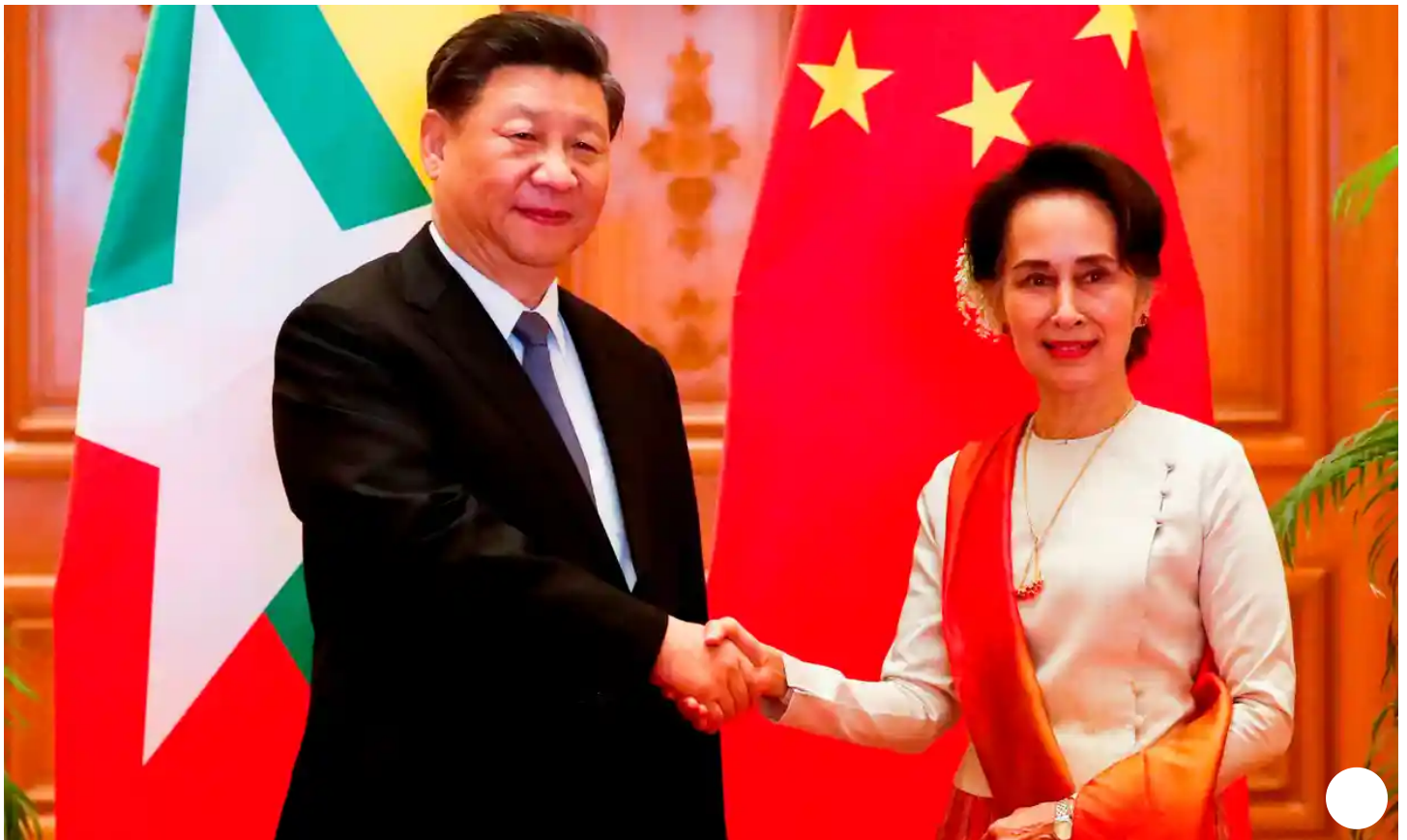




Facebook

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Facebook blames 'technical error' for Xi Jinping offensive name translation gaffe

**Problem arises in translation of leader's name from Burmese
Tech giant 'sincerely apologises for offence this has caused'**

Reuters

Sun 19 Jan 2020 02.30 GMT

Facebook has blamed a technical error for Chinese leader Xi Jinping's name appearing as "Mr Shithole" in posts on its platform when translated into English from Burmese, apologising for any offence caused and saying the problem had been fixed.

The error came to light on the second day of a visit by the president to Myanmar, where Xi and state counsellor [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) signed dozens of agreements covering massive Beijing-backed infrastructure plans.

A statement about the visit published on Suu Kyi's official [Facebook](#) page was littered with references to "Mr Shithole" when translated to English, while a headline in local news journal the Irrawaddy appeared as "Dinner honors president shithole".

It was not clear how long the issue had lasted but Google's translation function did not show the same error.

"We fixed a technical issue that caused incorrect translations from Burmese to English on Facebook. This should not have happened and we are taking steps to ensure it doesn't happen again. We sincerely apologise for the offence this has caused," Facebook said in a statement.

The Facebook system did not have Xi Jinping's name in its Burmese database and guessed at the translation, the company said. Translation tests of similar words that start with "xi" and "shi" in Burmese also produced "shithole", it added.

China is Facebook's biggest country for revenue after the US and the company is setting up a new engineering team to focus specifically on the lucrative advertising business there, Reuters reported last week.

"We are aware of an issue regarding Burmese to English translations on Facebook, and we're doing everything we can to fix this as quickly as possible," a spokesperson said in a statement.

Facebook has faced numerous problems with translation from Burmese. In 2018 it temporarily removed the function after a Reuters report showed the tool was producing bizarre results.

An investigation documented how the company was failing in its efforts to combat vitriolic Burmese language posts about Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims, some 730,000 of whom fled a military crackdown in 2017 that the United Nations has said was conducted with "genocidal intent".

It also showed the translation feature was flawed, citing an anti-Rohingya post advocating killing Muslims that was translated into English as "I shouldn't have a rainbow in Myanmar".

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