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To the judges of the Shadid Awards,

101 East, Al Jazeera's weekly current affairs programme on issues in the Asia-Pacific, wishes to submit our coverage of the Myanmar coup for the prestigious journalism prize.

Our entry for the Shadid Award can be viewed through this link: <https://vimeo.com/563560339>

The production team behind the two half hour programmes consists of Ali Fowle, Drew Ambrose, Aun Qi Koh, Andy Mees, David Boyle, Jenni Henderson, Nick Olle, Liz Gooch and Sharon Roobol. A number of Burmese journalists, producers and camera operators cannot be named due to concerns over their safety in Myanmar. The key point of contact for 101 East is the Executive Producer, Sharon Roobol. Sharon's Australian phone number is +61408316001 and her email is sharon.roobol@aljazeera.net.

101 East produced the world's first longform current affairs report about the protests and violent chaos which engulfed Myanmar after the military took control of the Southeast Asian nation in February 2021. Ali Fowle, a freelance journalist who had been based in the country's biggest city Yangon for nine years presented this compelling episode entitled "Inside Myanmar's Crackdown". She was one of the few western journalists on the ground during the coup and used her extensive contacts to access deposed politicians in hiding, demonstrators and local journalists who feared imminent arrest. The team had to navigate a raft of challenges in this post-coup environment. In the immediate aftermath, rolling internet blackouts and power shutdowns were used by the army to quell civilian uprisings and this made it extremely difficult to send footage out of the country. Facing constant danger and the risk of arrest, Ali Fowle documented army brutality as the death toll rose in this climate of fear and produced this unvarnished, yet nuanced coverage from the frontlines of Myanmar's fight for democracy.

Ali Fowle and the 101 East continued their dogged reporting of the Myanmar crisis through another half hour program entitled "State of Fear" which forms the second part of this Shadid Award entry. With Myanmar largely closed off to foreign media, 101 East has put disturbing cases of alleged torture, mysterious deaths, disappearances and detention without charge under the spotlight, revealing how the military is creating a state of fear and bringing its actions to the world's attention. Using witness testimony and forensic analysis, this programme exposed a secret interrogation center in army barracks on the outskirts of Myanmar's biggest city Yangon. 101 East worked with UK-based investigative agency, Forensic Architecture, to digitally recreate this secret facility. Utilizing field photography and satellite imagery, the team illustrated how the building was refurbished and showed signs of activity in the month before the coup. When the investigation began, there was scant knowledge of the exact location of the center or what was happening inside, it was little more than a rumor. This forensic reconstruction informed the public of what was going on inside this secret center, where hundreds of people are believed to have been detained, with some allegedly subjected to abuse.

101 East gained access to previously unseen footage of a politician who died in custody, which revealed his body had been drenched in blood and undermined the military's official account of his death. Although rumors about his death and others had been widely shared on social media, hard evidence has been extremely difficult to come by and Al Jazeera's investigation shed new light on a much talked about story. This programme, produced in collaboration with European investigative agencies, also revealed how Western companies sold telecommunications surveillance technology to Myanmar, putting civilians at even greater risk.

Both pieces of longform television journalism required careful and considered engagement with an array of interviewees and sources within Myanmar. Ali Fowle's long-term connections with dissident groups and



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intimate knowledge of the country allowed her to navigate the difficult conditions and obtain access other foreign media were unable to manage. The risks for interviewees in this project were extreme, and every precaution was taken to ensure the safety of those participating. One political leader Ali Fowle interviewed was in hiding due to her affiliation with the deposed government, so the team went to huge efforts to communicate covertly and to film in a secret location. In the early stages of the coup, the reporter met with potential interviewees in cars and safehouses. All communication was through encrypted messaging. Where in-person approaches had to be made, they were done through trusted sources in Myanmar known to the reporter and to the interviewee. These comprehensive efforts paid off, with interviewees providing viewers with critical insights into their fear and concerns. Ali Fowle used her mobile phone and nimble production equipment to film the documentary while trying to keep a low profile as a registered journalist at a time when local reporters were being detained and local media outlets shut down.

At the time of writing, more than 1440 people have died since the coup. Some of these have been mass killings at the hands of the military. A further 8400 Burmese dissidents have been detained by the authorities. These statistics highlight how dangerous it is for the civilian population in Myanmar at the moment. Foreigners were not immune to these threats. In the volatile post-coup environment, the army carried out arrests on a daily basis, including an Australian political advisor to the deposed government, a Japanese journalist and an American editor of a local media agency. In the months after the coup, Myanmar's military arrested 98 journalists and has already convicted six of them for violating a new provision of the penal code that makes it a crime to publish or circulate comments that they claim spread "false news" or "cause fear". These new laws made it extremely difficult to produce "State of Fear" because at the time of production, many dissidents were afraid to engage with the media. This pressure on those who speak out in Myanmar is best illustrated through an ill-fated media tour of Myanmar conducted by the military for two American journalists during April 2021. Eleven civilians were detained by soldiers for speaking to both reporters at a local market.

During this same period, 101 East was interviewing army defectors and dissidents in hiding for the second media project "State of Fear". Two of these interviewees were on the run from the authorities and hiding in the mountainous border regions of Myanmar. To capture their testimony, 101 East secured a safe location for the interviewees and recorded the interviewees using safe methods, trusted intermediaries and small production tools. Testimonies from former detainees were also gathered through secure means to uncover a secret interrogation centre in Myanmar where many dissidents are alleged to have been tortured. Ali Fowle obtained these testimonies using secure modes of communications and used character actors in the television piece to ensure that none of them faced repercussions for speaking with the media. As a result of these cautious ethical measures, no interviewee who featured in either television program was arrested or exposed. Despite the challenges and limitations, this piece of television journalism provided Myanmar's affected civil society a rare platform to speak openly about the state of fear which currently exists in the authoritarian Asian nation

Another ethical consideration addressed in 101 East's ethical reporting approach was ensuring that the reporting was respectful of the ethnic diversity of this Southeast Asian nation. Myanmar is home to 135 distinct ethnic groups. Many of them have been subjected to violence, civil wars and even genocide. Both the production team and the interviewees reflected that diversity. Due to the highly volatile security situation in Myanmar, reporter Ali Fowle worked with more than one local crew on the ground. Camera operators were from the Bamar, Danu, Shan and Rakhine ethnic minorities. The team included Muslims, Christians and Buddhists and consisted of an equal number of men and women. The production team spoke to several people of varying religions, ethnic groups and lifestyles. Burmese women are often underrepresented in Myanmar but they were given an equal voice in the first story "Inside Myanmar's Crackdown", with three men and three women interviewed in the final film.

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The production team also chose to focus on young female protest leaders to represent the new youthful activist movement instead of older male demonstrators who normally get more airtime. One prominent interviewee in the first piece “Inside Myanmar’s Crackdown”, Esther Chit, is an ethnic Karen leading a protest movement called The General Strike Committee of Nationalities (GSCN), which is made up of 29 different ethnic groups marching together to bring attention to the plight of ethnic and Indigenous people. Due to restrictions on travel, there has been little media focus on the uniquely challenging plight of the country’s minorities who have faced decades of persecution. Through Esther’s story, the team addressed these issues in the narrative to represent those suffering the most in Myanmar.

Under these repressive conditions, 101 East’s reporting provided a crucial role in informing the world of daily human rights abuses by the junta, both as the post-coup crackdown unfolded and when the army started taking political prisoners. Sky News UK, TRT World and other media outlets have also reported on the key findings of 101 East’s investigation soon after it was published. Both 101 East programmes have also been viewed a combined total of half a million times online. Myanmar citizens are widespread consumers of social media as their main source of information. Posts about the 101 East programmes were viewed widely on social media, reaching a combined total of more than 100,000 people on Facebook alone. 101 East posted ‘*State of Fear*’ in its entirety on Facebook, in order to reach viewers in Myanmar who might not be able to access the programme on other platforms.

With the foreign media’s access to Myanmar severely limited, most media organizations have struggled to cover this challenging news story and been forced to rely on foreign academics or diaspora voices as commentators. A few international news agencies have gained restricted access on heavily monitored tours. In contrast, 101 East’s unrivaled on-the-ground reporting provided eyewitness accounts of the atrocities as they unfolded. The unique strength of this reporting prompted the UN agency responsible for investigating atrocities in Myanmar, the IIMM, to ask the 101 East team to share its evidence and witness testimonies to help with their investigations. The combination of compelling first-hand accounts and forensic investigation makes the team’s unique coverage of the Myanmar coup and its aftermath worthy of a Shadid Award. Al Jazeera produced courageous, sustained coverage of one of the biggest stories of the year in Asia, maintaining a commitment to the news channel’s mission to be the “voice of the voiceless” across the Global South.

Kind regards

Nick Olle

Nick Olle
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