

Monitoring of the media coverage prior to 7 November elections in Burma

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1. Project Overview

MEMO 98, a specialist Slovak media institution with extensive experience of delivery media monitoring on behalf of international institutions as well as technical assistance to civil society groups, has been systematically monitoring the media coverage of the 7 November parliamentary elections in Burma (Myanmar). The project's goal is to provide an accurate picture of the state and independent media's behaviour in the campaign prior to Burma's elections.

Over a period of three months, the project will seek to evaluate the mass media's performance in providing objective and balanced coverage of the candidates and their platforms so the citizens of Burma can make well-informed choices at the ballot box. The project's findings will be determined through a well-defined and rigorous methodology and are not intended to support any one candidate or political party, but the integrity of the media environment as a whole during the campaign season.

2. Monitoring Sample

Based on criteria such as media ownership, coverage and impact, the following national media were included into the monitoring:

Table 1: Media outlets monitored

Media outlet	Ownership	Programmes	Potential geographical outreach
Television stations			
<i>Myanmar TV (MRTV)</i>	State	Prime time news	Nationwide
<i>Myanmar TV 4(MRTV4)</i>	State	Prime time news	Nationwide
<i>Myawaddy TV(MWD)</i>	State	Prime time news	Nationwide
<i>TV Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB TV)</i>	Private	Prime time news	Available via satellite
Radio channels			
<i>Radio Myanmar</i>	State	Prime time news	Nationwide
<i>Radio Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB radio)</i>	Private	Prime time news	Nationwide
Daily and weekly newspapers		Articles	Circulation
<i>Kyaymon (The Mirror)</i>	State	Political and election-related reporting	Nationwide
<i>Myanmar Ahlin (New Light of Myanmar)</i>	State	Political and election-related reporting	Nationwide
<i>Eleven (weekly)</i>	Private	Political and election-related reporting	Most of the Cities

<i>Myanmar Times (weekly)</i>	Private	Political and election-related reporting	Most of the Cities
<i>Voice Journal (weekly)</i>	Private	Political and election-related reporting	Most of the Cities
Web sites			
<i>Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB web)</i>	Private	Political and election-related	Internet
<i>Irrawaddy</i>	Private	Political and election-related	Internet
<i>Mizzima</i>	Private	Political and election-related	Internet

The monitoring team has observed media coverage of the Burmese political scene in order to:

- assess whether political entities are granted fair access to the media;
- supply the international community, media, political entities, regulatory organs, and citizens with data to measure the objectivity of the Burmese media coverage of the campaign;
- raise public awareness and document manipulations with important sources of information
- motivate citizens to better understand the role of the media.

In addition, the project is supposed to:

- enhance the capacity of the civil and academic communities in conducting the advanced media researches;
- advocate for more accurate, impartial and fair reporting.

To achieve these objectives, MEMO 98 has been assessing the media coverage against Burmese legislation and internationally recognized professional standards and principles of journalist ethics, which include:

- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of information
- Accuracy and transparency
- Balance
- Impartiality
- Matter-of-fact and relevance
- Timeliness
- Clarity
- Variety

3. Methodology

MEMO 98's monitoring team has employed quantitative and qualitative methodological tools according to international standards for media monitoring. The primary methodology used in the project has been proven and tested in some 35 countries. Given its comprehensive content-oriented approach, it is specially designed to provide in-depth feedback on pluralism and diversity in media reporting, including coverage of chosen subjects/themes. As such, the outcome of the monitoring will not be a set of empty and superficial data, but a detailed analysis and evaluation of the current level of political diversity in media reporting, examined in the proper context, including concrete comparisons and analysis.

Quantitative analysis

The quantitative component of the monitoring consists of a content analysis of a representative sample of media outlets. Media monitors measure the total amount of time devoted to selected "subjects" and also the tone in which the relevant subjects are portrayed – positive, neutral or negative. These data are recorded for all relevant information and presented graphically to illustrate differences between outlets and differences over time.

Monitored subjects:

- Head of State
- State Peace and Development Council (all relevant SPDC agencies and bodies, including on the local level)
- Union Election Commission
- Political parties (parliamentary parties registered for the upcoming elections and also those which decided to boycott the polls and were deregistered by the Union Election Commission).¹

To monitor the broadcast media, monitors measure the actual "direct/indirect appearance time" of previously selected subjects – in seconds. They also separately record each instance where a subject is mentioned indirectly (e.g. by a news presenter or by someone else) as a "reference". For the print media, monitors measure the space dedicated to relevant subjects - in square centimetres (cm²). As for the indirect references in the print media, monitors record them as "remarks". The quantitative analysis for the newspaper coverage is categorized according to a page number on which an article relevant for the monitoring appears. The format of the news coverage is also categorized based on: headlines, article, editorials, photos, paid/free advertisement, cartoons, commentaries, news item and news report. To monitor web sites, monitors use a similar methodology to that used for monitoring of the print media. More specifically, monitors print all political and election-related articles at specific time and measure all relevant subjects & topics in cm².

It is important to keep in mind that it is the behaviour of media outlets that is being assessed, not the monitored subjects. Positive and negative ratings refer to whether or not a viewer is offered a positive or negative impression of the subject or topic. Monitors give an evaluation mark to all

¹ See the list of parties in the annex under *List of acronyms*.

subjects, in addition to time and reference, to provide information on how the subject was portrayed by a media outlet. The evaluation mark is thus attached to all monitored subjects to determine whether the subject was presented in positive, negative, or neutral light. The five-level evaluation scale that is used for this purpose can be described in the following way: Grade 1 and 2 mean that a certain monitored subject was presented in a very positive or positive light respectively; in both instances the news coverage is favourable. Grade 3 is a “neutral mark”, with the coverage being solely factual, without positive or negative connotations. Grades 4 or 5 signify that a subject was presented in a negative or very negative light respectively. Such coverage has negative connotations, accusations or one-sided criticism of a subject portrayed in an item or story.

It is always important to consider the actual evaluation (judgement) on the monitored subject and also the context (background) of the story or item. The tone of the coverage is positive if the way the subject is presented and the context are both positive, similarly if the both factors are negative, the tone is negative. The neutral tone is the result of both factors being neutral. If the way the subject is presented and the context of the message do not match, monitors have to determine the tone according to what is the prevailing factor (so it could be either the content of the story or context).

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis assesses the performance of media against specific principles/benchmarks, such as ethical or professional standards, that cannot be easily quantified. Monitors report about lies, distortions, unbalanced coverage, unfairness, inaccuracy, bias and anything else that is important to presenting the quality of reporting. These data are reported separately and integrated in the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

The qualitative methodology focuses on the content of stories and the monitoring team will thus focus on important aspects of the information presented by the media, such as its quality and variety, producing findings on its structure (themes and topics) and assessing the overall quality of reporting provided by each media outlet, based on its overall informational value.

In order to eliminate any elements of subjectivity present in qualitative analysis, MEMO 98 does frequent checks on how individual monitors analyze the media. Where there is a difference of opinion over the evaluation of a particular item, the whole monitoring team (or a team leader) evaluates the item before making a final decision.

For the qualitative analysis, monitors are asked to:

- evaluate the placement of relevant stories and items in comparison with other reported topics and issues;
- evaluate the level of political diversity in media reporting;
- evaluate journalist’s knowledge and his/her ability to work with facts and information;
- evaluate the ability of the author to engage audience;
- in case an interview is conducted, are the questions fair or “loaded;”
- how does the language shape the audience’s understanding and perception of politics;

- does the media outlet use certain language, graphics and camera angles to influence the audience's perception of the monitored subjects and topics;
- evaluate journalist's involvement in the story.

Data collection

For each day's coverage on a channel or each issue of a publication, monitors complete a monitoring form. This form is then reviewed by a data enterer who enters the data into a special monitoring programme (database).

Data entry and Monitoring Database

The last phase of working with data is data processing – computer data processing and storage has several advantages:

- Possibility to store data in PC;
- Flexibility and simple data manipulation, e.g. specific data selection and evaluation;
- Graphic abilities and its direct use in presentations.

Since the monitoring forms consist of a relatively small number of different data types and the data can be easily organized according to the given criteria, Microsoft Excel (in combination with the whole Microsoft Office package) is suitable for processing the results of monitoring process. The data that is acquired during the monitoring consist of subject/affiliation, time (direct, indirect and total), evaluation, item start, item end, topic and its time.

4. Legal Framework

While there are legal guarantees of freedom of expression and media (anchored in the Constitution), these are not respected in practice. The Press Scrutiny Board, appointed by the government, censors not only criticism of the government, but negative news in general, including reports about natural disasters (e.g. Cyclone Nargis) or defeats by the national football team.² By the rules established in 2005, media are supposed to be allowed to offer “*constructive*” criticism of government activities and report on natural disasters and poverty, provided the coverage does not affect the national interest. However, in practise, those who criticise the regime are subject to harsh punishments, ranging from lengthy prison sentences to torture and intimidation.

While Article 354a³ of the 2008 **Constitution** guarantees the freedom of speech, this right is limited as citizens are free to exercise it only “*if it is not contrary to the laws, enacted for Union security, prevalence of law and order, community peace and tranquility or public order and morality.*”

² This is based on the 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Act,

³ “Every citizen shall be at liberty in the exercise of the following right: to express and publish freely their convictions and opinions“.

Other laws impeding the freedom of expression include the Emergency Provisions Act (1950), according to which committing any acts “*that cause or intends to spread false news about the government*” is an offence; the Printers and Publishers Registration Act (1962), which requires prior approval of all printed or written materials before they are published; the Criminal Code (1860) which under the Section 505(b) stipulates that people can be charged for any statement, rumour, report made “*with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, fear or alarm to the public or to any section of the public whereby any person may be induced to commit an offence against the state or against the public tranquillity*”; and the Electronic Transaction Law (2004) which imposes punishments for use of electronic devices for receiving or sending and distributing any information relating to secrets of the state or prevalence of law and order or community peace and tranquillity.

In addition, if anyone wishes to possess or use computer equipment, he/she has to get a license from the Ministry of Communications, Posts and Telegraph (according to the Computer Science Development Law 1996). Similarly, owners of television or video recorders are required to seek permissions for possession of such equipment under the Television and Video Law (1996).

On 14 September 2010, the Union Election Commission (UEC) announced that 37 political parties were registered to participate in the elections. The contesting parties have to seek an approval from the UEC to present their platforms in the media during the period preceding the elections.

UEC defines the timetable for free presentations of contesting subjects which are entitled to use 15 minutes on state-controlled media (radio or television).⁴ However, the freedom of expression of contestants is significantly limited given the fact that they have to comply with the following rules:

- (a) not to give any talks that can harm ‘non-disintegration of the Union’, ‘non-disintegration of national solidarity’ and ‘perpetuation of sovereignty’.
- (b) not to give any talks that can harm security, the rule of law, and community peace,
- (c) not to disobey the State Constitution of the Union of Myanmar and existing laws,
- (d) not to stimulate sedition or give any talks that can tarnish the image of the State,
- (e) not to give any talks that can lead to the collapse of the Tatmadaw or tarnish the image of the Tatmadaw,
- (f) not to give any talks or take organizing measures that can lead to conflicts or harm the dignity or moral conduct in connection with racism, or religion or the affairs of an individual or community,
- (g) not to abuse religion for political ends,
- (h) not to give any talks that can harm peaceful pursuit of school education,
- (i) not to give any talks that can discourage service personnel from performing their duties or to abet them to stage protests against the government.

⁴

According to UEC Notification N. 98/2010 adopted on 14 September 2010.

5. General Media Monitoring Findings

MEMO 98's media monitoring commenced on 4 August. After four weeks of monitoring, the monitoring team found significant differences in the way how state media and the exile media (outside Burma) portray political parties, the head of state, the SPDC and the Union Election Commission. Following is the summary of the main findings:

- The principal trend from the media monitoring is that there is an exceptionally limited range of diversity of political actors in the state and private mass media which operate inside Burma.
- Virtually all state and private media (operating inside Burma) devoted extensive and favorable prime time news coverage to activities of the SPDC and the head of state, thus directly benefiting candidates with a pro-government orientation. There was a clear tendency to cover the activities of state officials positively, pointing out achievements and successes.
- Parties have been able to utilize free airtime (15 minutes each) on both state TV and radio with the first slots being allocated on 24 September. However, parties are required to submit their broadcasts one week before the allocated time slot for pre-screening and are also significantly limited in their ability to freely express their message to voters.
- The main party in opposition – National League for Democracy – and its leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi did not receive any time or space in the state or private media operating inside Burma during the monitoring period.
- Prime Minister Thein Sein, who also chairs the pro-government Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), received more coverage than the head of state Than Shwe in all state and private media operating inside Burma (with the exception of Myanmar Ahlin newspaper).
- Monitored state media completely neglected to offer opposition parties (both those who participate in the elections as well as those who decided to boycott) any significant airtime/space and opportunities to challenge or criticize the political opinions of the current establishment
- Three state controlled TV channels covered only three persons in their political and election-related coverage - Thein Sein, Than Shwe and U Thein Soe.
- By contrast, the monitored exile media provided a diverse range of views, including criticism of the SPDC, the USDP and the head of state. DVB (TV, radio and web site), in particular, provided a significant coverage of the main opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her party National League for Democracy.

While there are approximately 150 privately owned newspapers and magazines in Burma, they are not allowed to publish freely but are subject to pre-publication censorship by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division which is run by military officers. The state-funded media comprise of four state-owned TV channels – TV Myanmar (MRTV), TV Maynmar 4 (MRTV4), Myawaddy TV (MWD) and TV Maynmar International (which broadcasts in English), one state-funded radio (Radio Maynmar), three daily state newspapers *Kyaymon* (The Mirror), *Myanmar*

Ahlin (The Light of Myanmar), *New Light of Myanmar* (in English) and one semi-government weekly paper *The Myanmar Times* (published in both Burmese and English). All state media are fully under the control of the SPDC. Television is the main source of information about politics.

5.1. Broadcasters (inside Burma)

Parties registered for the elections have been able to utilize free airtime (15 minutes each) on both state TV and radio with the first slots being allocated on 24 September. However, parties are required to submit their broadcasts one week before the allocated time slot, and the speeches, which must be presented by the party's chairman or general secretary, are then recorded some two days before the program goes to air.

Some parties already complained about the lack of time to prepare the broadcasts which have to meet a number of provisions stipulated by UEC Notification N. 98/2010 adopted on 14 September 2010 (see also the Legal framework). In particular, the vaguely formulated provisions significantly limit any criticism of the state authorities, thus having detrimental effect on the ability of political parties to openly discuss the performance of the incumbents in office which effectively prevents any meaningful campaign discourse.

MRTV

Between 4 and 31 August, *MRTV* devoted 100 per cent of its political and election-related news coverage to the activities of the state authorities, with the SPDC receiving 93 per cent, the UEC 4.7 per cent and the head of state 2.3 per cent of the coverage. This coverage was exclusively positive or neutral in tone. By contrast, with less than two months before election, all other political entities, including political parties contesting the upcoming elections as well as those which decided to boycott the polls, were largely ignored by the state television.⁵

It is important to mention that Thein Sein (who resigned from his military post in April – along with a number of other SPDC members - but remained in his political post as the prime minister), who also chairs the pro-government USDP, received more coverage (56 per cent) than the head of state Than Shwe (39.4 per cent) which indicates that *MRTV* is active in promoting the USDP. From among the monitored political representatives⁶, the only other covered person was the chairman of the Union Election Commission U Thein Soe (4.6 per cent).

As recipients of public resources, state-funded media have an enhanced duty to ensure balanced and fair treatment of politicians. While *MRTV* is funded with taxpayers' money, only activities of state authorities were covered on this channel during the first monitoring period. The channel completely ignored any views independent of or critical of the current establishment. There is no discussion on social, economic and political problems of the country, with no information to the citizens about consequences of bad governance.

⁵ No single party received any meaningful coverage on *MRTV*'s prime time news program.

⁶ These include the top state officials, leaders of registered political parties and the leader of the opposition Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

MRTV4

As in the case of MRTV, the state-funded *MRTV4* devoted almost all of its prime time news coverage (99 per cent) to the SPDC (91.9 per cent), the head of state (2.5 per cent), and the UEC (5.5 per cent). This coverage was exclusively positive or neutral in tone. A number of parties received a few seconds on the *MRTV4* prime time news, mainly in connection with their registration being approved by the UEC.

Similarly as MRTV, *MRTV4* also devoted significant time to Thein Sein who received as much as 77.5 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral in tone. The next most presented person was Than Shwe who received some 21.2 per cent of the coverage followed by the UEC Chair U Thein Soe with 1.3 per cent of the coverage which was also neutral.

Myawaddy TV

Myawaddy TV is a military-owned television network which was launched on the 27 March 1995, in commemoration of the Burmese Armed Forces Day. It adopted a similar approach to that of the other two state-funded TV channels and devoted extensive and favourable coverage to the state authorities. The monitoring showed that *Myawaddy TV* devoted 98 per cent of its political and election prime time news coverage to the SPDC (92.8 per cent), the head of state (1.6 per cent) and the UEC (5.4 per cent). Likewise, the tone of the coverage was neutral or positive. The only two political parties to receive at least a few seconds of the coverage were the pro-government USDP and Union Democratic Party. Conversely, during the same period, no other political party received any coverage at all.

Of the three state-controlled TV networks, *Myawaddy TV* devoted the biggest amount of time to Thein Sein – 87 per cent of the coverage. By comparison, Than Shwe received only 13 per cent of the coverage. This coverage was mainly neutral or positive in tone. It is alarming that the three main TV channels covered only three persons in their political and election-related coverage - Thein Sein, Than Shwe and U Thein Soe.

5.2. Newspapers (inside Burma)

Kyaymon

The state-controlled daily *Kyaymon* (The Mirror) devoted the bulk of its political and election-related coverage to the SPDC. However, unlike the other state-controlled outlets, it was lesser share – 53 per cent of the coverage. This newspaper covered intensively the work of the Union Election Commission by devoting it as much as 43.6 per cent of the coverage which was exclusively neutral in tone. The head of state was the only other covered subject with 3.4 per cent of the coverage.

As for the coverage of persons, similar to state television, *Kyaymon* devoted the bulk of its political and election-related coverage to Thein Sein who received 80.4 per cent of the coverage which was mainly positive or neutral in tone. The next most presented person was the chairman of UEC Thein Soe who obtained 14.4 per cent of the coverage (only neutral), followed by Than Shwe (3.1 per cent of mainly positive or neutral coverage).

Myanmar Ahlin

The state-controlled daily, *Myanmar Ahlin* (New Light of Myanmar), demonstrated similar trends to those monitored on state television. It devoted 80.8 per cent to the activities of SPDC, 14.8 per cent to the UEC and 3.9 per cent to the head of state. The coverage was overwhelmingly neutral or positive in tone.

As for the coverage of persons, unlike the state television, Myanmar Ahlin devoted the bulk of its political and election-related coverage to Than Shwe who received 48.8 per cent of the coverage. By comparison, Thein Sein was given 47.4 per cent of such coverage. While Than Shwe received roughly equal proportions of neutral and positive coverage, the coverage of Thein Sein was mainly positive in tone.

5.3. Exile media outlets

Unlike the state-controlled TV channels which de facto covered only three top state officials, the monitored exile media provided a diverse range of views from different candidates and political parties and also included criticism of the SPDC, the USDP and the head of state. *DVB* (TV, radio and web site), in particular, provided a significant coverage of the main opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her party National League for Democracy.

TV Democratic Voice of Burma

TV Democratic Voice of Burma (*DVB TV*) provided 36.9 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the National League for Democracy. 44 per cent of this coverage was positive, 53 per cent neutral and 3 per cent negative in tone. Unlike state-controlled media outlets, *DVB TV* heavily criticized the SPDC which received 20.4 per cent of the coverage. The main pro-government party - USDP - obtained 11.9 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral or negative in tone. The UEC, which was given 5.5 per cent of the coverage, was also portrayed both in a neutral and negative way. Unlike state-controlled media, *DVB TV* covered activities of other parties, including National Democratic Force (NDF) which received 5.5 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral in tone.

As for the coverage of persons, the main opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi received the bulk of the coverage – 42.2 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral in tone. The next most covered persons were the chairman of the Democratic Party U Thu Wai and the chairman of the Union Democratic Party Thein Htay who were given 14.9 per cent and 13.6 per cent respectively. The head of state Than Shwe received 7.6 per cent of the coverage which was mainly negative in tone.

Radio Democratic Voice of Burma

Radio Democratic Voice of Burma (*Radio DVB*) gave comparable time to the NLD (24.6 per cent of mainly neutral and positive coverage) and the NDF (21 per cent of mainly neutral coverage). Similar to *DVB TV*, *Radio DVB* provided critical coverage to the head of state who received 1.2 per cent of the coverage. In addition, also the USDP, which received 3.7 per cent of the coverage, was under heavy criticism. As for the coverage of other parties, the most covered ones were the

Shan Nationals Democratic Party (10.7 per cent), Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics and Union Democratic Party (8 per cent respectively).

As for the coverage of persons, the most covered person was the leader of Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics Aye Lwin who received 29.8 per cent of the neutral and negative coverage. The next most covered persons were the chairman of Rakhine Nationalities Development Party Aye Maung (17 per cent of neutral coverage) and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (12.4 per cent of neutral coverage). The head of state Than Shwe received 4.6 per cent of the coverage which was mainly negative in tone.

Web site Democratic Voice of Burma

Web site Democratic Voice of Burma (*Web site DVB*) provided 29.8 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the National League for Democracy. This coverage was mainly neutral or positive in tone. The next most covered subjects were the NDF (12.4 per cent of mainly neutral or positive coverage) and the SPDC (12.3 per cent of mainly negative and neutral coverage).

As for the coverage of persons, the main opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Aye Lwin received comparable space – respectively 16 and 16.2. While Aye Lwin received roughly equal proportions of positive and neutral coverage, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's coverage was mainly neutral. It is important to mention that DVB web informed about the biggest number of political entities from among the monitored media outlets.

Irrawaddy web site

Another web site Irrawaddy provided 32.5 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the USDP. This coverage was mainly neutral or negative in tone. The next most covered subjects were the SPDC (19.5 per cent of mainly neutral coverage) and the NLD (13.1 per cent of mainly neutral coverage).

As for the coverage of persons, Than Shwe received 49 per cent of neutral coverage followed by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who received 24.3 per cent of neutral and positive coverage.

Mizzima web site

The last of the three web sites Mizzima provided 23.3 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the UEC. This coverage was exclusively neutral in tone. The next most covered subject was the USDP which received 17.4 per cent of mainly negative and neutral coverage.

As for the coverage of persons, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi received 39.4 per cent of exclusively neutral coverage followed by Than Shwe who received 19.1 per cent of mainly neutral coverage.

5.4. Other qualitative aspects of monitoring

Monitored government-controlled broadcast media *MRTV*, *MRTV4*, and *Myawaddy* as well as the newspapers *Myanmar Ahlin* and *Kyaymon* offered very similar range of issues. They all gave

their overwhelming support to the SPDC, completely omitting any critical views of this political subject. By contrast, the opposition, presented very rarely, was portrayed in a negative light. Many reports were inaccurate, vague and lacking details. In a nutshell, they offered propaganda-like coverage of issues which were often:

- ***Out-dated reports***

For instance, on 5 August in the framework of its regular news program, *Myawaddy* aired seven news items which covered past events that took place between 13 July and 3 August.

- ***Not relevant and driven by ideological purposes***

A significant portion of time/space was dedicated to a story about a white elephant (*Sin Phyu Taw*) that has been moved to *Napyitaw* (a new capital of Burma) which, according to ideology of the ancient Burmese Kingdom, should bring blessing and fortune for the land and the people. Emergence of a white elephant was reported as a matter of national pride and it was presented in a way that white elephants would emerge in a “certain place where Buddha Sasana flourished and rulers governed in a just way and the nation remain peaceful and free from various forms of danger.” A clear link was made with the upcoming elections in portraying the emergence of the white elephant as “a good sign for the success of general elections and for the people to enjoy peace and stability and prosperity in the time of a new government like in the time of the existing government” (New Light of Myanmar).

Extensive exposures were also given to an issue of Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) - in particular in the state-funded print media - which changed its uniform as Border Guard Force (BGF). This coverage was presented as successful policy by the SPDC in transforming armed ethnic groups into a Board Guard Force – however, without providing any analysis or background and without presenting all important views.

Media coverage of appearances of the SPDC at ceremonial events, such as development projects aimed at improving infrastructure and the situation in rural areas, indirectly benefited the candidates with a pro-government orientation. Critical and independent opinions on the authorities’ performance as well as any comprehensive analysis of contestants’ platforms were completely absent from the news reporting on the state-funded media.

- ***Bias and lacking balance***

Alternative sources of information such as Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Asia (RFA), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and DVB were regularly targeted and criticized.

The broadcast government-controlled media aired propaganda-type of songs, blatantly praising Burmese government; in the same time short, negative spots targeting opposition were put in the broadcasts.

6. Conclusion

Data from the first month of monitoring reveal that monitored state-controlled media in Burma do not follow any journalistic standards, but only serve as a mouthpiece of the ruling powers. With less than two months before elections, the main news programs of state-controlled TV channels have only shown the three top state officials and completely ignored any other stakeholders. This is an exceptionally limited range of diversity of political actors, with all other political forces having virtually no access to the country's most important sources of information.

It is also of concern that these disturbing trends in the way the Burmese state-controlled media cover political entities are not result of short-term anomalies, but genuine trends in the Burmese media. These negative trends are to some extent meliorated by the exile media which do offer a diverse range of views, with the main opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her party National League for Democracy, getting the most significant coverage.

However, the potential geographical coverage of the exile media is much less than that of the state-controlled media in Burma. As such, it is highly questionable whether citizens will receive ample information to be able to make a qualified choice at the ballot box.