIVILIANS HELD BY MNDAA**

**E**leven Shan civil society organizations have demanded the release of nine civilians detained by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), commonly known as the Kokang Army.

On 1 February, residents of Man Sel Village, Nampawng Village Tract in Lashio Township, protested against the MNDAA's plans to grant gold mining rights to Chinese entrepreneurs. It is reported that 36 civilians were arrested and taken away on that day due to their opposition.

"They are currently being held at their base in Hsenwi. They haven't been allowed to see their families. Most of them are young people. Three of them have suffered broken bones," said Ying Mwe Leng, Secretary of the Shan Students' Union.

Of those arrested, 27 were released on 2 February. However, nine individuals Sai Pan Sein, Sai Sam, Sai Lu, Sai Nyunt, Sai Than, Sai San Mya, Sai Pwint, Sai Maung Yaung, and Sai Tun Kyaw remain in detention to this day.

The statement noted that on 29 January, a man named Lung Pan from Pan Myaing Village in Hsipaw Township died from injuries sustained after being beaten by MNDAA soldiers.

There are now grave concerns for the lives of the nine current detainees as they are reportedly being subjected to beatings.

Consequently, the 11 civil society groups issued a statement calling on the MNDAA to immediately release the nine detainees.

They also demanded an end to the forced seizure of farmland for gold mining against local wishes, an immediate stop to gold mining plans, an end to armed intimidation and violence against civilians, accountability and compensation for those affected until the issues are resolved, and a cessation of violations that undermine peaceful coexistence.



## TOP GOLD ASSOCIATION OFFICIALS ARRESTED BY MYANMAR JUNTA OFFICIALS

The Military Commission announced on the evening of 5 February that the Chairman of the Yangon Region Gold Entrepreneurs Association (YGEA), U Myo Myint of Thein Than Diamond, Gold & Jewelry Shop along with YGEA Vice-Chairman (1) U Myo Thu Win of Academy Gold Shop and YGEA Secretary U Nay Myo Htet of Shwe Sin Academy Gold Shop, have been arrested and will face legal action.

According to the Military Commission's statement, the three are accused of purchasing and stockpiling gold bars before reselling them at inflated prices with the intention of destabilizing the gold market. The Military Commission said these acts violate prohibitions issued by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation.

"Despite being responsible for supervising and maintaining gold price stability, these officials themselves were found to have purchased, hoarded, and traded gold bars at unofficial market rates with the aim of destabilizing the gold market," the statement said.

According to the statement, U Myo Myint, chairman of the Gold Association, allegedly bought eight pure gold bars each weighing 70 ticals at unofficial market rates in January and held them with the intention of reselling them for profit.

In addition, U Myo Thu Win is accused of purchasing 970 ticals of pure gold at unofficial market rates at his gold shops between December 2025 and January 2026, and later reselling 950 ticals at inflated prices.

Similarly, U Nay Myo Htet allegedly bought 319 ticals of pure gold at his gold shops during the same period and resold 268 ticals at higher prices for profit.

The Military Commission has warned other gold entrepreneurs to cooperate in maintaining stability in the domestic gold market and to strictly comply with all issued orders and directives. It added that effective legal action will be taken against any trader who fails to do so.



Sergei Shoigu with Min Aung Hlaing.  
Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR AND RUSSIA AGREE NEW MILITARY ALLIANCE

**M**yanmar and Russia have signed a five-year military cooperation pact, Moscow said 3 February, sealing an alliance analysts say has been crucial to the junta's grip on power.

Myanmar's military snatched power in a 2021 coup, triggering a civil war, and has relied on backing from Russia as well as neighbouring China to keep its forces stocked.

Air strikes by Russian-made jets have kept surging rebel factions at bay, while also frequently targeting civilians in attacks some conflict monitors say amount to war crimes.

Russia's defence ministry announced the new pact lasting until 2030 after a Monday visit to Myanmar by the Kremlin's top security official, Sergei Shoigu, state news agency TASS said.

Myanmar state media also confirmed the deal for "enhancement of defence cooperation" on Tuesday, but, like their Russian counterparts, gave scant details about what it entails.

While the junta's use of Russian jets is well documented, some conflict monitors say Myanmar has also shipped gear to Russia to bolster its stalling attempt to invade Ukraine.

"Russia fully supports the Myanmar leadership's course to protect territorial integrity and strengthen national sovereignty and security," Shoigu told junta officials, according to TASS.

Many Western nations have considered Myanmar a pariah state since the military coup five years ago, and Russia likewise an outcast since it launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

"Western pressure on Russia and Myanmar will not cease," Shoigu said.

"You can fully count on Moscow's comprehensive assistance, including in the international arena."

Myanmar's junta has just completed a month-long election -- touting the exercise as a return to democracy and a chance for peace after five years of military rule and civil war.

But it was blocked from vast areas controlled by rebels, and was widely criticised abroad for excluding jailed democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, which won the last elections in 2020.

The Union Solidarity and Development Party -- described by many analysts as a military proxy -- won in a walkover, taking more than 80 percent of seats, according to official results last week.

But with rebel factions rejecting the vote as an illegitimate exercise intended to rebrand and reinforce the rule of the armed forces, analysts say it is unlikely to stymie the civil war.

AFP



Indian soldiers near the Myanmar-India border. Photo: AFP

## **INDIAN ARMY'S CROSS-BORDER BOMBING HIGHLIGHTS MYANMAR JUNTA'S FAILURE TO PROTECT SOVEREIGNTY**

**A**n Indian Army cross-border drone bombing in Pansaung Township, Naga Self-Administered Zone, has drawn sharp criticism from a Naga nationalist politician and local residents, who say the incident exposes the Myanmar junta's inability to protect Myanmar's sovereignty.

The criticism follows a drone bombing carried out by the Indian Army near Kyaethayauk village, Pansaung Township, at around 3 am on 1 February.

"I don't understand what goes through the minds of those who claim, 'Myanmar is a sovereign country and not even an inch has been compromised. This incident clearly shows that they are incapable of defending themselves,'" a Naga politician, who requested anonymity, told Mizzima on 5 February.

He also criticized the junta's silence over repeated cross-border incursions, noting that Myanmar's neighbours including China, Thailand, and Bangladesh have lodged strong protests in similar situations.

"India, a democratic country, is acting beyond international standards and norms, fully aware of the Military Commission's weaknesses, and is committing these violations," the politician said.

During the attack, a bomb reportedly exploded on farmland owned by U Zin Kyae, a farmer from Kyaethayauk village near the India-Myanmar border. While some local media reported no casualties, other

unconfirmed sources claimed that two civilians were killed and three others injured.

There is speculation that the bombing was intended to pressure the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K), led by U Yone Aung, which has refused to engage in peace talks with the Indian government.

However, a Naga resident said the incident reflects the junta's failure to ensure the safety of civilians living near areas where armed groups operate.

"India may be targeting the NSCN-K, which has rejected peace talks, and there are also Assamese and Manipur rebel groups that previously fought against India in this area. But if such attacks take place, the authorities are clearly unable to protect the lives and property of the people," he said.

This is not the first time the Indian military has conducted drone strikes on Myanmar territory. Previous attacks have also resulted in civilian casualties, according to a statement issued by the United Tangshang Naga Council (UTNC) on 3 February.

The UTNC said Indian forces crossed the border and bombed Karmwaylawri village in Lahe Township, Naga Autonomous Region, on 20 October 2025, killing two local residents. Earlier, on 13 July 2025, drone attacks were also carried out in Nanyun and Lahe Townships.



## **MANIPUR JAIL RELEASES 27 MYANMAR NATIONALS, INCLUDING TWO CHILDREN**

**T**wenty-seven Myanmar nationals have been freed from Sajiva Central Jail in Imphal, Manipur State, India, according to local media reports and sources close to the families.

"Yes, the release has been confirmed. They were flown by helicopter from Imphal to the border and are now staying at a church in Tamu," said a source close to one of the families.

The group comprising 24 men, a woman, and her two children. They had been detained in Manipur for lacking valid residence documents. They were transferred to Myanmar through the India-Myanmar border on 4 February.

He added that the returnees will undergo testing for the Nipah virus, which is currently spreading in India, and will be placed under quarantine for one week before being allowed to go back to their homes under family guarantees.

Those freed include migrant workers in Manipur, students, and border residents, many of whom had been imprisoned for periods ranging from three to five years.

According to a source close to the families, their release followed the submission of citizenship documents to the Myanmar Embassy in India. The documents were verified and the individuals formally accepted back into Myanmar.

According to NE Live, the Manipur state government handed over the 27 Myanmar nationals to Myanmar authorities at the No. 1 India-Myanmar Friendship Bridge after completing immigration formalities in accordance with the Foreigners Act of 1946.

Separately, the Myanmar junta's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that 27 Myanmar nationals who had been convicted in India on various reasons were repatriated to their respective homes via the international border entry and exit gate in Tamu on 4 January.

According to the statement, the Myanmar Embassy in India coordinated the repatriation with relevant authorities in Manipur through India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

This marks the fifth release of Myanmar nationals from Manipur jails. Previously, 39 detainees were released on 2 May 2024, followed by 38 on 11 June, 26 on 4 January, 2025, and 27 on 21 March 2025.

In addition, family members of the detainees said that over 60 Myanmar nationals, both men and women, remain imprisoned in Imphal jail for lacking valid residence documents.

Due to the poor food, limited access to clean drinking water, as well as inadequate healthcare in jail, 32-year-old Ko Dae Khol Lun died on 26 February 2023, and 57-year-old U Aung Min died on 19 May 2025.



## MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKE IN TAZE TOWNSHIP KILLS SIX, INCLUDING FOUR NOVICES

**S**ix people, including four novice monks, were killed due to an airstrike carried out by Myanmar junta forces on the village monastery in Thit Say Kone village, northern Taze Township, Sagaing Region, on the morning of 5 February.

The attack was carried out by two jet fighters at around 9:30 am. It is reported that there are also several people with serious injuries.

"Two jet fighters bombed the village monastery. The first plane dropped bombs twice, and the second one fired rocket and dropped bombs. Six people, including four little novices, were killed," a 25-year-old local man said.

During the incident, the military used two jet

fighters for the bombing. Four young novices, one man, and an elderly woman were killed by shrapnel, while three others sustained severe injuries.

"The monastery has no connection to the revolution. There is a large vehicle workshop inside the compound, and they likely mistook the many parked cars for a hospital or clinic. They targeted a non-military site by mistake," the local man said.

The National Unity Government (NUG) released a statement on 2 February, stating that in the five years since the military coup, the junta has carried out 4,750 airstrikes targeting civilians across the country, resulting in 5,188 civilian deaths.

Photo: KIA



## **NUG RECOGNIZES AND HONOURS KIO-KIA'S LEADING ROLE IN SPRING REVOLUTION**

**T**he National Unity Government (NUG) said it acknowledges and takes pride in the Kachin Independence Organization/ Kachin Independence Army (KIO/KIA), for their leading role in the current Spring Revolution.

The remarks were included in a message issued to commemorate the 65th Anniversary of Kachin Revolution Day on 5 February.

"In the ongoing Myanmar Spring Revolution, we acknowledge and salute the KIO/KIA as a revolutionary force with steadfast principles that is at the forefront of the struggle," the statement said.

The NUG also reaffirmed its commitment to stand and fight together with its allied Kachin revolutionary forces until the ultimate goals are achieved – the complete dismantling of military dictatorship and the creation of a Federal Democratic Union that guarantees

full self-determination, reflecting the collective will of the Kachin people.

The NUG also vowed to do everything within its capacity to deliver justice for all martyrs who lost their lives during the course of the revolution, as well as for their families and Kachin internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were driven from their homes by the conflict.

In addition, the statement conveyed profound respect for the Kachin people's decades-long sacrifices of life, blood, and labour over the past 65 years, made in their struggle for national equality, self-determination, and the realization of a Federal Democratic Union in line with the Panglong Agreement promises.

The Kachin ethnic people began their armed revolution on 5 February 1961, to reclaim their lost national rights, religious freedom, and other fundamental liberties.



Photo: AFP

## MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER ATTRIBUTES WIDESPREAD POVERTY TO CITIZENS' FAILURE TO PURSUE SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Myanmar junta leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, said that widespread poverty in the country is due to the fact that the majority of the population is unable to pursue their personal development.

He made the comments during a speech to instructors and trainee officers at the National Defence University on 3 February, according to junta-controlled newspapers.

"Personal grievances, jealousy, and discontent may develop as long as poverty endures. Educational deficiencies have been identified as the root cause of national instability throughout our nation's history," the military chief stated.

He also stressed that a strong education sector is essential for the country's progress, stability, and development.

He further claimed, citing reports on social media, that some people had failed to salute the national flag or sing the national anthem, which he described as a sign of declining patriotism. He also alleged that certain civil servants had engaged in economic and political corruption, attributing this to a lack of patriotic spirit.

The junta chief additionally said that civil servants must manage their income and spending responsibly, noting that action has been taken against some officials for attempting to obtain excessive personal gain.

A June 2025 report by the United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP), titled "An Analysis of Urban Poverty in Yangon," found that the country's commercial capital is facing a severe surge in urban poverty.

The crisis is most acute in outlying townships, where large numbers of people displaced by conflict and economic collapse have sought refuge.

The report said that under the National League for Democracy (NLD) government, only 10 percent of Yangon's population was living in poverty in 2017, but that number had climbed to 43 percent by 2023 following the coup, and that the poverty of the poor is getting deeper.

UNDP Myanmar also reported in October 2025 that young people aged 15 to 35 who make up more than one-third of the country's population are confronting unprecedented difficulties in accessing education and employment. The report said that ongoing political instability, economic deterioration, and social challenges have severely undermined opportunities for youth learning and job creation.

Meanwhile, data released on 21 January by the Institute for Strategy and Policy-Myanmar (ISP-Myanmar) showed that foreign investment has fallen by nearly three-quarters over the past five years, as international companies continue to exit the country in the aftermath of the military coup.

Photo: Supplied



### MYANMAR JUNTA TROOPS SUFFER HEAVY LOSSES IN FALAM WITH OVER 30 KILLED AND WEAPONS SEIZED

**C**hin National Army (CNA) and Chin Revolutionary Joint Forces launched an attack on a junta column advancing in large numbers in Falam Township, Chin State, killing 36 troops, including a major, and seizing 33 weapons along with a large cache of ammunition, according to reports.

On 3 February, Chin forces attacked a camp near Zaung Lay village, located between Thaing Ngin and Falam, which had been reinforced in 20 January with about 300 troops from Kalay in Sagaing Region.

CNA spokesperson Salai Htet Ni confirmed that, in addition to those killed, 20 junta troops were wounded, and Chin forces seized 33 weapons and more than 5,000 rounds of ammunition.

He also said that Chin forces attacked and captured the camp, seizing bodies and ammunition, but later withdrew because the position was vulnerable to drone surveillance and airstrikes, also the operation aimed to neutralize resistance before retreating.

A video released after the battle, filmed by a Chin leader, shows the bodies of junta troops lying near a communication trench, while Chin soldiers are seen being ordered to collect weapons and remain alert for possible enemy fire.

No fatalities were reported among the Chin

resistance forces during the fighting, though four fighters were wounded.

Chin forces have held Falam town since late October 2025, after junta troops advanced with nearly 1,000 personnel from the Kalay-Thaing Ngin and Kalay-Weibula routes but were halted after more than three months at Khunli and Susham, over 10 miles from Falam, unable to push further forward.

The current fighting involves newly reinforced military units advancing on Falam Township in three columns, while Chin resistance forces under the Chinland Council including the Chin National Army and the Chin National Defence Force of the Chin Brotherhood are engaged in the clashes.

The CNA spokesperson said at least 100 junta personnel have been killed in frequent clashes, ambushes, and firefights, adding that while the number of wounded remains unclear, the death toll could be higher.

Of Chin State's nine townships, the junta controls only Tedim and Hakha, with the remaining seven held by revolutionary forces.

Revolutionary military sources say the junta is attempting to retake Falam as a stepping stone for a broader offensive to reclaim other lost territories.



## **FORMER HOME AFFAIRS MINISTER INVESTIGATED FOR ALLEGED TIES TO ONLINE SCAM OPERATIONS AMID MAJOR CABINET RESHUFFLE**

**L**t. Gen. Tun Tun Naung, the former Minister of Home Affairs under Myanmar's military junta, has reportedly come under investigation for allegedly accepting bribes from illegal online scam syndicates.

The probe follows a 27 January 2026, announcement by the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) that retired the general from his ministerial post and returned him to his original military duties though sources in Naypyidaw indicate he has not been given a new assignment.

Paradoxically, Lt. Gen. Tun Tun Naung had been serving as the chairman of the Central Supervisory Committee on Combating Telecom Fraud and Online Gambling, the very body tasked with eradicating the "scam centres" that have proliferated along Myanmar's borders.

The anti-scam centre was established on 10 December last year and scheduled for completion in the 2026–2027 fiscal year. Now its chair himself has come under investigation over allegations of accepting bribes from scam operations.

Tun Tun Naung previously served as Minister of Border Affairs in the early post-coup period. His removal from office as Minister of Home Affairs on 31 January 2025 comes one year after assuming the role.



## **MILITARY COMMANDER KILLED AND CIVILIAN CASUALTIES MOUNT AS FIGHTING INTENSIFIES IN HPAKANT**

**A** mid-ranking military officer, Major Zarni Aung, was reportedly killed alongside dozens of soldiers during fierce clashes between Myanmar's military junta and a coalition of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and People's Defence Forces (PDF) in Hpakant Township.

The fighting, which escalated significantly around 2 February, centred on the Mashi Kahtaung Ward and surrounding areas, resulting in the surrender of several junta soldiers and the reported death of approximately 35 junta troops. The casualties included Major Zarni Aung, column commander of Battalion 381.

A 13-year-old boy was killed during the violence and four others injured by junta artillery shelling, local residents reported.

"We have captured several soldiers in the fighting and have not disclosed their details. This morning, five surrendered, and another the previous day. Their column leader is also dead. The fighting continues, but all who return to the legal fold are safe," a revolution military source said.

On that day, a junta member surrendered with weapons, followed by five more on the morning of 3 February.

Regarding the matter, KIA spokesman Colonel Naw Bu said, "No one has officially confirmed it. However, public reports suggest that a major-level officer may

have been killed. Official confirmation has not been announced yet."

A source close to the Kachin People's Defence Force (KPDF) said a reward of 300,000 kyats will be offered to those who surrender with weapons to Battalion 6 in the KIA Brigade 9 area. Colonel Naw Bu added that the amount will vary depending on the type of weapon surrendered.

A local resident reported that around 12:20 noon on 2 February, a large-calibre shell fell and exploded in Kalachaung, Myoma Ward, killing a 13-year-old boy and injuring a woman. Earlier, at about 5 am, a mortar shell struck a house in A Mite Pone village, injuring a two-year-old child and his parents. On 2 February, a mortar shell hit a school in Hpakant, injuring two 10-year-old students.

Fighting in Hpakant has been intense since 31 January, when junta troops based at Strategic Hill (Byuha Gone) launched a military operation in the area. The clashes have left several civilians injured.

The forces advanced through Mashi Kahtaung Ward and Htong Bo village, targeting Seikmu (Saing Taung) village, which remains under KIA and KPDF control.

Exchanges of heavy weapons fire continue this morning in Mashi Kahtaung Ward and A Mite Pone village, local sources reported.



Photo: Supplied

## DEPUTY REGIONAL COMMANDER OF CENTRAL COMMAND AND COMMANDER OF MYANMAR'S LID 99 ARRESTED

According to an internal Myanmar military source, the Deputy Commander of the Central Regional Military Command (CRMC) and the Commander of the 99th Light Infantry Division (LID 99) have been arrested.

The report states that Brigadier General Lin Naing Soe, Deputy Commander of the Mandalay-based Central Command, and Brigadier General Soe Win Tun, Commander of the Meiktila-based 99th Light Infantry Division, were recently taken into custody by resistance forces.

These reports have not been independently verified.

Brigadier General Lin Naing Soe was last seen in public on January 27th during a ceremony to welcome back "frontline returnee" soldiers at a local battalion in Minbu Township, Magway Region.

# NUG REPORTS OVER 5,000 CIVILIAN DEATHS AMID INTENSIFYING MILITARY BRUTALITY IN FIVE YEARS SINCE MYANMAR COUP

The National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar has released a harrowing report marking the fifth anniversary of the military coup, documenting the deaths of 5,188 civilians at the hands of junta forces.

Speaking during a regular news broadcast on 3 February 2026, NUG spokesperson U Nay Phone Latt detailed a systematic escalation of violence that includes the use of human shields and the deliberate destruction of essential infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and water sources.

"Over the five years of the Spring Revolution, the military commission's brutality has intensified year by year. Recently, the military commission has increasingly used civilians as human shields during military offensives. Beyond burning villages, the military commission forces have systematically destroyed essential lifelines such as wells, ponds, schools, and hospitals, rendering communities unliveable," he said.

U Nay Phone Latt added that the actions of junta forces have grown more severe with time, pointing out

that 501 massacre incidents were recorded over the five-year period, including 159 cases in 2025 alone.

Furthermore, records compiled by the NUG's Ministry of Human Rights show that a total of 4,750 airstrikes have been carried out by the junta, leading to the destruction of 1,272 hospitals, schools, and religious buildings.

The ministry's data also indicates that junta forces conducted 289 airstrikes in December 2025 alone.

The NUG also stated that its Ministry of Human Rights is continuously monitoring and documenting massacres, airstrikes, human rights violations, and forced conscription carried out by the Myanmar junta

U Nay Phone Latt emphasized that the NUG will not allow those responsible for the junta's war crimes to go unpunished and will make every possible effort to ensure accountability and justice through all available means.

# POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THAYET PRISON STAGE SILENT STRIKE TO MARK FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF MYANMAR COUP

**A** silent strike was held within the walls of Thayet Prison in the Magway Region as political prisoners and other inmates joined nationwide protests to mark the fifth anniversary of the 2021 military coup.

"They were assigned work that day, but no one spoke or made any sound. During the break, everyone switched off the lights and remained completely silent," the source told Mizzima, quoting a message sent from inside the prison.

According to sources close to the families of those detained, approximately 120 prisoners participated in the act of defiance on 1 February, refusing to speak or

make any sound during their work assignments and switching off all lights during their breaks.

The Political Prisoners' Network - Myanmar (PPNM) reported that at least 500 prisoners are currently being held in Thayet Prison.

According to figures released on 2 February by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a total of 30,371 people have been arrested since the coup. Of these, 22,778 remain in detention, and 11,511 have already been sentenced to prison.



Photo: AFP

## **BHRN SAYS MYANMAR JUNTA CONTINUING TO KILL WITH IMPUNITY**

The Burma Human Rights Network released a statement on 1 February marking the five year anniversary of the Myanmar military coup. The statement calls attention to the killing of thousands of civilians, detention of over 30,000 as political prisoners and the displacement of at least 3.6 million people.

The BHRN statement continues as follows.

Its atrocities, which include war crimes and crimes against humanity, have only intensified over the past year. For Myanmar's Muslim communities, the military's violence has been accompanied by systematic attacks on religious life. Since the coup, the junta has destroyed several Islamic religious buildings through airstrikes and arson, sealed mosques, seized historic cemeteries, and permitted ultranationalists to incite hatred with impunity.

"The military stood before the ICJ this month and denied committing genocide while its allies back home called for Rohingya to be 'shot, killed, dumped, buried,'" said Kyaw Win, Executive Director of the Burma Human Rights Network. "Five years after the coup, the military is still bombing civilians, raiding mosques during prayers, and permitting open calls for Muslims to be exterminated. Not a single general has faced justice. There is still no arms embargo, no global jet fuel ban, no ICC referral. That impunity is why the killing continues. The question is whether the world will do anything about it?"

Even as the International Court of Justice held public hearings this month in the genocide case filed by The Gambia, ultranationalists aligned with the military seized the moment to incite hatred against Muslims. Nay Myo Wai, a senior figure of the Yangon-based

Peace and Diversity Party, a political ally of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party, told a pro-junta media outlet that he stands by extreme rhetoric targeting Rohingya Muslims, including that Rohingya entering Myanmar waters should be "shot, killed, dumped, buried." Ma Ba Tha, the ultranationalist Buddhist organisation long nurtured by the military to spread intolerance and violence against Muslims, organised rallies in Yangon to support junta delegates at the ICJ.

The junta has targeted Muslims through coercive conscription practices, including raids on mosques during prayers. On August 15, 2025, soldiers and Pyu Saw Htee militants raided a mosque during Friday Jumu'ah prayers in Sagaing Region, and seized 10 Muslim youths. On September 7, junta forces abducted five Muslim youths from the a mosque in Shwebo during sunset prayers.

The military's use of airstrikes has sharply intensified, with 2,165 airstrikes from January to late November 2025 compared to 1,716 during all of 2024. Faced with pressure on jet fuel supplies, the junta has shifted to paramotors and gyrocopters. On October 6, 2025, a paramotor bombed a candlelight vigil in Sagaing Region, killing at least 24 people including children; hours later, the military struck the same location again. On January 4, 2026, a gyrocopter attacked a hospital, killing the chief physician and two staff. The following day, a gyrocopter bombed the cemetery where he was to be buried.

The junta staged fraudulent elections in three phases between December 28, 2025, and January 25, 2026, in an attempt to legitimise its illegal rule. Turnout was abysmally low, with at least 7.5 million people

excluded, major political parties deregistered, and over 400 people prosecuted under an 'Election Protection Law' carrying penalties including death for criticising the process. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has stated it will not endorse the elections.

Despite critical advances in accountability this month, including ICJ hearings and a Universal Jurisdiction complaint filed in Timor-Leste, significant gaps in sanctions coordination persist. While 222 individuals and entities have been designated by the US, UK, EU, Canada, and Australia, 40 percent have been sanctioned by only one country. India, Japan, and South Korea have imposed zero targeted sanctions since the coup.

"Five years of statements of concern have not stopped a single airstrike," said Kyaw Win. "Governments must impose a comprehensive arms embargo including aviation fuel and dual-use components, close the gaps in sanctions coordination, reject any legitimacy for the junta's sham elections, and support every available avenue for accountability. We have been calling for these measures for years. The solutions are clear. What is missing is the political will. Everyday governments delay, more people die."

China and Russia, the military's primary arms suppliers, both sent election observers and continue to block action at the UN Security Council. The people of Myanmar have made their position clear through mass boycotts, silent strikes, and continued resistance at enormous personal risk. The international community must stand with them, not through rhetoric, but through action.



Photo: Supplied

## FIFTEEN FEMALE POLITICAL PRISONERS PLACED IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT FOLLOWING COUP ANNIVERSARY PROTEST AT KALAY PRISON

Authorities at Mawlaikkalay Prison have placed 15 female inmates in solitary confinement after more than 200 prisoners staged a peaceful demonstration to mark the fifth anniversary of the 2021 military coup.

The protest, which occurred on 1 February, involved over 100 political prisoners who sang the revolutionary anthem Blood Oath (Thway Thitsar) and demanded an end to gender-based discrimination in prison duties and the dismantling of authoritarian structures.

According to the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM) and family members, the 15 women were singled out as alleged leaders of the strike and are being held in isolation despite having conducted the protest without any violence or property damage.

Ko Thike Htun Oo, a member of the Central Steering Committee of the Political Prisoners' Network-Myanmar (PPNM), told Mizzima on 2 February that it has been confirmed 15 of the protesters were placed in solitary confinement and that further details are still under investigation.

"We have received reports that they were placed in solitary confinement. We are working to confirm the

identities of those placed, but further details are not yet available," he said.

PPNM has alerted the public and human rights organizations to closely monitor the security situation and welfare of the 15 female prisoners placed in solitary confinement.

Following the military coup, it was regrettable that sentences for nine major crimes including murder, rape, robbery, and extortion were not reduced, including for political prisoners. However, women were instead assigned increased positions of authority within prisons.

Inmates have reportedly set 17 April, Myanmar New Year's Day, as the deadline for their demands. If authorities fail to comply, they have declared 18 April as a "Nationwide Prison Strike Day" and plan to continue their protests.

Located in Kalay Township, the prison houses roughly 1,600 inmates from Chin State, Kalay Wa, Min Kin, Paungbyin, Mawlaik, Homalin, and Khanti townships, including around 500 political prisoners.



Bombing victims being laid to rest.  
Photo supplied

## INSTITUTE OF CHIN AFFAIRS REPORTS OVER 1,100 CHIN DEATHS AND 400 AIRSTRIKES IN FIVE YEARS OF POST-COUP CONFLICT

The Institute of Chin Affairs (ICA) released a comprehensive five-year report on 2 February, documenting the devastating toll of the Myanmar conflict on the Chin people, with 1,183 verified deaths recorded since the February 2021 military coup.

The report, which covers the period from 1 February 2021, to 31 January 2026, highlights that the fatalities include 497 civilians and resistance fighters, among them 81 children under the age of 18 and 33 religious leaders.

"The numbers in the report were verified through information from the ground and online sources. However, the actual toll could be much higher," ICA Press Secretary Slai Van Swee San told Mizzima on the morning of 2 February.

"We are working hard to find every possible way to bring justice and provide redress for the victims, and we will continue until the perpetrators are held accountable," he said.

According to the ICA statement, the dead included 497 civilians and members of resistance forces, most of whom were between the ages of 18 and 35. The victims also included 33 children under the age of 10, 48 aged between 11 and 17, 154 aged over 36, and 451 whose ages could not be confirmed due to the circumstances of the conflict.

Of the 574 deaths recorded in direct fighting, 405 were resistance fighters and 169 were civilians, showing that the conflict has indiscriminately endangered both

civilians and combatants.

The report also stated that in Chin State, junta forces carried out more than 400 airstrikes over the past five years. These attacks killed around 400 civilians and resistance fighters, injured 1,140 people, and destroyed 2,199 homes, 76 churches, and 88 government buildings, including schools and hospitals.

In addition, 84 civilians and resistance fighters were killed by landmines, while 33 others died as a result of torture, sexual violence, and extrajudicial killings during detention, according to the ICA. The report said these acts constitute serious violations of international human rights law.

The junta forces also burned villages and used nearly 100 civilians as human shields during military operations, leading to the deaths of about 15 Chin civilians.

With more than 100,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) and over 60,000 refugees living abroad, the situation has become a humanitarian emergency. The ICA strongly urged the international community, including the United Nations and ASEAN, to urgently investigate the actions of the military junta.

The Institute of Chin Affairs is an independent organization established in May 2021. It provides humanitarian assistance and conducts research aimed at improving education, health, and living standards in Chin communities.



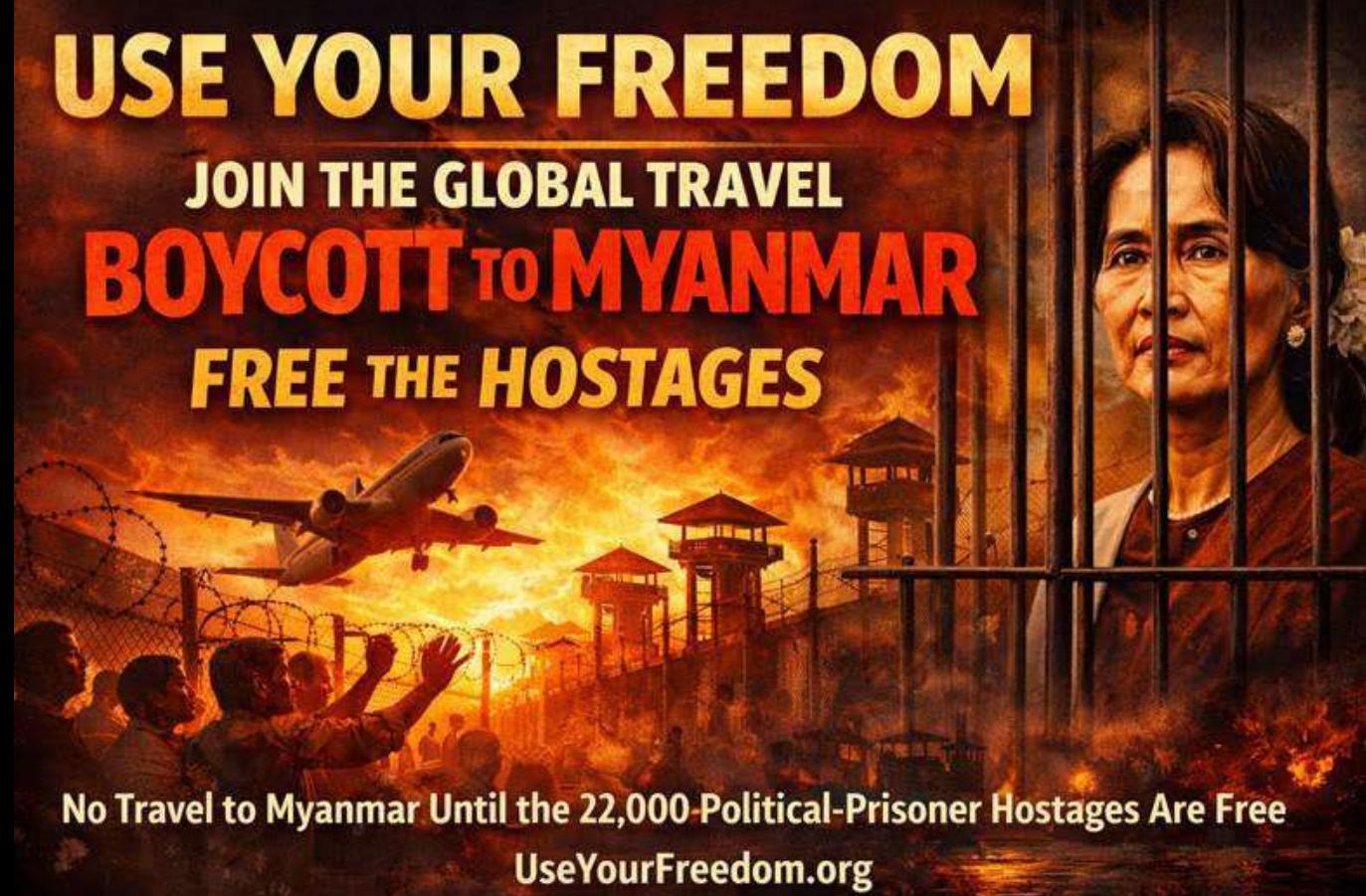
Myanmar nationals protest in Taipei.  
Photo supplied

## TAIWAN HOSTS PROTEST COMMEMORATING THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF MYANMAR'S MILITARY COUP

Myanmar nationals living in Taiwan, along with supporters of related causes, held a protest on 1 February to mark the fifth anniversary of the military coup in Myanmar. The event took place near Nanshijiao MRT Station and was organized by the Taiwan Alliance for Myanmar (TAM).

Participants highlighted the violent repression by the military junta which has forced an increasing number of people to flee to Taiwan, while asylum seekers continue to struggle without adequate support. They urged the Taiwanese government to show solidarity with Myanmar's democracy movement under the slogan "Taiwan Can Help."

The demonstration saw participation from a wide coalition of civil society groups, including the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, Asia Citizen Future Association, Amnesty International Taiwan, Taiwan Immigrant Youth Alliance, Taiwan Gongsheng Youth Association, Students for a Free Tibet-Taiwan, Taoyuan City Grassroots Service Association, Lee Ming-che, Resisters United, NCCU Seed Social, the NTU Labor Club, Defend Students' Rights Action, and the NTNU Humanities Society.



## NO FLIGHTS TO A PRISON STATE

*A Global Call to Boycott Travel to Myanmar Until Prisoners Are Freed and Democracy Restored*  
*By Alan Clements and Fergus Harlow, On behalf of the Use Your Freedom Global Campaign*

This past Sunday marked five years since Myanmar's military overthrew a democratically elected government in a pre-dawn coup, plunging the country into a spiral of violence, mass incarceration, economic collapse, and one of Asia's gravest humanitarian crises.

Since the 2021 coup, at least 7,700 civilians have been killed, more than 30,000 people arrested, and over 22,000 remain imprisoned—many subjected to torture and fabricated charges, including the country's civilian leaders. More than 3.6 million people have been displaced, over 113,000 homes burned, and nearly 10,000 airstrikes—many targeting schools, hospitals, religious sites, and villages—have become routine.

Inflation has surged to crippling levels, foreign currency has been seized, essential imports restricted, and daily survival rendered precarious for millions. Even as the junta stages widely rejected "elections" to launder its rule, the international community—

including ASEAN—has refused to recognize their legitimacy. Myanmar today is not a democracy in crisis. It is a country ruled by terror, coercion, and impunity, systematically brutalized by its own armed forces.

This is a formal moral imperative to a world that too often mistakes freedom of movement for neutrality and tourism for innocence. We call for an immediate and universal suspension of all travel to Myanmar, also known as Burma.

This call is not symbolic. It is not protest theater. It is a coordinated act of global solidarity grounded in the oldest principle of nonviolent resistance: the withdrawal of consent from injustice.

Myanmar is not a destination. It is a prison state. The country is held hostage by a military junta that overturned a democratic election, imprisoned a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and continues to rule through fear. Entire communities have been erased by arson campaigns. Refugees fleeing airstrikes have been

massacred. Detainees have been used as human shields. Narcotics trafficking and organized criminal enterprises flourish under military protection. Terror is not an aberration of governance; it is the method.

Every tourist dollar feeds a system of repression. Every visa issued without protest launders crime. Every glossy travel listing that treats Myanmar as normal erases lives lived behind bars and beneath airstrikes. Neutrality, in this context, is not impartiality. It is participation.

We are therefore asking the world to withdraw consent—clearly, publicly, and persistently.

For travel agents, this means suspending the promotion and sale of itineraries to Myanmar and issuing explicit public statements explaining why. For airlines and booking platforms, it means halting routes, codeshares, and marketing that present the country as safe or routine. For embassies and governments, it means refusing to facilitate leisure travel and advising against nonessential visits as a matter of human rights.

For policymakers and faith leaders, it means naming the injustice without euphemism. Silence, in moments like this, is alignment. For influencers, artists, writers, and cultural figures, it means refusing to aestheticize suffering or convert oppression into content. For journalists and editors, it means abandoning soft framing and calling reality by its name: a nation under military terror.

This boycott applies universally. It applies to all nationalities, all passports, and all institutions. Complicity thrives in complexity. Justice requires clarity.

What can individuals do now? Refuse travel to Myanmar until political prisoners are released and civilian rule is restored. Declare that refusal publicly. Amplify it relentlessly across classrooms, communities, professional associations, cultural spaces, and social media. Pressure the institutions you belong to—universities, NGOs, companies, unions, arts organizations, and faith communities—to adopt the boycott formally and visibly.

This is how nonviolent pressure works: not through a single voice or moment, but through millions of refusals that deprive a regime of revenue, legitimacy, and international cover. When consent is withdrawn at scale, the architecture of impunity begins to crack.

To Aung San Suu Kyi, to every unlawfully imprisoned leader, and to the thousands held in cells, camps, and hidden detention sites across Myanmar: you are not forgotten.

No flights to a prison state.

No tourism under terror.

No business as usual while a nation is caged.

Boycott travel to Myanmar until the prisoners are free, until peace is restored, and until democracy is real.

This call is issued as part of the Use Your Freedom global campaign—an invitation to turn mobility, visibility, and voice into instruments of conscience. History shows that sustained, collective refusal—across borders and cultures—can succeed where statements alone fail.

Truth calls on us to do more than ask what is happening in Myanmar. It is time to use our freedom for the people of Myanmar.

### About the Authors

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

Fergus Harlow is a writer, scholar, and human rights advocate whose work has been integral to documenting Myanmar's pro-democracy movement. He is the Director of the global campaign UseYourFreedom.org, which calls for the release of unlawfully imprisoned State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and all democratically elected leaders in Myanmar. He has co-authored multiple investigative works with Alan Clements grounded in primary research, direct testimony, and long-term engagement with Myanmar's political and civil-society leaders.

RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

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

by *Nandita Haksar and Soe Myint*



## RESISTING MILITARY RULE IN BURMA (1988-2024)

Story of Mizzima Media:  
Born in Exile, Banned in Myanmar

Nandita Haksar  
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Photo: AFP

## A REGIONAL LOOK AT ASEAN'S CHALLENGES FOR 2026

ASEAN newsrooms have joined together here to provide an initial assessment of the progress and challenges faced by ASEAN in 2026 under the chair of the Philippines.

In the following article, published in two parts, regional newsrooms Rappler, Mizzima, Kiripost, and Malaysiakini delve into the key issues facing this regional body.

### Philippines takes ASEAN helm amid stormy seas

Tensions and crises within and beyond ASEAN are rivaled in intensity by a flood control corruption scandal that Philippine President Marcos is trying to manage at home

By BEA CUPIN\*

CEBU, Philippines – Throughout 2024, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. made variations of a

similar pitch: that in a world of two superpowers trying to one-up each other, middle powers should come together against common threats to make sure they're the "main characters in our collective story."

Marcos' aspirations will have to come into practice in 2026, with the Philippines acting as chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Manila has introduced "three Ps" as its priorities — "Peace and Security Anchors, Prosperity Corridors, and People Empowerment."

The archipelagic nation's aspirations are painted all over ASEAN 2026's visual branding. Its logo is that of a balangay, a pre-colonial boat used to travel across the archipelago that would eventually constitute the Philippines.

The mighty balangay was also once used to traverse open sea and trade in faraway islands and

coasts long before modern-day borders were drawn up. The ASEAN chairship's theme is not subtle either: "Navigating Our Future, Together."

With the abundance of maritime references, one wonders: what kind of rough waters will Marcos and the Philippines need to steer the bloc through?

### Security takes spotlight

The Philippines kicked off its chairmanship in Cebu province, home to over 5.2 million people. As the most vote-rich province in the country with a long history of pre-colonial and modern-day trade, Cebu is a hub of both political power and trade.

The gathering of ASEAN's foreign ministers is the first high-level meeting in the Philippines' chairmanship and the first major meeting under the ASEAN Political-Security Community.

Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) officials had laid out priority discussions for the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AMM) — the implementation of the 5-point consensus on Myanmar, border tensions between Thailand and Cambodia, and tensions and disputes in the South China Sea.

Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary and AMM chair Maria Theresa Lazaro said in a press statement, the global environment ASEAN faces "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."

In other words, the world ASEAN exists in is in flux.

As China deepens its influence in the bloc and beyond, the United States has become more brazen in flouting rules that middle powers try to uphold.

Lazaro added: "Taken together, these realities underscore the enduring importance of ASEAN's time-honored principles of restraint, dialogue, and adherence to international law in seeking to preserve peace and stability for our peoples."

After the retreat on January 29 that took over four hours and a January 28 huddle on the 5-point consensus, ASEAN could not yet make a stand on the elections in Myanmar days after the third voting round in the junta-ruled country concluded.

Lazaro said the bloc wants a solution that is "both

Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-led, while reaffirming that Myanmar remains an integral part of ASEAN."

### Hope in a Code of Conduct?

Among Manila's loftier aspirations is the elusive conclusion of the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea between ASEAN and China. 2026 is the deadline foreign ministers set in 2023 for the conclusion of rules the bloc and China would follow to avoid clashes, lower tensions, and bring stability to the key waterway.

Negotiations have stretched for two decades, since the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) was signed in 2002. Its pace has been exceedingly slow — with the first breakthrough being a Single Draft Negotiating Text agreed upon in 2018, or 16 years after the DOC.

It was not until 2025 that negotiators began deliberating on milestone issues, or the most contentious points in talks.

Manila wants an even faster pace in 2026.

Lazaro said face-to-face meetings between ASEAN and China on the COC are set to happen monthly. Diplomats say there's willingness to hold even online meetings to hasten progress in negotiations.

But meeting frequency does not always ensure that difficult topics will be resolved faster.

The four milestone issues include the scope of the COC, definitions including self-restraint and rules covering joint military drills, the new text's relation to the DOC, and whether it will be legally binding.

Lazaro disclosed a focus of the Philippines: the definition of self-restraint and the "possible terms of reference of that issue."

Consensus is a core principle that's helped maintain ASEAN cohesion while making it difficult for the bloc to make bold declarations.

ASEAN members are diverse in how they view South China Sea issues and their relationships with China. Differing national interests explain, in part, why negotiating a COC in a consensus-based bloc has been so difficult.

While the South China Sea is a constant talking point in ASEAN, rarely is consensus found in these discussions.

The stakes for the Philippines are especially high.

China's sweeping claim in the South China Sea has translated into restrictions on, and harassment of, Filipino fisherfolk in some fishing areas. For local communities that are among the poorest in the country, this means fishing in less abundant waters or venturing farther into open sea.

For Philippine government vessels, it has meant repeatedly facing dangerous acts by the China Coast Guard — like strong water cannons while at sea — to drive them away from waters Beijing considers its territory.

ASEAN and its member-states have been noticeably quiet in the face of clashes between Manila and Beijing in the West Philippine Sea — a portion of the South China Sea that includes the Philippines' exclusive economic zone and its claimed features.

President Marcos has repeatedly raised South China Sea issues in ASEAN summits.

In 2024 at Vientiane, Marcos urged the bloc "not to turn a blind eye to the aggressive, coercive, and

illegal actions of an external power against an ASEAN member state for such actions undermine their claims of genuine adherence to our core values."

Marcos warned that "silence in the face of these violations diminishes ASEAN." According to Nikkei reporting, co-claimants "Vietnam, Singapore and Thailand followed Marcos' lead and brought up their South China Sea concerns" at the ASEAN-China Summit, where geopolitical issues are typically not raised.

Will Marcos and the Philippines be as bold in 2026? After all, in 2024, Marcos said the "onus is now on China" to hasten talks since "ASEAN has been waiting for a long time."

### Challenge at home

As the Philippines plans and hosts 650 or so meetings across the year, including the 48th and 49th Summit, Marcos must also deal with an existential crisis at home.

The flood control corruption he exposed has caused his trust and approval numbers to plunge, with



Cambodians pray for peace following border clashes.

Photo: AFP

over two years still left in his presidency.

There's concern in the bureaucracy and diplomatic circles that the resulting mess could suck oxygen from domestic governance and waste the opportunities an ASEAN chairmanship offers.

The week before Cebu's hosting of the AMM and the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF), impeachment cases were filed against Marcos. The same week, he announced a diverticulitis diagnosis, which meant he had to cut down on public engagements, including the ATF kickoff.

If 2025 was rough seas for Marcos as president and politician, 2026 has early indications of even stormier conditions.

Can Marcos and the Philippines effectively steer and navigate the bloc's future in one piece?

\*Bea Cupin is a multimedia reporter who covers foreign affairs, defense, and politics for Manila-based news website Rappler.

### Myanmar's opposition fears ASEAN betrayal

The Philippines envoy's first steps may have raised eyebrows, but she appears to have moved quickly to engage opposition figures as part of a plan to tackle the Myanmar crisis.

By SRI, Mizzima Correspondent\*

CHIANG MAI, Thailand: ASEAN has struggled over the last five years to respond to the Myanmar crisis following the February 1, 2021 military coup. It was therefore no surprise that 99 civil society organizations (CSOs) penned a protest letter to the regional body following the January 6 visit of the then newly-appointed Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar for 2026 Philippines Foreign Minister Maria Theresa Lazaro to Naypyidaw to shake hands with Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing and hold discussions.

ASEAN's new chair has a lot on its plate, not least the standoff in the South China Sea, and the tensions between Thailand and Cambodia. But the Myanmar crisis and ASEAN's adherence to the 5-Point Consensus (5PC) continue to prove a hard nut to crack.

The Myanmar opposition National Unity Government (NUG) and a range of opposition players and CSOs are seeking reassurance from ASEAN -

whose performance is considered mixed if best over the last five years - that they will not recognize the Myanmar junta's recent three-phase national election and offer the resulting administration any shred of legitimacy.

### Military-proxy party wins election

In December and January, the military-proxy Union and Solidarity Development Party (USDP) won the majority of seats in an election that saw a poor voter turnout, far lower than the 54 percent claimed by the junta - and minus the jailed National League for Democracy (NLD) leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her party.

Lost in the verbiage of a recent ASEAN foreign ministers' statement January 29, following a meeting in Cebu, was a direct reference to any outright ASEAN rejection of the Myanmar junta election. Instead, the emphasis of the statement was placed on the largely discredited 5PC that the junta has largely ignored. In addition, a representative from Myanmar was invited to attend the Cebu meeting.

The Philippines' foreign minister told reporters that ASEAN members did not go as far as endorsing Myanmar's junta-run elections, but "a good number" of the 11 nations agreed that "these elections might be something positive".

The ASEAN statement included the following: "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."

### ASEAN envoy action

Khin Ohmar of NGO Progressive Voice said she was initially worried about Philippine Foreign Minister Lazaro's visit to Myanmar on January 6 "because she went during the period of the military junta's sham election. We were afraid that the military junta would use this for big propaganda and take credit. Indeed, the military junta did use it [in this way]." But the ASEAN envoy has moved quickly to engage with a number of Myanmar opposition figures behind closed doors since her Naypyidaw visit, she noted.

That said, Khin Ohmar, who was involved in Myanmar's 1988 democracy uprising, is concerned that ASEAN has failed to secure any of the points of the body's 5PC.

"If they think they can just have the military and the revolutionary side meet, drink tea or coffee, and everything will be fine, then they don't understand Myanmar's political history or real 'positive peace.' Just stopping the shooting for a few months is not a real or sustainable solution; that is what we call 'negative peace,'" she said.

"What we in the revolution are trying to do is to remove and abolish the military institution - the structure that teaches people to kill, rob, and rape. If we just go and talk to this group of people, including Min Aung Hlaing, without holding them accountable or punishing them through the law, the person talking to them would be a fool. People in the revolution are not that politically weak. So, there is no reason for the revolution side to talk to the terrorist military," Khin Ohmar added.

### Opposition NUG seeks solution

Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson for the opposition NUG Prime Minister's Office, told Mizzima that he hoped ASEAN would not accept the result of the Myanmar military junta's national poll and offer any form of legitimacy to the resulting administration.

"From what we understand now, in the [ASEAN] statement ... we do not see a sense of recognizing this 'Sham Election.' We only see that they have 'noted' that it was carried out. We haven't seen them release anything that recognizes it. So, it must be said that ASEAN does not recognize this illegal election. I

understand the concept in that way. To be honest, we have always requested this. Because nothing will change. The USDP is also a party dominated only by people from the military. So, it is just military people changing their uniforms, taking the form of a party, and trying to make military rule in Myanmar last longer by changing it into another form," he said.

The NUG spokesperson recognizes that some ASEAN countries may be more willing to accept the outcome of the Myanmar election as "there are some individual countries within ASEAN that are very friendly with the military". But "this does not align with the will of the people".

Nay Phone Latt predicts that junta leader "Min Aung Hlaing will take the President position that will come from the USDP. So, it seems Min Aung Hlaing himself will continue to rule the country. Therefore, as long as Min Aung Hlaing is ruling, there is no reason for this country to get better. I analyze that it will only get worse."

### Fears about offering legitimacy

Many Myanmar NGO activists are concerned about ASEAN pushing a solution that includes the military junta, as evidenced by the CSO protest letter signed by 99 organizations.

Activist Mulan with NGO Blood Money Campaign told Mizzima that ASEAN continues to push for a solution through negotiation and discussion involving all stakeholders.

"To put it simply, the situation is that they will continue to push the NUG, NUCC [National Unity Consultative Council], federal units, and EROs [Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations] to have a dialogue with the terrorist military junta," she said. "While they are telling the military junta to follow the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus to stop the violence, on the other hand, ASEAN countries like the governments and companies of Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand are fully helping from behind the scenes with the supply chains for finances, weapons, technology, and aviation fuel so that the military junta can carry out terrorist bombings."

Actions matter more than words. "During these five years, both ASEAN leaders and Lazaro have frequently used the word 'peace' for Myanmar, but their way of approaching the terrorist military junta is wrong," said

Mulan. "If they really want to solve Myanmar's affairs, the approach of meeting, talking, shaking hands, and issuing statements - without doing a single thing that can take action against the terrorist military junta, whether as a group of ASEAN leaders or individually by country - this does not work at all. The military junta will, of course, be happy. They can kill people as they like, and when the time comes, ASEAN leaders still come to meet them one after another. By frequently using the word 'diplomacy', ASEAN itself is supporting and encouraging the violence."

### Unity viewed as lacking

NUG spokesperson Nay Phone Latt noted that part of the challenge for the Myanmar opposition groups when attempting to interact with ASEAN is their diversity and lack of cohesion of the players.

"We are working with a focus on making cooperation stronger in both military and political ways," Nay Phone Latt said. "In military terms, the Joint Command - the PDFs under the NUG, the EROs, and alliances like the SRA (Spring Revolution Alliance) - we are trying to work so that all these groups are not fighting separately, but fighting and carrying out military operations under a Joint Command. On the other side, we are also consulting to form a stronger leadership group in political terms. We are trying very hard for something to emerge within this year."

He recognizes a stronger sense of resistance unity is needed to make it easier for ASEAN to engage with the voices of the Myanmar people who are seeking "system change" and not "regime change".

\*SRI is a Mizzima multimedia correspondent who covers Myanmar and regional affairs.

### Philippines Takes ASEAN Chair as Cambodia-Thailand Border Tensions Test Bloc's Conflict-Management Role

As Manila assumes the 2026 ASEAN chairmanship, renewed fighting along the Cambodia-Thailand border and external mediation efforts place pressure on ASEAN's centrality and credibility

By Prak Chan Thul

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia: As the Philippines takes up the 2026 chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ongoing tensions

along the Cambodia-Thailand border have renewed scrutiny of the bloc's ability to manage conflicts among its members and uphold its role in promoting regional peace and stability.

Long-standing disputes over an 800-kilometre stretch of border territory have led to intermittent lethal conflict between Cambodia and Thailand. The latest hostilities have escalated deep into Cambodia's interior, resulting in significant casualties and a humanitarian crisis involving nearly one million displaced persons.

Cambodian analyst Panhavuth Long said the border tensions have affected ASEAN's image as a bloc committed to peace.

"Border tensions between Cambodia and Thailand do undermine ASEAN's image as a bloc committed to peace and stability," he said. "When member states experience open confrontation, it raises doubts about ASEAN's internal cohesion and its ability to uphold its norms. Even if such disputes remain bilateral, they have reputational consequences for ASEAN as a whole."

He said the dispute can be viewed both as an embarrassment and as a test for ASEAN. "Such disputes can be seen both as an embarrassment and as a test. They are embarrassing because they highlight the gap between ASEAN's rhetoric and its limited enforcement capacity.

"At the same time, they test whether ASEAN's conflict-management mechanisms - such as chair-led diplomacy, quiet mediation and consultation frameworks - can function effectively. If ASEAN helps contain the dispute and support de-escalation, it may reinforce its credibility. If it remains passive, ASEAN risks being perceived as ineffective."

### External actors

On the role of external actors, Panhavuth said outside involvement could help reduce tensions but must not sideline ASEAN.

"External actors such as the United States may contribute to de-escalation by providing diplomatic leverage or humanitarian support. However, heavy external involvement also risks weakening ASEAN centrality if ASEAN appears unable to manage regional disputes independently."

Chhai Bunsonareach, a Research Associate at the

Asian Vision Institute, said ASEAN centrality in practice is limited by the bloc's lack of enforcement powers.

"In practice, ASEAN centrality means it gives members a platform and rules, but not enforcement power," he said. "It acts as a convener and norm-setter for wider regional processes, following the 'ASEAN Way' of informality, consensus, non-interference and mutual respect."

Bunsonareach said that binding settlements are usually pursued outside ASEAN mechanisms. "When disputes escalate, ASEAN offers venues, statements, and sometimes observers, while binding settlements are pursued bilaterally or through bodies, like the International Court of Justice," he said.

Bunsonareach added that the current tensions have harmed ASEAN's reputation, particularly for smaller member states.

"The ongoing Cambodia-Thailand border tensions are damaging ASEAN's reputation as a guarantor of peace and stability, a role on which small states like Cambodia depend," he said.

Bunsonareach pointed to ASEAN's overcautious response, including its decision not to activate the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation High Council, has raised concerns that quiet diplomacy alone may be insufficient to reassure smaller members when a larger neighbor resorts to force.

### Resolving disputes

The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), signed in 1976, sets rules for peaceful relations among ASEAN states and includes a High Council to resolve disputes, though it is rarely used as members prefer bilateral talks.

He added, however, the Joint Statement of December 27, 2025, shows that a small state can still leverage ASEAN's regulations and procedures to support demining, deploy an ASEAN Observer Team (AOT), ensure a lasting ceasefire, and bind both sides to the UN Charter, the ASEAN Charter, and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.

On external involvement, he said US engagement can support de-escalation if framed within ASEAN-led efforts.

"US efforts are most beneficial when they are explicitly framed as reinforcing ASEAN-led processes, such as backing ASEAN chair statements, observer teams, and de-mining missions, rather than replacing ASEAN as the main broker," he said. US President Donald Trump stepped in to try to bring peace in phone calls made in 2025.

### Cambodian government response

Pen Bona, spokesperson for the Cambodian government, said Malaysia had worked throughout 2025 to facilitate a ceasefire and joint peace efforts. "Malaysia has tried very hard to have a ceasefire and a joint peace agreement in Kuala Lumpur," he said, adding that Malaysia also supported the establishment of the AOT.

He said ASEAN foreign ministers met on January 29 to discuss implementation of agreements between Cambodia and Thailand. "ASEAN under the Philippines had discussed development of implementation of all agreements between Cambodia and Thailand," Bona said.

He added that Deputy Prime Minister Prak Sokhonn had briefed ASEAN members on developments. "The Deputy Prime Minister Prak Sokhonn has informed all ASEAN members about the situations between Cambodia and Thailand, how the problems evolved and some issues about refugees," he said.

Bona said Philippine Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro confirmed Manila's role in implementing the joint declaration. "She confirmed that she is prepared to facilitate and monitor the December 27, 2025 joint declaration to be effective," he said, adding that "the Philippines has also taken the chairmanship of the AOT from Malaysia".

### Malaysia's ASEAN chairmanship: Restraint over reform in a year of crises

How did Malaysia set the scene for the Philippines ASEAN chair and deal with the range of challenges?

### Qistina Nadia Dzulqarnain

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Malaysia's chairmanship of ASEAN last year unfolded amid intensifying great-power rivalry, the Myanmar crisis, South China Sea disputes, and economic uncertainty – a convergence that pushed Kuala Lumpur toward crisis

containment rather than ambitious reform.

Within such constraints, however, analysts argue Malaysia performed credibly, particularly in keeping ASEAN-led mechanisms functional - the ASEAN Regional Forum remained active, and Malaysia successfully mediated the Thailand-Cambodia border dispute.

### 'Diplomatic prowess'

For Institute of Strategic & International Studies (ISIS) analyst Izzah Khairina Ibrahim, Malaysia's chairmanship was a case study in diplomatic prowess and regional leadership.

The large turnout at the ASEAN Summit, she said, reflected not only Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's personal diplomacy, but also Malaysia's long-standing, principled and non-aligned foreign policy shaped by its dependence on external market access and global stability.

This approach translated into initiatives that strengthened geo-economic diversification, particularly the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

### Myanmar 5PC 'ineffective'

While Malaysia maintained restraint on the South China Sea issue, preventing deeper internal division, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman's assistant professor of international relations Liew Wui Chern saw ASEAN's role in managing the Myanmar crisis as "diplomatic, albeit with limited impact".

He highlighted that the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus (5PC) remained ineffective in tackling deeper concerns, with the bloc continuing to release declaratory statements while lacking enforcement mechanisms.

Izzah noted that the lack of such mechanisms, coupled with consensus-based decision-making, limited more decisive action, raising broader concerns about ASEAN's cohesion and effectiveness.

Manila now assumes the chairmanship, inheriting these same structural constraints alongside mounting geopolitical pressures.

The unresolved Myanmar crisis remains a central challenge, with continued political instability and

little prospect of meaningful progress under existing mechanisms.

South China Sea tensions are expected to weigh even more heavily on the agenda, particularly as Manila-Beijing relations deteriorate.

### Minilateral security groupings muddy the waters

Complicating the landscape further is the growing prominence of minilateral security groupings - Bangkok, Manila, and Singapore have strengthened ties with the United States, while Cambodia has aligned more closely with China. These pressures test ASEAN's internal unity and challenge the long-standing neutrality of members like Malaysia and Singapore as divergent alignments deepen.

Liew warned that Manila may be tempted to elevate ASEAN on the global stage, especially on the South China Sea issue, but over-politicisation risks splitting the bloc internally.

Malaysia's experience, he argued, showed that "trying to do less can sometimes preserve more". ASEAN works best as a stabiliser - one that maintains dialogue and manages expectations - rather than a resolver of disputes.

Izzah offered similar counsel: the Philippines should build on, rather than sideline, the work of previous chairs - particularly the progress made through the Malaysian special envoy on Myanmar.

The Philippines could also leverage individual members' strengths in managing extra-regional powers and potential crises, she argued, as complements to existing regional mechanisms.

The difficulties in securing a ceasefire despite the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord, she added, serve as a reminder that matters of strategic importance cannot be avoided for fear of national sensitivities.

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# TRUMP SUGGESTS 'SOFTER TOUCH' NEEDED ON IMMIGRATION

U.S. President Donald Trump suggested 4 February that a "softer touch" may be needed on immigration, as his administration said 700 federal officers would be pulled from Minnesota but that mass deportations would not stop.

The fatal shootings of two protesters by federal officers in Minneapolis last month sparked widespread outrage in the United States and calls for an end to immigration raids in the Midwestern city, but Trump's administration has been reluctant to shift course.

"I learned that maybe we could use a little bit of a softer touch. But you still have to be tough," Trump said in an interview with NBC's "Nightly News" when asked what he had learned from Minneapolis.

Trump's border chief Tom Homan had earlier announced that 700 federal officers would be withdrawn from Minnesota, but said the contentious deployment would continue, with about 2,000 agents remaining after the drawdown.

And in an interview with Laura Ingraham on Fox News later in the day, he vowed that removals of undocumented migrants would continue.

"Mass deportations are here, they're coming, we're already breaking records, and we're not going to stop," Homan said.

## 'A step in the right direction'

The mayor of Minneapolis and the governor of Minnesota -- both Democrats -- described the announcement of the pullback from the city as "a step in the right direction," but called for the federal government to move faster in winding down its immigration operations in the state.

Homan -- sent as a replacement to oversee the crackdown in Minneapolis as anger over the fatal shootings and the government's false accounts of them grew -- said the reduction would take effect immediately. He cited increased cooperation with local authorities.

Homan said there are now "more officers taking custody of criminal aliens directly from the jails" rather than detaining them on the streets -- efforts that require fewer personnel.

Before the launch of the high-profile crackdown in Minnesota, there were only 150 federal immigration officers in the state, he said.

## 'Mass deportations'

Homan also stressed he would stay in Minneapolis -- which has become a major flashpoint in Trump's overall immigration policy -- "until we get it all done."

"President Trump fully intends to achieve mass deportations during this administration, and immigration enforcement actions will continue every day throughout this country," Homan said.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey welcomed the reduction in federal personnel but said on X that the US immigration operation in Minneapolis -- dubbed Metro Surge -- must end "immediately."

Minnesota Governor Tim Walz took a similar stance, calling for a "faster and larger drawdown of forces" and state-led investigations into the killings of the two Minneapolis protesters.

Federal agents shot and killed an unarmed woman, 37-year-old Renee Good, as she attempted to drive away from an encounter with ICE agents last month.

Two weeks later, immigration officers beat and shot dead intensive care nurse Alex Pretti, also 37, as he lay pinned to the ground. Both victims were US citizens.

In the NBC interview, even though Trump said that neither of the victims was an "angel," he was upset about their deaths.

"I'm not happy with what happened there," he added. "It should have not happened... To me it was a very sad incident, two incidents."

At the same time, Trump threw his support behind ICE agents.

"I'm going to always be with our great people of law enforcement, ICE, police, we have to back them. If we don't back them, we don't have a country," the president said.

The killings drew international attention and condemnation over the government's false accounts of what happened, intensifying public concern about the conduct of federal immigration operations.

Following the outcry over the shootings that drew tens of thousands of demonstrators into the streets, Trump withdrew combative Customs and Border Protection commander Gregory Bovino and replaced him with the more policy-focused Homan, who then pledged to draw down the operation with conditions.

AFP



## UN HUMAN RIGHTS AGENCY IN 'SURVIVAL MODE': CHIEF

The UN human rights chief said 5 February his agency was "in survival mode" due to funding shortfalls, as he launched a \$400 million appeal to tackle global rights crises in 2026.

Volker Turk warned countries that at a time when global human rights are under significant assault, his office was facing dire funding shortages hampering its increasingly important and life-saving work.

"Our reporting provides credible information on atrocities and human rights trends at a time when truth is being eroded by disinformation and censorship," he told diplomats at the UN rights office headquarters in Geneva.

"We are a lifeline for the abused, a megaphone for the silenced, and a steadfast ally to those who risk everything to defend the rights of others."

In 2025, the UN Human Rights Office's regular budget -- set by the UN General Assembly of member states -- was \$246 million, but it ultimately received only \$191.5 million of that money.

It also sought \$500 million in voluntary contributions, of which \$257.8 million came in.

Funding for the UN's human rights work has long been chronically underfunded, but Turk said: "We are currently in survival mode, delivering under strain."

"These cuts and reductions untie perpetrators' hands everywhere, leaving them to do whatever they please. With crises mounting, we cannot afford a human rights system in crisis," he added.

The UN human rights office lost around 300 out of 2,000 staff last year and had to end or scale back its

work in 17 countries.

Its programme in Myanmar, for example, was cut by 60 percent.

### High impact, low cost

This year, the General Assembly approved a regular budget of \$224.3 million for human rights.

However with the United Nations facing a liquidity crisis, uncertainty remains over how much Turk's office will receive.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is among a slew of international organisations hit by a global funding crisis.

The United States was the United Nations' biggest contributor but has slashed its funding since President Donald Trump returned to power in January 2025 -- while other countries have tightened their belts.

UN chief Antonio Guterres warned last Friday that the world body is on the brink of financial collapse and could run out of cash by July, as he urged countries to pay their dues.

Against this backdrop, Turk is seeking \$400 million in voluntary funding from countries and donors.

He said human rights accounted for a very small slice of overall UN spending but produced "high-impact" results that help to stabilise communities, build trust in institutions and underpin lasting peace.

"The cost of our work is low; the human cost of underinvestment is immeasurable," he insisted.

In 2025, UN human rights staff working in 87

countries undertook more than 5,000 human rights monitoring missions -- down from 11,000 in 2024.

"That means less evidence for both protection and prevention," said Turk.

### 'Countering secrecy'

Giving examples of his office's work, Turk said it supported 67,000 survivors of torture and modern slavery, documented tens of thousands of human rights violations and exposed discrimination in more than 100 countries.

Its monitoring mission in Ukraine is the "only organisation" with a comprehensive record of verified civilian casualties "since the initial Russian invasion in 2014", he said.

In Bangladesh, its fact-finding mission on the 2024 crackdown "helped establish a comprehensive record of systematic and serious human rights abuses".

And the probe in the Democratic Republic of Congo "uncovered patterns of grave human rights violations that may amount to crimes against humanity".

"All this work aims to bring the stories of victims to the world, countering secrecy -- the oppressor's strongest ally -- and challenging injustice and impunity," Turk said.

AFP



## COUNTRIES USING INTERNET BLACKOUTS TO BOOST CENSORSHIP: PROTON

As countries step up their use of internet shutdowns to muzzle dissent, some are also taking advantage of the blackouts to increase censorship firewalls, internet privacy company Proton warned in an interview with AFP.

Switzerland-based Proton, known for its encrypted email and virtual private network (VPN) services, has for years observed how authoritarian governments apply "censorship as a playbook", lead product manager Antonio Cesarano told AFP in a recent interview.

But increasingly they are observing governments in countries like Iran and Myanmar emerging from internet shutdowns with a supercharged ability to censor internet access.

VPNs delivered by Proton and others provide a secure, encrypted connection over the internet between a user and a server, giving users greater anonymity and often allowing them to avoid local restrictions on internet use.

But now the company worries governments are using long blackouts to beef up their ability to counter VPNs.

In several cases, Cesarano said that internet shutdowns saw countries' censorship capabilities "going from nothing, or something laughable, to something very skilled".

### 'Censorship as service'

Proton's VPN general manager David Peterson said in an email that this sudden jump in capabilities could indicate that "censorship as a service" technology "is being sold by other countries that have more know-how".

"For example, over the past couple of years, we've seen the Chinese 'great firewall' technology used by Myanmar, Pakistan, and some African nations," he said.

The trend is emerging as the willingness to impose total internet shutdowns is also growing, warned

Proton, which runs a non-profit VPN Observatory that tracks demand for its free VPN services to detect government crackdowns and attacks on free speech.

Cesarano, who serves as spokesman for Proton's internet censorship and online freedom work, pointed out that the extreme and once almost unthinkable measure has "happened three times in six months".

He highlighted the latest dramatic shutdown in Iran, when the country's more than 90 million people were forced offline for nearly three weeks, obscuring a crackdown on country-wide protests which rights groups say killed thousands of people.

There was also the weeklong shutdown implemented in Uganda in the days prior to the elections last month, and Afghanistan's internet and telecoms blackout last year.

Iran also completely shuttered the internet for a week last June amid the conflict with Israel.

### VPN 'honeypots'

Backing out the internet completely was "very concerning, because it is very extreme", Cesarano said, pointing out that a country's entire economy basically grinds to a halt when the internet shuts down.

"It's very dangerous and costly for the population," he said.

Cesarano said Proton was in contact with NGOs in the field working with people on how to counter censorship by educating them on what VPNs are, how to use them, and which ones to pick.

"It is a cat and mouse game," he said.

In some countries like Myanmar, where VPN use is illegal, the authorities deploy fake VPNs "as honeypots" to detect dissidents, he said.

In Myanmar and other countries, police may also stop people on the streets and search their phones for VPNs.

Proton spokesman Vincent Darricarrere said the company had therefore launched a special feature "to disguise the VPN app and to disguise it as a different app, like a weather app or the calculator", to help people escape detection.

There is certainly appetite for using VPNs to try to sidestep censorship.

The VPN Observatory can predict that a clampdown is coming from spikes in sign-ups, said Cesarano.

"When we see something on our infrastructure, we can predict that something is happening," he said, pointing to "huge spikes in demand" seen in countries like Iran, Uganda, Russia and Myanmar even before the crunch comes.

Right before Iran's latest internet shutdown took effect on January 8, the VPN Observatory noted a 1,000-percent rise in use of Proton's VPN services over the baseline, indicating an awareness of the coming clampdown.

And it saw an 890-percent hike in VPN sign-ups in Uganda in the days before last month's elections as the government signalled a suspension of public internet was looming.

VPN usage also surged in Venezuela at the start of this year, jumping 770 percent in the days after the US ousted long-term president Nicolas Maduro, according to the observatory.

AFP



# A NOT SO QUIET AMERICAN

**I**t was a really dynamic but also very challenging time to work in Myanmar," recalls Scott Aronson, a career humanitarian and conflict expert, reflecting on his years in the country from 2015 through the 2021 coup. In this conversation, he explores how his field experience, crisis leadership, and ethical convictions converged amid Myanmar's unfolding tragedy.

Aronson's humanitarian career began in the early 2000s, working across southern and eastern Africa with the United Nations and various NGOs supporting refugees and conflict-affected communities. He spent several years in Darfur during the height of the crisis, focusing on civilian protection and gender-based violence, before contributing to reconstruction efforts in northern Uganda following the Lord's Resistance Army conflict. These early experiences shaped his understanding of how local communities, aid networks, and international systems intersect within fragile and volatile environments.

Aronson later joined the U.S. Agency for International Development, within what became the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, where he oversaw both conflict response and disaster operations. He recalls deployments where U.S. military assets were mobilized during major emergencies, including the 2015 Nepal earthquake. In

these missions, he emphasizes the importance of civilian oversight to ensure that military logistics aligned with humanitarian principles and the host nation's sovereignty. This work reinforced his belief that effective emergency response depends on coordination, adaptability, and a deep respect for those most affected.

It was in 2016 that he arrived in Myanmar, at a time when the country was transitioning from military rule to quasi-democracy; his position as USAID's senior conflict and governance advisor at the U.S. Embassy in Yangon centered on the formal peace process and on helping civil society assume responsibilities long suppressed under dictatorship. Aronson's task was to strengthen networks among civic groups separated by geography, ethnicity, and religion, and to create "platforms of coordination, communication, and understanding." These years were dynamic and difficult, and he recalls them as being filled with both promise and tension as Myanmar navigated a fragile democratic opening.

While the U.S. government's goal was to support the nascent democracy, Aronson's particular work concentrated on conflict-affected Rakhine, Shan, and Karen States, where long-standing wars had continued even as political reforms advanced. His focus shifted more sharply to Rakhine in 2017 during the military's campaign against the Rohingya, and he worked closely with civil society organizations from all communities there, while also coordinating with refugee operations across the border in Bangladesh.

## CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/1/24/episode-474-a-not-so-quiet-american>



Myanmar's defence team at the ICJ hearing.  
Photo: AFP

# MYANMAR JUNTA HAILS ICJ GENOCIDE CASE DEFENCE AS 'NATIONAL DUTY'

Myanmar's junta praised its legal team for defending the country against genocide allegations at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), portraying the case as a matter of national dignity and unity, state media reported on 9 February.

At a ceremony in Naypyidaw on 8 February, junta chief and Acting President Min Aung Hlaing hosted a dinner for officials involved in Myanmar's defence at the ICJ. The Gambia brought the case before the ICJ, accusing Myanmar of breaching the Genocide Convention over its treatment of the Rohingya minority.

According to the Global New Light of Myanmar, Min Aung Hlaing said the proceedings were not directed at individuals but at the state itself, framing the case as an attack on Myanmar's sovereignty and national honour. He claimed the delegation had presented "clear and concrete evidence" refuting what he described as a "politically fabricated label" linked to unrest in northern Rakhine State.

The case was filed in 2019 and entered its merits phase in January 2020 after more than six years of proceedings. Although the case was filed before the February 2021 coup, the current military rulers opted to continue participating in the case despite the change

in government. The junta argued that withdrawal would have allowed the court to proceed without Myanmar's input.

Min Aung Hlaing said the decision was taken amid the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide resistance to military rule, warning that non-participation could have resulted in long-term damage to the country's international standing.

The Myanmar junta denies committing genocide against the Rohingya. UN investigators, however, detailed how a brutal military crackdown on the Rohingya in 2017 resulted in the flight of more than 700,000 to neighbouring Bangladesh, describing it as having "genocidal intent".

Human rights groups and the National Unity Government (NUG) have rejected the junta's claim to represent Myanmar at international forums, arguing that the military lacks legitimacy.

The ICJ has yet to rule on the merits of the case. Provisional measures ordered in 2020, requiring Myanmar to prevent acts of genocide and preserve evidence, remain in force.



### ONLINE USERS CRITICIZE GRADUATION CEREMONY ATTENDED BY MIN AUNG HLAING

The attendance of military leader Min Aung Hlaing at a graduation ceremony at Yangon University on 5 February sparked widespread discussion on social media. Many users questioned the symbolism of hosting a high-profile academic event under heavy security, especially amid disruptions, surveillance, and restrictions at universities across the country.

Public sentiment online is largely critical and sarcastic. Users contrasted the formal graduation ceremony with the broader reality faced by students who have been arrested, displaced, or forced to suspend their studies since the coup. Some described the event as a staged image-building exercise rather than a genuine celebration of education.

Common comments from users include:

- "A graduation under fear is not a celebration."
- "Universities are militarized, but they show smiles on stage."
- "Education is used as a photo opportunity."

Some users also noted that Yangon University, once a symbol of student resistance, is now being used to project control and legitimacy. Overall, the event has become a prominent topic of discussion last week, reflecting public anger over the disconnect between official ceremonies and the lived reality of students and academic freedom in Myanmar.

# 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.