

ASEAN Parliamentarians denounce Myanmar's cyber-security law



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Guwahati: The ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) opposes the military junta's recently revived cyber-security law with a warning that it would pose a serious threat to fundamental rights and contradicts the principles enlisted in the Constitution of Myanmar. The draconian legislation is a calculated attempt by the junta to suppress dissents, stifle free expressions and violate the privacy of Myanmarese nationals, added the APHR, a regional network of current and former Parliamentarians belonging to southeast Asian nations.

Expected to come into force next week, the law grants the military sweeping and unchecked powers under the pretext of national security. These powers enable the regime to censor public discourse, dominate digital platforms and restrict access to independent information. By institutionalizing mass surveillance, the law severely undermines privacy and individual freedoms, obstructing the efforts of pro-democracy advocates and civil society organizations striving for justice and accountability in the country, said an APhR statement issued from Jakarta on 24 January 2025.

“The true purpose of this law is to eliminate any opposition to the regime and solidify its grip on power,” said Mercy Chriesty Barends, APhR co-chairperson and a lawmaker in Indonesia’s House of Representatives. It flagrantly contradicts Myanmar’s own constitution, which guarantees the rights to free expression and privacy. As parliamentarians committed to defending human rights, we stand unequivocally with the people of Myanmar and the activists, journalists, and civil society groups who are directly threatened by this oppressive measure, she added.

One of the law's most chilling provisions criminalizes the use of virtual private networks (VPNs), essential tools for bypassing censorship and accessing independent information. This alarming move exemplifies the junta's efforts to monitor, censor and control online activities, creating a climate of fear and constant surveillance.

"This law's demand for forced data handovers and invasive monitoring highlights the regime's blatant disregard for both human rights and constitutional guidelines," said Charles Santiago, APhR co-chairperson and a former lawmaker of Malaysian Parliament. Not only does it violate the fundamental freedoms of Myanmar's citizens, but also undermines the rule of law by enacting measures that contradict the constitution's protection of individual rights. This is nothing short of a formalisation of the junta's escalating abuses, added the former lawmaker.

"This proposed cyber-security law must be withdrawn immediately," asserted Arlene D Brosas, an APhR board member and lawmaker in the Philippines House of Representatives. She furthermore shared that it was shelved in previous years due to overwhelming national and international oppositions and the current draft is no better. It demands urgent resistance from both the region and the global community.

If enacted, the proposed law will deal a death blow to Myanmar's online civic space. It threatens to obliterate freedom of expression, association and access to information. Its provisions are intentionally crafted to dominate every aspect of the digital sphere, escalating surveillance, censoring dissent and stifling any form of political opposition. This blatant attempt to crush Myanmar's pro-democracy movement demands a resolute and unified response from the global community.

The forum of Parliamentarians now calls on the international community to take immediate action by denouncing this law and exerting diplomatic pressure on Myanmar's military junta to abandon it. Governments, media outlets and human rights organisations must unite to denounce this oppressive legislation, which directly undermines the right of Myanmarese to express themselves freely in a safe and open digital environment.

“This draconian law must be repealed urgently,” stated Rangsiman Rome, an APHR board member and lawmaker in the Thai Parliament. The people of Myanmar deserve a future where their rights are protected, their voices are heard, and their freedoms are preserved. Otherwise, this law will only further tighten the junta's grip on power, suffocating freedoms and entrenching their illegitimate control over the country, he concluded.

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Assam Times Staff. editor@assamtimes.org

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