

# Myanmar: Ultranationalism, Religious Discrimination and Incitement to Violence

Monday 31 October 2022, by [Progressive Voice Myanmar](#) (Date first published: 26 October 2022).

**The ultimate objective of the Spring Revolution is not simply to oppose the military dictatorship but also to build a community that values diversity and peaceful coexistence and to break the repetition of horrendous events based on hatred.**

Links between ultranationalist ideology, military chauvinism, and the atrocities committed by the military junta, as demonstrated by a new report by Myanmar CSO, Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica, highlight the nexus of hate, violence and power that underpins the military's failed coup attempt. The report is important in drawing attention to a dark underbelly of hatespeech, intolerance and incitement to violence, fostered and perpetuated by the military and military-linked groups, that has blighted Myanmar society for decades.

Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica's report, "The Challenge of Nationalism and Hatred," published on 13 October, gives a historical overview of links between the Myanmar military, the military proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party, violent militia groups, extremist monks, anti-Muslim hate-speech, xenophobic ideology and incitement to violence. The military has long stoked and fomented this type of ideology, infiltrating the monkhood, allowing rumors of sex crimes committed by Muslims to spread and create anti-Muslim pogroms, or arming groups of thugs to attack pro-democracy, anti-military activists, politicians and striking workers. The report also highlights the key role that dissemination of anti-Muslim propaganda played in various riots, during the 1990s, 2000s, and throughout the partial-civilian governments of President Thein Sein and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In particular, the rise of ultranationalist group, 969, made up of extremist Buddhist Monks, and its successor organization, Ma Ba Tha, played a significant role in stoking anti-Muslim hatred during the 2012 violence between Rakhine Buddhists and Muslim Rohingya, and the 2017 genocide committed by the Myanmar military.

The report is important because it links this violence to the aims of the Myanmar military. Such groups as Ma Ba Tha spread a discourse that the country is in peril, and that the military is needed to bring the country together, to protect its borders, and to defend religion (Buddhism) and race (Bamar). This was manifest in the highly discriminatory package of four 'protection of race and religion' laws, proposed by Ma Ba Tha and passed by the Thein Sein Government in 2015. Such legislation as well as the rhetoric that surrounds it is also gendered with the symbol of the vulnerable Bamar Buddhist woman, susceptible to being converted to Islam, or being subject to sexual violence, playing a role in the imaginations of these 'defenders of the nation.' The reality is that they serve the purpose of the military, its power, and its role in politics. It gives them an air of authority and a higher purpose which is in stark reality to the violence it commits against not just Muslims and other religious and ethnic minorities, but also Buddhists.

The links between militia groups, extremist monks and xenophobic ideology go back many years, but the report brings them into sharp-focus in a post-coup attempt Myanmar. For example, the group Pyu Saw Htee, which is responsible for burning down homes in central Myanmar, killing and

torturing suspected members and supporters of revolutionary forces, and terrorizing villages. Pyu Saw Htee were formed by the Myanmar military and contain military supporters, former military personnel, and ultranationalists. They are supported by the Ma Ba Tha, who themselves have been receiving guns and military training. These groups are being used, especially in Sagaing and Magwe Regions where the revolutionary forces are defeating junta troops, as a proxy force to instill terror into local populations. Just this week, the burned bodies of four people were found in a village in Magwe Region that had been under the control of the military and Pyu Saw Htee.

As Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica's report points out, just days after the coup attempt, the Myanmar military released leading ultranationalists Wirathu and Michael Kyaw Myint. Junta leader, Min Aung Hlaing himself met high-profile Ma Ba Tha figures last year, and also stated that the previous, NLD-led Government, by banning Ma Ba Tha, was 'damaging Myanmar's race and religion.' He also decorated a leading Ma Ba Tha monk with a religious award. This is in stark contrast to the violence and brutality committed by the Myanmar military junta against the monks that are opposing them or are simply caught up in conflict. None more apparent than the attacks on monasteries and monastic schools sheltering fleeing civilians. One particularly egregious example was the deliberate aerial bombing of a monastic school in Sagaing Region that killed at least 11 schoolchildren.

It is important to understand the ingratiation between the Myanmar military, ultranationalists, and extremist factions of the monkhood. They are used to stoke divides and tensions between diverse groups of people within Myanmar, which the military then exploits for its own gain to hold on to power. However, as the report points out "The ultimate objective of the Spring Revolution is not simply to oppose the military dictatorship but also to build a community that values diversity and peaceful coexistence and to break the repetition of horrendous events based on hatred." The diversity and inclusion of ethnic and religious groups from all over Myanmar in the Spring Revolution, united in opposing the violent attempt to grab power by the Myanmar military is a model for a future Myanmar that can break these cycles of division, hate speech, and incitement to violence based on religion. However, the main obstacle to breaking this cycle is the institution that creates, funds, disseminates, and benefits from a language of hate - the Myanmar military.

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