



# **How the Media Cover Political and Social Issues Myanmar**

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1 - 31 May 2018*

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**Myanmar Institute for Democracy**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Myanmar Institute for Democracy (MID), a non-partisan organization dedicated to freedom of expression and the media, in cooperation with the Slovak media-monitoring organization MEMO 98, has been systematically monitoring the level of political and social diversity in Myanmar's media reporting. The overall objective of this initiative has been to keep the public informed about the conduct of the media, in particular through a comprehensive analysis of trends and tendencies of media reporting, and to facilitate a discussion about the objectivity and quality of media reporting. The project is supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

The monitoring is intended to offer professional, comprehensive, and objective assessment of political and social diversity and balance in news reporting on four television channels, two radio stations, four newspapers, and two online media outlets.<sup>1</sup> The project's findings are not intended to support any one political actor, but the integrity of the media environment as a whole. This is the second of three monitoring reports concerning media performance that are to be disseminated to the public, media, civil society, political parties, and international community.

The methodology was developed by MEMO 98 which has carried out similar projects in more than 50 countries in the last 20 years, including in Myanmar.<sup>2</sup> Given its comprehensive content-oriented approach, the methodology is specially designed to provide in-depth feedback on pluralism and diversity in media reporting, including coverage of chosen subjects and themes, examined in the proper context, and incorporating detailed comparisons and analysis.

## BACKGROUND

The coverage of the Rakhine issue has been dominant also in the last two monitoring periods (2017-2018). The unresolved issue escalated to an unprecedented level of the crisis right on the day of the release of the Kofi Anan Commission' report.<sup>3</sup> Most of the coverage in some private media outlets reflected the reaction of the UN and international community to the crisis and direct or indirect impact on the economy and the government's effort to contain the impacts. Much of the media focus in the monitored periods was on the reform process of the NLD-led government, particularly in the most populated region such as Yangon and Mandalay. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Panglong conference was the event covered as the most important issue in the recent monitoring periods. The President U Htin Kyaw resigned in March 2018 and President U Win Myint, the speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw, was elected as the successor.

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<sup>1</sup> Television: *MRTV, Myawaddy TV (state-owned), Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) and Up to Date;*  
Radio: *Radio Myanmar (state-owned) and BBC Radio (foreign service)*  
Newspapers: *Myanmar Ahlin (state-owned), Eleven, Voice and 7 Days*  
Online media: *Irrawaddy and Mizzima*

<sup>2</sup> For the previous projects conducted in 2010-2011 and 2015-2017, see [www.memo98.sk](http://www.memo98.sk)

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see "TOWARDS A PEACEFUL, FAIR AND PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR THE PEOPLE OF RAKHINE" Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State here: [https://storage.googleapis.com/kofiannanfoundation.org/2017/08/FinalReport\\_Eng.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/kofiannanfoundation.org/2017/08/FinalReport_Eng.pdf)

The coverage reflected the expectation of the people of the country placed on the NLD-led government and their policies and implementation to manage the expectation.

This is the second report published in the framework of this project, with both MID and MEMO 98 jointly publishing seven monitoring reports during and after the 2015 elections.<sup>4</sup> Following is the summary of the main monitoring findings covering two monitoring periods - from 15 December through 15 March 2018 and between 1 and 31 May 2018:

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **The monitoring results in 2017 and 2018 indicate that there was generally a limited diversity of political views and opinions presented by most monitored media, most notably those funded by the state.**
- **Regrettably, the state-funded media did not provide ample diversity of views which is important so that citizens are properly informed about important events and issues affecting their lives**
- **By contrast, a few private media, namely BBC and DVB, continue to provide a greater plurality of views, thus meliorating to some extent the negative trends observed on the state funded media.**
- **The government continues to dominate the coverage of most monitored media. Other key actors receiving substantial coverage were the *Tatmadaw* and the local government.**
- **Among parties, the National League for Democracy (NLD) clearly dominated the media coverage, and received significantly more airtime or space than other political parties. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and Arakan National Party (ANP) were two parties to receive also some coverage, but much less than the NLD.**
- **The state-owned media as well as some private ones continued to portray political actors in a predominantly neutral or positive way. Only a few media demonstrated a more analytical and probing approach when it comes to covering the activities of state officials, most notably BBC.**
- **Regrettably, state-funded and some private media covered sensitive issues and topics, such as the situation in the Rakhine state or the case involving two Reuters journalists, only from the official perspective and often did not include any other views. As such, people were deprived of receiving more objective and balanced information on some important topics that dominated during the two monitoring periods.**

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<sup>4</sup> The first report covered the period from 1 August to 15 September 2017.

- A few media that attempted to report about the situation in a more balanced way used in their reports a greater variety of sources, including information reported by some international news agencies.

## **MEDIA MONITORING FINDINGS**

### **Television**

Between 15 December 2017 and 15 March 2018, *MRTV* devoted more than half of its political news coverage to the government, with the president, the vice president, the local government getting around 83 per cent of the coverage. More specifically, *MRTV* provided substantial coverage of various decrees and orders by the president, vice presidents' foreign trips, and activities by government members. Also, the state-funded TV covered efforts by the government to negotiate peace between ethnic armed groups and the military. Additionally, similar type of coverage was devoted to the State Counsellor and to some extent also to the Senior General U Min Aung Hlaing with his foreign trips and meetings with foreign diplomats. When it comes to the coverage of the *Hluttaw* (Parliament), *MRTV* provided coverage of questions and answers of the MPs, ministers and deputy ministers, and the speakers reading the approved bills – usually presented from the day the *Hluttaw* sessions were conducted.

Moreover, the NLD was the most presented political party receiving more than 7 per cent. By contrast, all other political parties received a combined total of only less than 2 per cent of the coverage. The *Tatmadaw* (Army) received more than 3 per cent of the coverage. Virtually all monitored subjects were portrayed in a positive or neutral manner. In so doing, the state-funded television did not provide ample diversity of views which is important so the citizens are properly informed about important events and issues affecting their lives.

Between 1 and 31 May 2018, *MRTV* continued to allocate the bulk of its coverage to the government. The coverage was again mainly neutral and positive. The NLD received 7.4 per cent of the coverage while the USDP only 0.5 per cent. The monitoring results indicate that there is a clear need to transform *MRTV* from the state into an independent public broadcaster which would provide a greater diversity of political views and act as a watchdog of the government.

In both monitored periods, *MRTV* provided most of its topics-related news coverage to *Politics* (some 47 and 56 per cent), followed by *Foreign news* (around 11-12 per cent) and *Others* (some 10 per cent in both monitored periods). A total of 1.6 and 1.4 per cent of its news coverage was allocated to the *National Peace Process* (NPP), respectively. When comparing with previous monitoring periods, it is visible that the coverage is slowly decreasing (3.5 per cent in March against 2.9 per cent in August-September 2017). While it is an obligation of the publicly or state funded media to give voice to voiceless, different types of minorities received insignificant coverage on *MRTV* during the monitoring periods. More specifically, 3.9 (and 1.2 in May) per cent was devoted to *Religious Groups (RG)* <sup>5</sup>, 3.1 (and 2.4 in May) per cent to *Social*

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<sup>5</sup> Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Other religious groups.

*Minorities* (SM) and only 2.1 and 0 per cent to *Ethnic Minorities* (EM) in both monitoring periods.

Similar to previous monitoring periods, ***Myawaddy TV (MWD)*** offered an extensive and very favourable coverage of the *Tatmadaw* that was given almost 65 per cent of the coverage. The rest of the coverage went to other state institutions, primarily to the government (21 per cent). There were only two political parties to receive some coverage on *Myawaddy TV*, namely the NLD (2.7 per cent) and the USDP (0.2 per cent). The coverage of all subjects was overwhelmingly positive. Apart from covering the activities of *Tatmadaw* and the government, *Myawaddy TV* also aired songs praising the peace process and *Tatmadaw*. In general, *Myawaddy TV* channel focused primarily on the activities of the *Tatmadaw*, very openly promoted them and in fact served as its propaganda tool. While different commanders and officers were presented, the *Tatmadaw* was personified mainly by the senior general Min Aung Hlaing. For example, during the ceremony of presenting honour awards for the Independence Day, *Myawaddy TV* gave more attention to him than to the president U Win Myint.

The May monitoring results indicate that *Myawaddy TV* continued to allocate the bulk of its coverage to the *Tatmadaw*. The coverage was again exclusively positive. There was an increase in the coverage of the government (41 against 21 per cent in the second monitoring period). The *Myawaddy TV* only reflects the position of the *Tatmadaw* and state authorities, completely lacking any independent editorial policy which would make it useful for citizens.

The editorial policy of the channel appears to convey a message that the military is very benevolent, helpful, and protective of people, working for them and profoundly supporting country's majority religion. For example, during the evening news, activities of the military's mobile medic team providing health care services to the poor in rural remote areas across the country were regularly emphasized, including encouragements of relevant commanders' for such health care services. Numerous reports covered religious issues, especially Buddhism – the channel presents reports about military's goodwill actions and support for Buddhism and its religious teachings. In most of the news, the channel presented military leaders' contributions to the religion, including donations to religious buildings, or building stupas. By comparison, there was little coverage of any other actors, including the regular civilian government (or vice president). Their activities were presented only on some special occasions at the union level and usually only in the evening news programme (after 22:00).

However, when presenting news about the situation in the Rakhine state, the channel presented only the official military position, following the line that the military handles the conflict only under the guidance of the civilian government in compliance with the adopted rules and regulations. Moreover, the news about the insurgencies of ethnic armed organizations was also given significant airtime. At the same time, reports about the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signing ceremony with Lahu and New Mon State Party were emphasized as well. However, the channel entirely ignored any news concerning protests of various factories' workers, students and journalists.

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When it comes to the coverage of topics, *Myawaddy TV* allocated the largest share of its news coverage to *Religious Groups* (39.7 and 46.5 per cent in May 2018), followed by *Military* with 19 (and 11.3 in May) per cent, and *Politics* with 8.5 (and 11 in May) per cent of the coverage. The most presented topic – *Religious Groups* - concentrated mainly on the Buddhist religion. The *National Peace Process* as whole was also given only slightly bigger coverage than on MRTV (3.5 and 2.3 per cent in May).

The privately owned television *Up to Date* also devoted majority of its coverage to the authorities, all together some 67 per cent of its political coverage. The tone of the coverage was mainly positive or neutral although it should be noted that the government also received some negative coverage. The channel featured various activities and press conferences by the government, military's actions and parliamentary parties' activities. The government received 27 per cent, followed by the local government with almost 22 per cent of the coverage. The State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi received almost 7 per cent of the coverage, while the president around 3 per cent. When it comes to the coverage of political parties, the NLD received almost 23 per cent while the USDP only some 0.7 per cent of the coverage. Other parties to receive some coverage were the ANP (2.2 per cent), and the SNLD (0.7 per cent).

The third monitoring period (1-31 May 2018) results indicate that *Up to date* continued supporting the current ruling establishment, devoting the bulk of its May political coverage to the activities of the authorities, with a big portion of this coverage being positive. There was a slight increase of the coverage for the USDP (3.1 per cent against 0.7 in the second monitoring period). By comparison, the NLD received 20.4 per cent of mainly positive coverage.

*Up to Date* allocated 22.3 per cent (and 30.8 per cent in May monitoring period) of its news to *Politics*, followed by *Foreign news* (16.2 per cent) in the first monitoring period and by *Business/Economy* (12.9 per cent) in the second period. *Religious groups* received 14 (and 6.8) per cent of coverage (with the vast majority of this time being allocated to the Buddhist religion), *Social Minorities* 2.8 (and 0.9) per cent and both *Ethnic Minorities* and the *National Peace Process* were allocated 1.8 per cent respectively (0.9. and 0.6 per cent, respectively, in the second period). Concerning the coverage of the Rakhine issue, statements of the government and the military were mostly referred and the activities of the union government and local governments were emphasized. While presenting news related to the Myanmar's peace process, discussions and speeches were focused only the information announced by the military, in most occasions.

Similar to the previous monitoring periods, *DVB* again provided greater diversity of political views in comparison with other monitored TV channels. While different state actors received approximately 67 per cent of the coverage, the tone of their coverage was not overwhelmingly positive as on other monitored channels. The bulk of the coverage went to the local government (28 per cent), followed by the government (21 per cent) and the State Counsellor (11.5 per cent). While 64 per cent of the local government coverage was positive, 12 was negative (in the first monitored period). *DVB* adopted similar approach when covering the central government and the

*Tatmadaw*. The NLD received approximately 18 per cent of the coverage which was more than a combined total of all other covered parties (5 of them). However, as mentioned above, it still covered more parties than any other monitored television. Moreover, unlike other TV channels, while *DVB* covered activities of state officials, it also provided platform to independent voices, including citizen journalism reports from rural areas that include variety of sources. Importantly, *DVB* always made an effort to provide a variety of sources in vast majority of its stories. For example, *DVB* provided regular updates about the two Reuters' reporters who were recently prosecuted in connection with their journalistic investigations in Rakhine and also included views from some journalists and political commentators.

Between 1 and 31 May 2018, *DVB* allocated the bulk of its coverage to the NLD, followed by the local government and the central government. There continued to be primarily a positive and neutral coverage of the subjects, with occasional criticism of the NLD, the local government as well as the central government. While there was clearly a greater diversity of views presented on *DVB*, the channel's news programme still has a room for improvements when it comes to a hard-hitting and probing coverage of the activities of incumbents – something that would enable the citizens of Myanmar to receive more diverse views on the way the government manages the public funds.

Reporting on the Inn-din massacre in Maungdaw district of the Rakhine State, *DVB* aired news on the arrest and interrogation of villagers who witnessed the case. In the footages, the villagers refused to give responses because of fear of being shown in the media. The repatriation process implemented by the Rakhine local government and union government were covered positively. *DVB* provided comprehensive coverage of the situation in the Rakhine state, including visits by international ambassadors and delegates to refugee camps in Bangladesh, as well as the UN meeting trying to take actions towards the Myanmar government and military. In this context, criticism of the *Tatmadaw* and the government was aired on a daily basis.

*DVB* also provided coverage of IDPs – more specifically their conditions in Kyaukme because of the clashes between the state army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). The public engagement of the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) in the peace building process as well as the application of the resignation letters from some regional ministers were also covered. In relation to the murder of militants from the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and a civilian, it was reported that youth and civil society organizations protested in front of the Kayah regional government office, with the voiced criticism against subsequent government action to arrest some protesters. Overall, the programmes in different ethnic languages reporting the challenges faced by ethnic minorities were aired daily.

In addition, various other stories were covered by the channel, with an apparent editorial policy to present all opposing point of views, such as updates on the murder of Ko Ni, an advocate supporting constitutional amendment; the progress of the repatriation process, as well as the signatory event of two new parties in the NCA agreement.

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DVB allocated 22.9 (in May 2018 it was 19.3) per cent of its news coverage devoted to topics to cent of its news coverage devoted to topics to *Politics*, followed by *Foreign news* with 16 (15.1 in May) per cent and *Business/Economy* with 13.3 (11.2 in May) per cent. By contrast to other monitored TV channels, DVB provided more coverage to *Social Minorities* (6.4 and 7.2 per cent of the coverage in May), to the *National Peace Process* (5.8 and even 8.1 per cent in May) and also *Ethnic Minorities* (5.6 and 7.5 per cent in May).

## **Radio**

The state-funded ***Myanmar Radio*** allocated the majority of its political news coverage to the activities of government that received 66 per cent of the coverage, followed by the local government (8.6 per cent), the vice president (4.5 per cent), and the State Counsellor (4.5 per cent). This coverage was mainly positive. When it comes to the coverage of political parties, the NLD received almost 7 per cent, followed by the ANP and the SNLD (0.4 and 0.3 per cent respectively). This coverage was again positive.

In May, the Myanmar Radio gave even more coverage to the government (76.7 per cent against 66 in the previous period), with the exclusively positive coverage. The state radio should be reformed along with the state television as mentioned above.

The volume of the Myanmar Radio's news broadcasts increased in comparison with previous years. In particular, besides presenting the activities of the government ministers, the activities of local government officials as well as government staff working at different levels were covered too. Such news was not included in the regular news programs, but rather broadcast separately. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the variety of news coverage has also broadened. Programs regarding laws, women, disabled, children and awareness have been increasingly presented.

Regrettably, there was very little coverage of the anti-government protests and demonstrations against various draft laws. In addition, while only very a limited number of news about internal conflicts was presented, there was no news about protests organized by various social groups.

The Rakhine-related issues were presented only occasionally, and in most of the cases from the official, government's point of view. In this respect, a number of reports covered Dr Win Myat Aye, the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. Also, the radio devoted significant portion to news about arrangements for refugee camps in conjunction with invited international diplomats and other activities for the stability and development. In addition, the case involving the two Reuters journalists received only a limited coverage and when covered, it was only by presenting the government's point of view.

Overall, most activities of the government were presented positively. The activities of the *Hluttaw* were covered in the framework of the "*People's voice, Hluttaw's voice*" programme which is aired after the news. During the program, audio recordings of proposals, questions, and answers from ministers and deputy ministers from

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respective ministries were presented. There was some negative coverage of the government when MPs criticised the answers of the relevant officials. Noteworthy, when airing the news about regional *Hluttaws*, only the news of the Yangon Regional Parliament was aired with no information about other regional *Hluttaws*.

Myanmar Radio allocated 27.6 (42.2 in May) per cent of its news coverage devoted to *Politics*, followed by *Foreign news* with 10.1 (9.3 in May) per cent and by *Social Minorities* with 9.3 (5.2 in May) per cent (it was *Health Care* with 8 per cent in the second period). From among minorities-related coverage *Religious Groups* received 4.2 (3.2 in May) per cent, the *National Peace Process* 3.8 (1.7 in May) per cent and *Ethnic Minorities* 1.3 (0.1 in May) per cent of this coverage.

It should be mentioned that **BBC** clearly stands out for its more independent and impartial reporting in comparison to all other monitored media. Between 15 December 2017 and 15 March 2018, it allocated the bulk of its coverage to the *Tatmadaw*. This coverage however was overwhelmingly negative and neutral. The government received almost 20 per cent of the coverage, followed by the local government and the State Counsellor (almost 7 per cent respectively). As for the tone of the coverage, while the government received slightly more negative than positive coverage, the coverage of the State Counsellor was more positive than negative. The NLD received 22 per cent of the coverage, followed by the ANP (8.2 per cent) the SNLD (6.1 per cent) and the USDP (2.7 per cent). The tone of the coverage of all parties was mainly neutral and positive.

It is good for the Myanmar citizens to have at least one broadcaster (apart from DVB) that provides them with a greater plurality of views – this trend was confirmed also in the May monitoring of BBC.

During both monitoring periods, BBC covered the peace building process in Myanmar, providing comprehensive coverage which included special sections and interviews. For example, an exclusive interview with the chairman of the Mon New Society Party which recently became a signatory party in the NCA was broadcast.

Importantly, BBC also reported news related to the repatriation of Rohingyas almost every day. BBC reflected local and international opinions as well as progress of the lawsuit against the two Reuters reporters that covered the Rakhine issues. Overall, the cases of marginalization towards Muslims in Myanmar were reported very often. In most of the reports, voices of ethnic armed forces (EAOs) were raised, and the state military was portrayed regularly in a negative manner. Also, BBC covered attempts of the international sanctions, including bringing the military authorities to the International Criminal Court (ICC). By the end of the first monitored period, the news on a Thai royal gift in the form of a White Elephant to Myanmar's commander in chief was aired.

In some reports, there was harsh criticism towards the State Counsellor – for example, on 18 December it was reported that mass murders of Rohingya by the Myanmar security forces are done under the admission from the State Counsellor. On 25 and 26 February, similar highly critical reports were presented.

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BBC devoted 31.3 (21 in May) per cent of its coverage to *Politics*, followed by *Foreign news* with 26.1 (25.3 in May) per cent of the coverage and *the National Peace Process* with 11.7 (14.3 in May) per cent. It was the highest portion of the coverage from amongst the monitored media devoted to the NPP. Also *Social Minorities* received relatively visible coverage with 4.3 (3.8 in May) per cent *Ethnic Minorities* received 1.6 (0.7 in May) per cent, and *Religious Groups* 0.4 (0.3 in May) per cent of the coverage.

## **Newspapers**

State-owned ***Myanmar Ahlin*** allocated majority of its coverage to the authorities as follows: the government received almost 36 per cent, the local government 8 per cent and the State Counsellor almost 16.7 per cent of coverage. The *Tatmadaw* received almost 7 per cent of the coverage. The tone of the coverage was mainly neutral and positive. As for the political parties, the NLD received 6.5 per cent of the coverage, followed by the ANP (0.8 per cent), and the USDP (0.3 per cent) and the. The portrayal of these subjects was primarily neutral. While there was also some positive coverage, the critical views were missing overall.

Myanmar Ahlin primarily focused on the activities of the government and other state actors. In May, the state newspaper gave even more coverage to the activities of the government members (44.4 per cent against 36 per cent of the coverage in the second monitoring period). The government should consider privatization of Myanmar Ahlin as state-funded newspapers exist only in autocratic states but not in countries with a democratic system of governance.

As a state-owned newspaper, an overwhelming portion of space was allocated for the authorities – in particular for the actions of ministers, regional development activities and attendances at national ceremonies. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's participation at the Loikaw Peace Dialogue, president's appearance at the children's literature festival and the vice president U Myint Swe's trip to Naga areas were included to such news.

Conversely, coverage of views and opinions different from those of the government were almost non-existent. For example, anti-government protests regarding local issues (Latpadaung issue, strikes of Paleik textile factory workers, condemnation of the murder of three KNPP soldiers and one civilian); or in cases of the rights to a peaceful assembly, and Taxation Bill, only the views presenting the position of the government were presented. In comparison to the coverage of the *Hluttaw*, and similarly to the first monitored period, the coverage of the State/Regional Hluttaws was limited and presented only on special occasions (Rakhine, Kachin and Taninthayi).

During the first monitored period, the news about the Rakhine State were presented separately on pages 10-11 – they included situations mapping, actions of the Office of the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine (UEHRD), escorts of international diplomats to Maung Daw or donations of the government ministers to Rakhine State. However, the paper was almost entirely silent about the international criticism concerning Rakhine including from the UN and international opinions – whereas the information about the US sanction and a global

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political commitment Responsibility to Protect (the R2P commitment)<sup>6</sup> was widespread, there was no coverage of it.

The privately owned newspaper *Eleven* also focused on the government which received over 32 per cent of the coverage, followed by the NLD with more than 18 per cent, the local government with 17.3 per cent, the State Counsellor with 9.5 per cent and the Tatmadaw with 8.8. When it comes to the coverage of other parties, the ANP received 3.6 per cent, followed by the SNLD and the USDP (with 1.5 and 1.1 per cent of the coverage respectively). While all these subjects were presented in an overall neutral or positive light, there was some critical coverage of the government, the local government and the army. By contrast, the NLD was the only subject to receive more positive than neutral coverage. In May, *Eleven* continued to allocate the bulk of its coverage to the government with the tone of the coverage being again mainly neutral and positive.

The privately-run newspaper regularly presented a broad variety of sources, often opinions that were different from those of the government, and at the same time news presented with a strong criticism towards the ruling authorities, highlighting the government's failures.

In addition, the local political movements were emphasized, such as the local activists' movements in the Latpadaung issue, Mon people assembly's actions for the integration of two Mon political parties, strikes at various textile factories around the country (Sittaung paper factory, Paleik textile factory, Panda factory), disapproval of the local Karenni population concerning a coal factory project, the Mandalay trial concerning nationalist monks, the condemnation of local population in relation to the murder of three KNPP soldiers and one civilian, and the Rakhine hluttaw's activities.

Regarding the coverage of the Rakhine issue, the newspaper's position appeared to correlate with the official government's stance. Nevertheless, international opinions and various opinions from diverse perspectives were presented. There were strong criticisms regarding the proposed legislation concerning rights to peaceful assembly, as well as the Taxation Bill.

In May, the news about the Rakhine issue intensified, including analytical comparisons of the human rights situation on one side and the sovereignty of the Myanmar territory on the other side. Additionally, a reference to the strong international criticism and pressure, something that was completely omitted in the state-controlled media, was covered.

In general, *Eleven* tries to offer its readers a more comprehensive coverage than the one presented by the state-run media. The paper often criticised the national authorities and official bodies, including the NLD-dominated parliament – e.g. the proposed Taxation Bill was strongly criticized. In addition, activities of the regional and state governments, in particular of the Yangon regional government, were criticised (e.g. Yangon new town projects). Alongside, the paper covered stories such

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<sup>6</sup> It is the principle that first obligates individual states and then the international community to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It was universally endorsed at the 2005 World Summit and then re-affirmed in 2006 by the UN.

as frictions between Hluttaw and the government, high gasoline prices, articles about cronies monopolising the market and the inadequate controlling measures of the government to prevent it; a trial of the charged chairman of the Arakan National Party (ANP) and his positions. When covering the peace protests, the paper always tried to present also opinions of the protesters.

**Voice** allocated almost 26 per cent of its coverage to the local government, followed by 24 per cent of the coverage allocated to the government and more than 20 per cent to the NLD. The Tatmadaw received 9.3 per cent and the State Counsellor 9.2 per cent of coverage. Voice portrayed all subjects predominantly in a neutral light. Voice adopted a similar approach in May 2018 as confirmed by the monitoring results.

The Voice presented news about the Kyauk Phyu deep sea port project; discussion between the military's senior general Min Aung Hlaing and the Karen National Union (KNU) to resolve the tension in Karen State; a proposal of the Yangon deputy to the Speaker of the Yangon regional parliament to investigate the business activities of the Yangon regional government, a return of the Muse conflict-inflicted IDPs from China to Myanmar. Moreover, the paper covered various other political stories, such as NLD's summary of the work of its 40 ministerial officials during the two years term, resignation of the minister, government group's meeting with the NCA signatories to hold 21st Century Panglong Conference in June, the military's opinion on why KIA/KIO does not sign the NCA and the Myanmar government's acceptance of returned IDPs from Bangladesh.

News regarding the international Amnesty International's May report about the ARSA's deadly attacks in August 2017 with evidence was presented. Moreover, the paper brought the news about the British Parliamentary Committee's attempt to terminate assistances to Myanmar and the article written by Larry Jagan (former BBC World Service news editor) about the rising international pressure on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in relation to the Rakhine crisis were shown too. Other stories related to Rakhine informed about the union minister U Thein Swe's remark about 15,000 holders of national verification card (NVC) in Rakhine State; and local and international religious leaders of different faiths' meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and their visit to Rakhine State.

**7 Day** allocated almost 24 per cent of its coverage to the government, and further almost 20 per cent to the local government. The NLD received more than 20 per cent. The State Counsellor received 13.6 per cent of the coverage. By comparison, other parties received only marginal coverage – the ANP (2.2 per cent), the SNLD and the USDP (1.9 and 1.5 per cent respectively). Overall, the presented subjects were mainly portrayed in a neutral or positive and light but there were also some critical views presented about the Tatmadaw and the local government. 7 Day adopted a similar approach in May 2018 as confirmed by the monitoring results.

During the monitored period, the newspaper covered various areas, mostly devoted to activities of authorities (President, State Counsellor, Cabinet members, and local government) - summaries of government activities, as well as reshuffle of union level cabinet members and appointments in state/regional governments, State

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Counsellor's activity (meeting with EU's delegates for Human Rights; Japanese business delegation and her forthcoming visit to ASEAN-Australia summit), preliminary meetings and subsequent event concerning the new NCA signatories - Mon New Society Party (MNSP) and Lahu Democratic Union Party (LDU). In this respect, government meeting with Karen National Progressive Party (KNPP), United Wa State Army (UWSA) and National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) to prepare for NCA, a request of the China special delegate to seven northern ceased fire organizations to take part in NCA process, as well as an appointment of the United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC) leadership with Commander-in-Chief and State Counsellor were also covered.

At the end of the first monitoring period, the paper reported on news related to peace process that covered the meeting of government with ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) as well as existing clashes between State Army and some EAOs. News on scheduling third session of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglon Peace Conference on early May 2019 was released.

In relation to Rakhine, it reported impeachment of Rakhine State Minister of Municipal Affairs, the visit of British Foreign Minister to refugee camps in Maungdaw and State Counsellor, and assertions of Win Myat Aye, the Union Minister of Social Welfare that Myanmar is ready for repatriation process for the refugees in Bangladesh. Also the R2P commitment related to Rakhine issues was mentioned. On the 37<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Council, U Thaung Tun, Union Minister of Office of the Government, was reported to present conditions in Rakhine state. Overall, the paper did not present the crisis in Rakhine as a genocide.

Moreover, registration of the Tetra-Eight (8888) party, the obstruction of a public rally to support the Shan national political talk in the Shan state were also in the headlines. Additionally, the paper reported on criticism of regional parliaments towards a new urban planning to be implemented by Yangon regional government, encouragements of the Speaker of Pyithu Hluttaw to deputies to report financial abuses in public sector with evidence.

Noteworthy, the following news were also covered - government's amendment of Peaceful Assembly and Association law and subsequent protest of more than 200 civil society organizations (CSOs); as well as discussions about undergoing corruption amongst public officials, as affirmed by Union Vice Minister of Planning and Finance U Maung Maung Win.

In May, the paper continued to bring a variety of political, economic and social news, presenting them from different perspectives. The news about civilian deaths caused by the ambush of the Kachin Independence Army/Kachin Independence Organisation (KIA/KIO) joint armed group in Muse in Northern Shan State; the Chinese government's condemnation of the conflicts in the Muse border; the police's crackdown on protesters to stop wars, and the Chinese government's urge to the Northern Alliance to attend the Panglong conference were presented. Also, the news about setting the minimum wage, the NLD's central committee assembly, and changes amongst the ministers were also presented.

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In relation to the Rakhine State, the news about Amnesty International's report concerning the August 2017 attack of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), religious leaders of different faiths' visit to Maungdaw; the Myanmar's acceptance of people who came back from Bangladesh, the minister U Win Myat Aye's discussion in Hluttaw about Rakhine State stability and accepting IDPs were covered.

In addition, the newspaper also informed about the speech of the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defence that the military will comply if the president instructed to stop the attacks; military officers forced retirement in Rakhine State and negotiations between the government, military, ethnic armed groups for the 21st century Panglong conference.

### **Online media**

Similar to DVB, ***Irrawaddy*** also provided a greater diversity of political opinions and allocated almost 16 per cent of its coverage to the NLD, followed by the State Counsellor who was given almost 15 per cent, and the local government that received more than 14 per cent of the coverage. The government received 12,4 per cent, and the ANP almost 12 per cent of coverage. While most subjects received neutral or positive coverage, Irrawaddy was not shy to criticise a few subjects, such as the *Tatmadaw*, the State Counsellor, the government as well as the NLD.

The most frequently featured issue was the peace process. Irrawaddy covered the voices of the ethnic armed groups in interviews and articles. It also presented the government and the army's points of view.

The *Tatmadaw* was under heavy criticism by Irrawaddy in May, mainly in connection with the crisis in the Rakhine state. By comparison, the NLD-led government received only a slightly more coverage, but the tone was different. While 17 per cent of the *Tatmadaw's* coverage was negative and 15 positive, as much as 16 of the government's coverage was positive and 10 was negative.

Irrawaddy usually presented news in the feature formats. However, the news related to the government, the *Tatmadaw* and EAOs were presented in the form of interviews. For example, the media outlet offered its readers various interviews and commentaries focusing on the two arrested Reuters reporters, including criticism of the government.

Reshuffling cabinet positions were analysed by articles and commentaries, including criticism of the NLD-led government. Noteworthy, the site published an article describing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as a media oppressor by the Committee To Protect Journalists (CPJ). In another instance, an article depicted a wedding reception of the son of Win Htein (the NLD Spokesperson), with a title recalling night of diamonds (as once celebrated by the Military Junta's daughter under dictatorship). The vote for impeachment of the Rakhine State Minister Min Aung, protests (police controlling protest with gun shots) surrounding arrest of a Rakhine political leader Dr Aye Maung (he was arrested on 17 January) and his subsequent resignation letter to the Rakhine National Party were covered.

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Also, Irrawaddy conducted interviews with ethnic leaders on the Independence Day. In relation to the peace process, the outlet covered activities of EAOs and UNFC as well as signing of the NCA by two additional parties - Mon New Society Party (MNSP) and Lahu Democratic Union Party (LDU). Alongside, reports presented conditions of IDPs in Kyaukme as a consequence of on-going clashes between the *Tatmadaw* and TNLA. News and articles on women's rights were also published.

**Mizzima** provided the largest share of its coverage to the NLD (almost 29 per cent), followed by the local government (22.1 per cent) and the government (17.3 per cent). The State Counsellor received 11.4 per cent and the USDP 4.8 per cent of the coverage. All these subjects were presented overwhelmingly in an overall neutral manner. In May, the coverage on *Mizzima* continued to reflect on the activities of state officials and main political parties. While there continued a general neutral presentation of the subjects, there was also some positive coverage of the government and the local government as well as some criticism of the *Tatmadaw* and the government.

The *Mizzima* news agency presented the news about the government, ethnic armed organizations and the *Tatmadaw* in an equitable manner. Changes in the ministries, criticism of the government and positive opinions were presented. News about the conflicts between ethnic armed organizations and the *Tatmadaw* as well as the peace process was also presented.

Moreover, the online outlet also informed about protests in Yangon and farmland, often accompanied with interviews.

### **Topics and Structure in the Print and Online Media**

Noteworthy, all monitored print and online media prioritised **Politics** over other topics. It appears that by dedicating to *Politics* between 69 (online media) and 65 per cent (print media) of their space, they offered their readers less space for social topics. At the same time it is noteworthy that one year ago (findings from March 2017), the share of *Politics* in newspapers was significantly higher, amounting to almost 79 per cent of their space.

If comparing the respective media outlets, *Politics* was the most presented in the state-owned newspaper *Myanmar Ahlin* and private online *Mizzima* with 79 per cent during May 2018 respectively, followed by *Voice* with some 74 per cent, also during the second monitored period in May. Conversely, the least coverage of *Politics* was observed in *Eleven daily* in the first period (December 2017 to March 2018) with some 56 per cent.

Additionally, the media dedicated rather high attention to the *National Peace Process* (overall, if combining all newspapers, it amounted to some 9 per cent and to almost 20 per cent if combining all online media). In all print and online media, such news presented the second or third most covered topic - the highest level was seen at *Irrawaddy* with 27.9 per cent in May (and 23.1 per cent in the first monitored period). On the other side, state-owned newspaper *Myanmar Ahlin* devoted only limited share of their coverage of the NPP - some 6 per cent in each of the monitored period. In combination with less than 2 per cent devoted to the topic in each of the periods by the state MRTV, it is a rather alarming tendency.

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Importantly, as Myanmar is a diverse country, including various religious, ethnic and social groups, most of the broadcast media reflected this plurality. If taken in total, including the share of the National Peace Process (NPP), the mentioned groups altogether received some 18 per cent.<sup>7</sup> While online media devoted more attention to *Social Minorities* (4.7 per cent combined) and less than 2 per cent to each of remaining two, print media covered more *Religious Groups* (with 4.5 per cent).

## CONCLUSION

The monitoring results from 2017 and 2018 revealed that there were no major differences in comparison with the previous periods in the way the political subjects and topics were portrayed and in the amount of coverage provided to different political subjects.

The state authorities, primarily the government and the *Tatmadaw*, as well as the NLD continued to dominate the media coverage. Similarity as in the past and during the previous monitoring periods, the portrayal of the political actors remained neutral or positive, with only a few media offering critical views. The developments in Rakhine state reflected in the situation of Rohingyas was presented in most media only from the perspective of authorities including the *Tatmadaw*.

The way the state-funded media cover domestic and international topics and issues remains to be problematic. As recipients of state resources, state-funded media have an enhanced duty to ensure balanced and fair treatment of politicians as well as comprehensive reporting on politically relevant events. Yet, they often showed only the activities of state authorities and usually from a positive perspective; whereas largely ignored views independent or critical of the government. There was generally no profound discussion on social, economic and political problems of the country, or serious alternative viewpoints to the citizens on the country's governance.

It is important to reiterate that citizens need a more analytical and in-depth coverage of political and social issues to better understand important events and issues affecting their lives. The media need to be more proactive in setting the agenda and formats of their political coverage to better facilitate the exchange of opinions, public debate, investigation and commentary that would offer the public fully informed, analysed and assessed views of persons seeking public office.

## METHODOLOGY

The monitoring focused on basic aspects of programming of monitored media outlets trying to assess to what extent are the Myanmar media moving towards a greater

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<sup>7</sup> For comparison, when combined all TV stations, the aggregate share is 25.1 per cent, while for combined radio stations it is 17.1 per cent. The share for TV channels is influenced by the coverage presented by *Myawaddy TV*, where *the Religious Groups* was the most covered topic with 41.6 per cent of its news coverage (for both periods combined). Without *Myawaddy TV*, the portion which channels devoted to these four topics is significantly lower – 17.3 per cent.



range of public interest programming. The monitoring also aimed to contribute to creating more room for cultural diversity in the media - creating the atmosphere of collaboration and solidarity, and of condemning intolerance.

### **News diversity – Political and topical diversity**

The media monitoring included quantitative analysis of the coverage focusing on the amount of time allocated to selected political subjects and the tone of the coverage in which these political subjects were portrayed – positive, neutral or negative.

The qualitative analysis assesses the performance of media against specific principles, such as ethical or professional standards - balance, accuracy, timely, choice of issues, the omission of information, the advantage of incumbency, the positioning of items, inflammatory language, that cannot be easily quantified. These data are reported separately and integrated into the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

Additionally, in continuity with the previous project (2016-2017), an additional aspect of monitoring was preserved – topical structure of the news, with an aim to assess diversity and comprehensiveness of the monitored media.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the monitoring also focused on the coverage of specific groups, namely religious, ethnic and social ones, as well as on the presentation of the National Peace Process.

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<sup>8</sup> When analysing political diversity, only relevant information is scrutinised - those stories in which any of the monitored subjects is presented. For the purpose of topical analysis, all stories within the news programme were analysed (for broadcast media) – thus, also the stories in which none of the monitored subjects is presented. However, for the purpose of topical analysis in print and online media only relevant information is scrutinised - those stories in which any of the monitored subjects is presented.

## ANNEX A

### List of Monitored Subjects

President  
Vice President  
State Counsellor  
Government | *Ministers and Deputy Ministers*  
Speakers of the Parliament  
Local Government (incl. mayors of Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay and Yangon)  
Army | *Four top commanders*

Arakan National Party  
All Mon Regions Development Party  
Democratic Party Myanmar  
Kachin State Democracy Party  
Kokang Democracy and Unity Party  
Kayin People's Party  
La Hu National Development Party  
Lisu National Development Party  
Mon National Party  
National League for Democracy  
National Unity Party  
Pa-O National Organization  
Shan National Democratic Party  
Shan National League for Democracy  
Tai-Leng Nationalities Development Party  
Ta-ang (Palaung) National Party  
Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State  
Union Solidarity and Development Party  
Wa Democratic Party  
Wa National Unity Party  
Zomi Congress for Democracy  
Independent Deputies  
Other Political Parties

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## ANNEX B

### List of Monitored Topics and Subtopics

Agriculture  
Army (military)  
Business, economy  
Culture  
Civil society organisations  
Crime /Accidents  
Elections  
Education  
Environment  
Ethnic groups  
Foreign news  
Health care  
Judiciary  
Media  
National Peace Process  
    .Negotiations, agreements, peace talks  
    .Ongoing fights and reservations  
    .Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) caused by the civil war  
    .Other developments  
Politics  
Religious groups  
    .Buddhist religion  
    .Christian religion  
    .Hindu religion  
    .Islam religion  
    .Other religions  
Social groups  
    .Disabled  
    .Sexual minorities (LGBTI, ...)  
    .Women  
    .Youth  
    .Other Social Minorities  
Sport  
Others

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