

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



SNAGGING A VICTORY

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Hlaing's legitimacy plan

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Our relaunched magazine Mizzima Weekly provides readers with a more focused read on what matters in Myanmar and the wider region, with an emphasis on analysis, insight and providing key talking points.

THE DANGERS OF INVITING MYANMAR'S JUNTA BACK INTO ASEAN

ASEAN faces a dangerous choice over Myanmar. After years of violence, political repression and civil war, there is growing pressure to bring Myanmar's military regime back into the regional fold. But treating the junta as a normal government risks turning ASEAN's long-standing principles into little more than diplomatic decoration.

The problem is not that ASEAN should refuse to engage with Myanmar. Engagement is essential. The problem is who ASEAN chooses to legitimize as Myanmar's representative. The military seized power in a coup in 2021, imprisoned elected political leaders and has presided over a conflict that has devastated communities across the country. Millions have been displaced, while airstrikes, village burnings, arbitrary arrests and other abuses have become features of the conflict.

Inviting the junta back into ASEAN's political mainstream without meaningful conditions could therefore send a deeply damaging message: that sufficient time, violence and diplomatic pressure can eventually transform an illegitimate and abusive regime into an accepted regional partner.

It would also weaken ASEAN's own credibility. The organization has repeatedly emphasized non-interference, consensus and peaceful settlement of disputes, while its Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar calls for an immediate end to violence and inclusive political dialogue. If the junta is welcomed back without demonstrating genuine progress toward those objectives, ASEAN risks rewarding the very behaviour it says it wants to stop.

There is an additional danger. ASEAN recognition could strengthen the junta's claim that it is the legitimate government

of Myanmar, while marginalizing the National Unity Government (NUG), ethnic organizations and other political forces that have considerable influence inside the country. A diplomatic seat at the ASEAN table could become another weapon in the junta's battle for international legitimacy – on top of recognition from China, India and Russia.

Yet exclusion alone is not a strategy. ASEAN needs channels through which humanitarian assistance can reach civilians and through which all relevant Myanmar stakeholders can eventually participate in political dialogue. The answer should be conditional engagement, not unconditional rehabilitation.

If the junta wants a meaningful place within ASEAN, it should have to demonstrate measurable progress: an end to attacks on civilians, meaningful humanitarian access, the release of political prisoners – including Aung San Suu Kyi – and a credible commitment to inclusive political dialogue.

ASEAN should not confuse hospitality with legitimacy. Welcoming Myanmar back simply because regional governments find the current situation inconvenient would sacrifice principle for short-term diplomatic comfort.

Myanmar's crisis will not disappear because ASEAN chooses to look away. If anything, premature normalization could make the conflict harder to resolve. ASEAN's challenge is therefore not whether to engage Myanmar, but whether it can engage without becoming complicit in legitimizing murderous military rule.

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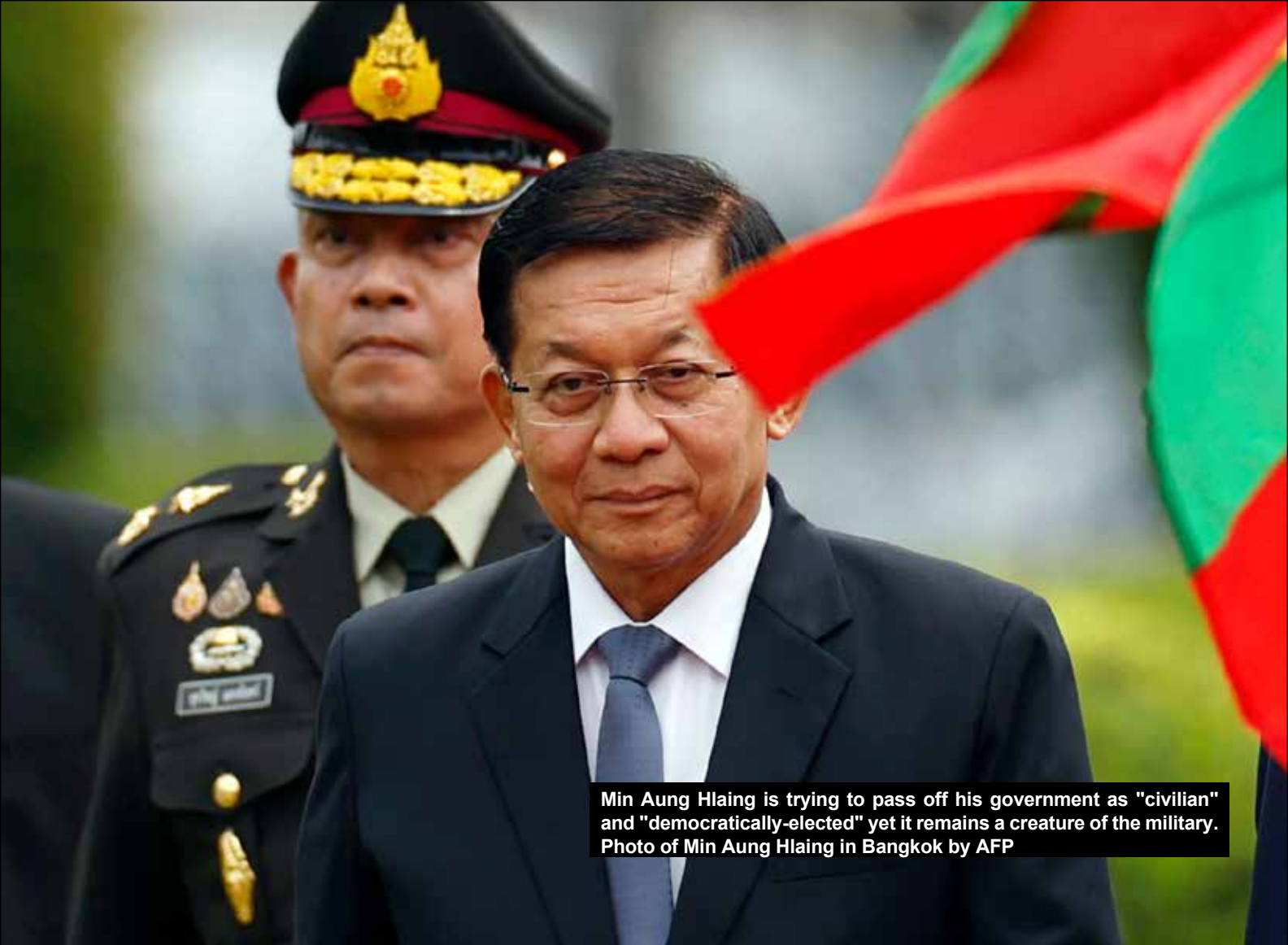
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Cover photo of Min Aung Hlaing on his official visit to Thailand by AFP



Min Aung Hlaing is trying to pass off his government as "civilian" and "democratically-elected" yet it remains a creature of the military. Photo of Min Aung Hlaing in Bangkok by AFP

SNAGGING A VICTORY THAILAND VISIT BOUYS MIN AUNG HLAING'S LEGITIMACY PLAN

MIZZIMA COMMENTARY

The Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing's recent official visit to Thailand has thrown the cat amongst the pigeons. And it has bolstered the military coup-maker's plans to legitimize his illegal rule.

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) will now be in a quandary following the 6-7 August visit to Bangkok as a result of the invitation of Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul.

Thailand's decision to roll out the red carpet for the Myanmar junta leader appears to have been guided by pragmatism on two scores.

Firstly, Bangkok seeks to deal with a host of important bilateral Thailand-Myanmar issues from border security, tackling scam centres, and dealing with migrant workers, to improving trade and business ties.

Secondly, Bangkok recognizes ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus, aimed at bring peace and democracy to Myanmar and the freeing of political prisoners, is dead in the water. The Naypyidaw parliament has publicly ditched it.

Hence the pressure – as Bangkok sees it – for a new approach.

However, Myanmar analysts see a major problem. Min Aung Hlaing, who grabbed power in a coup in 2021, ousting Aung San Suu Kyi's democratically-elected government and engineering a "sham" election to place himself in power as civilian "president," will milk this opportunity to further legitimize his position and continue to wage war against his people and deny them free democratic choice.

A host of critics have chimed in – from Myanmar nationals to a Thai opposition MP. Rights group Justice For Myanmar has criticized the visit, saying it lends "false legitimacy" to Min Aung Hlaing and the ruling generals.

It is all part of a plan. According to democracy activist Igor Blazevic, Myanmar's sham elections have only strengthened Min Aung Hlaing's grip on Myanmar's institutions, notably through the creation of the Union Consultative Council – without any parliamentary vote – an extra-constitutional body giving him sweeping influence over the military, judiciary, executive, and legislative branches of government. The Myanmar Bar Council has assessed that this is an act that leads to the permanent rule of the military dictatorship, Blazevic notes.

One thing is obvious. Min Aung Hlaing is good at playing games, recognizing he has some major nations on this side – China, Russia and India – and exploiting the division amongst ASEAN members over the Myanmar crisis. The Philippines currently holds the chair of ASEAN but appears to have made little progress in dealing with the Myanmar crisis.

One element of the game involves The Lady. Ahead of his Thailand visit, Min Aung Hlaing allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to meet with 81-year-old Aung San Suu Kyi, currently serving 18 years under "house detention" for a range of trumped-up charges.

Allowing this visit had the desired effect. The Thai government responded positively. Mr. Sihasak Phuangketkeow, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign

Affairs welcomed the report, which includes photos, of the recent meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and the Head of ICRC in Myanmar, especially following the informal meeting between the ASEAN Foreign Ministers and the Myanmar Foreign Minister in Bangkok on 12 July and in light of the Min Aung Hlaing's visit to Thailand.

Mr Sihasak said his government hoped that the Government of Myanmar will undertake further positive steps towards lasting peace and stability in Myanmar.

Positive words. But what does all this mean?

Min Aung Hlaing is working to cement his position and that of the Myanmar military to continue to govern the country long term – a decades-old drive by the military to lead the country.

Last week, marking his first 100 days as “president” in a speech to parliament in Naypyidaw, Min Aung Hlaing defended his military-backed administration's record, dismissed the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus as merely Brunei's position, and unveiled a five-year roadmap focusing on national security, constitutional changes, and special elections.

The Myanmar junta leader put forward the following published plan. It involves a Core Priorities and a Roadmap Two-Phase Plan. He outlined a five-year strategy featuring two years of accelerated security and stability build-up followed by three years of full-speed national development.

The plan involves Constitutional Changes, noting that his administration submitted a package of 43 proposed amendments to the military-written 2008 Constitution to parliament.

It involves Special Elections. It involves announced plans for special elections in 2027 across 102 townships that were excluded from the previous voting phases due to active armed conflict.

It rejects the ASEAN Consensus, claiming that the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus was not a collective agreement of all member states but just a statement by Brunei as the former chair, while accusing some regional members of discrimination.

In terms of Conflict and Conscription, it confirms that the military's conscription law remains active and that security forces will be continuously reinforced to fight opposition and rebel groups.



In terms of Peace Dialogues, it states that the government has held discussions with 13 ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) while pursuing its own domestic solution to the conflict.

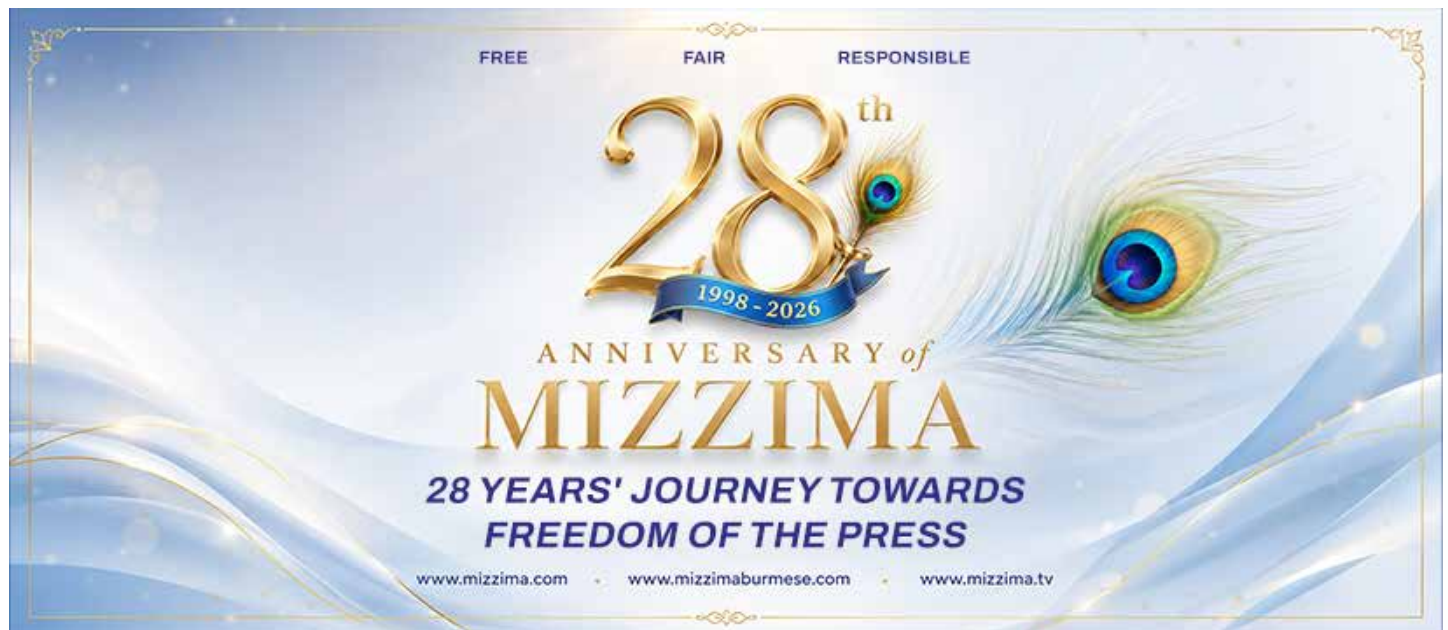
Thailand's red-carpet treatment for Min Aung Hlaing sparked protests in Bangkok and around the world.

According to political analysts, the demonstrations illustrate that while Min Aung Hlaing's visit has received official diplomatic engagement, it has also continued to attract significant public criticism. The protests highlight the contrast between formal government-le-

vel diplomacy and the views expressed by segments of civil society.

Min Aung Hlaing has snagged a victory with the Bangkok visit and will be seeking to leverage the division within ASEAN to stack more cards in his favour.

These are early days but the junta leader is leveraging options to maintain power over the next five to ten years, while the Myanmar people continue to suffer.



ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



MALAYSIA RAISES EYEBROWS OVER ROHINGYA REPATRIATION PLAN

Malaysia's plan to begin repatriating 5,000 Rohingya refugees to Myanmar has raised fresh questions over their safety and the feasibility of the proposed return, as fighting continues in parts of Rakhine State.

On July 29, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said Myanmar had finally agreed to accept 5,000 Rohingya as the first phase of a repatriation process. He said Malaysia had repeatedly faced calls to repatriate the refugees but stressed that they could only be returned to Myanmar with Myanmar's agreement. He described the acceptance as a result of Malaysia's good relations with Myanmar.

However, Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan has raised concerns over whether the refugees would be safe after their return. He said Myanmar had indicated it was prepared to receive the Rohingya by sea, but stressed that Malaysia needed to consider what would happen to their security and lives after repatriation.

The concerns come as Rohingya refugees in Malaysia themselves face growing pressure. After being expelled from their host community in Kurlar Mudar, northern Pinan Province, a group of Rohingya travelled to Kuala Lumpur to seek help outside the UNHCR headquarters. More than 100 were arrested by Malaysian authorities. The following day,

Hasan said Malaysia might reconsider allowing UNHCR operations in the country if the agency did not strengthen controls over the issuance of refugee cards.

According to UNHCR Malaysia, around 126,000 Rohingya refugees hold UNHCR refugee cards in the country. While Malaysian officials have increasingly discussed repatriation, neither Myanmar's junta nor the Arakan Army (AA), which controls much of Rakhine State, has publicly responded to the proposed return.

The security situation in Rakhine further complicates the plan. The junta is preparing to defend Sittwe, its remaining major stronghold in the state, while intense fighting continues around Kyaukphyu, a key Chinese investment area.

With no clear public commitment from the authorities controlling much of Rakhine, Malaysia's proposed repatriation raises a fundamental question: where can the Rohingya safely return when the conflict that forced them to flee remains unresolved?

Controversy over Myitsone Dam project

Since late 2025, Myanmar's junta has stepped up efforts to revive the Myitsone Dam project, which was suspended in 2011 after strong public opposition and concerns over its environmental and social impacts. The renewed campaign has raised fresh concerns in Kachin State, where many residents remain firmly opposed to the mega-dam.



Local Kachin groups have called on citizens not to get involved in promoting the Myitsone Dam project.
Photo: AFP

Recently, a Kachin State government-led team, including cabinet members and local ethnic representatives, has been meeting communities in Myitkyina and other junta-controlled areas to promote the project. Authorities have also used social media to advocate for its resumption. However, many residents have rejected the campaign, with some refusing to attend meetings organized by local authorities to explain the project.

The push has gained momentum following the junta leader's visit to China in June. At a June 30 press conference, junta spokesperson Khaing Khaing Soe confirmed that the junta leader and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed reviving the Myitsone project during the visit. She said seven hydropower sites had been identified in the Irrawaddy basin, with the Myitsone project alone expected to generate 5,600 megawatts—more than half of Myanmar's estimated 10,000-megawatt national electricity demand.

However, the proposed electricity benefits for Myanmar remain a major point of contention. Under the original agreement, 80 percent of the electricity was to be exported to China, while Myanmar would receive 10 percent, including 600 megawatts free of charge, and could purchase another 10 percent.

The renewed campaign has also emerged as China itself faces growing concerns over dam safety amid typhoons and heavy rainfall, including recent dam-related incidents. Critics question whether reviving a massive project in the Irrawaddy basin is appropriate when climate-related risks are becoming increasingly serious.

The junta's campaign has been accompanied by growing restrictions on opposition. In December 2025, it introduced a law allowing action against people who oppose the Myitsone project, raising concerns over freedom of expression. Forty-nine civil society organizations subsequently issued a joint statement opposing the law, while Kachin Human Rights Watch (KHRW) also spoke out against the project's revival in July.

Despite the authorities' efforts to portray the dam as essential for solving Myanmar's electricity shortages, continued public resistance suggests that the Myitsone project remains not simply an energy issue, but a deeply contested question of environmental protection, resource ownership, national interests and the rights of Kachin communities.

Difficulties faced over flooding response

Since the middle of the monsoon season, severe flooding has affected southern and central Myanmar, leaving communities displaced and raising concerns over the authorities' uneven response to the crisis.

In Ayeyarwady Region, the Ngawun River levee broke at the end of July, sending floodwaters into Laymyatnar town. Residents struggled with flooding for about a week before the junta's vice president arrived on the sixth day to oversee rescue efforts and provide assistance. At least two people died, while junta authorities said more than 30,000 people were affected. Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing visited the area after returning from Thailand. During his visit, cronies and businesspeople were reportedly pressured to

make donations for flood victims, despite remaining largely silent during the early days of the disaster.

In central Myanmar, the situation has been particularly severe in Sagaing Region, where flooding followed the release of water from Thaphanseik Dam. On August 6, six female paddy farmers returning from their fields were swept away by strong currents and died. According to an August 11 statement by the National Unity Government (NUG), at least 23 people had died across seven townships, with more than 200,000 people affected in the region.

Despite the scale of the disaster, the junta has faced criticism for providing inadequate assistance to

flood-hit communities in Sagaing, where resistance forces maintain strong control. In Shwebo Township, junta authorities reportedly warned that aid would not be provided to flood victims and threatened to seal the houses of people who donated independently.

As the junta response remains limited, the NUG and Sagaing Federal Unit formed a Joint Emergency Response Committee (JERC) in August to coordinate flood relief. The contrasting responses have deepened public criticism that political considerations are influencing access to humanitarian assistance, leaving communities in resistance-held areas particularly vulnerable during a worsening monsoon crisis.



Sagaing has been badly hit by flooding.
Photo: Supplied



MYANMAR: RSF AND MIZZIMA REOPEN A VITAL INFORMATION LIFELINE ON SHORTWAVE RADIO

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the independent Myanmar media outlet Mizzima have joined forces to launch the “Voice of Independent Myanmar,” a shortwave radio broadcast aimed at providing vital information to the Myanmar public as it confronts the civil war and censorship from the military junta.

Beginning on 9 August 2026, a 60-minute broadcast will be aired weekly on shortwave radio (17665 kHz) from 7 am to 8 am every Sunday in Myanmar, aiming to reach between 500,000 and 2 million Myanmar listeners weekly, and up to 4 million during major crises. The broadcast will combine local and international news bulletins and analysis, practical information and segments dedicated to human rights and disinformation. To maximise its impact, the audio content will also be broadcast across Mizzima's accounts on digital platforms, which count over 21 million followers on Facebook and 3 million subscribers on YouTube.

“This radio broadcast, which is freely accessible to anyone equipped with a shortwave receiver and can’t

be blocked or jammed on a wide scale, will allow the Myanmar public to once again access independent news despite the junta's censorship, internet blackouts and digital surveillance, and the growing influence of propaganda narratives from other countries in the region — particularly from China,” says Cédric Alviani, Director, RSF Asia-Pacific Bureau.

Shortwave radio, a means of bypassing censorship

Unlike cellular networks and the internet, shortwave radio can cross borders without relying on local telecommunications facilities, which the junta can shut down. Cost-effective and extremely difficult to jam on a large scale, it can be accessed through a simple battery-powered receiver. It is the most direct and secure way to reach isolated populations in conflict zones and rural areas, as well as refugees and diaspora communities across the region.

“For decades, shortwave radio has been a vital lifeline for the people of Myanmar, providing access to trusted information even in the country's most remote

and conflict-affected areas," says Soe Myint, Managing Director and Editor-In-Chief of Mizzima. "Through this partnership with Reporters Without Borders (RSF), we are strengthening that lifeline and helping ensure that people across Myanmar continue to receive reliable, independent news. We are sincerely grateful to RSF for its invaluable support and unwavering solidarity with the people of Myanmar in defending the fundamental right to access independent media. Launching this initiative as Mizzima marks its 28th anniversary makes this moment particularly significant, reaffirming our long-standing commitment to independent journalism and to serving the people of Myanmar."

This initiative is part of RSF's goal to defend the right to information worldwide via resilient anti-censorship tools, building directly on a similar project in Iran launched in April 2026. In addition to financial aid, RSF will contribute content focused on press freedom and Chinese regional influence. The new broadcast enables Mizzima to bypass military censorship and restore a vital news lifeline to its audience on the ground.

Since the military coup of February 2021, Myanmar has plunged into a severe crackdown against journalism. More than 200 reporters have been detained, at least 39 of whom remain behind bars today, while the licences of at least 15 media outlets have been arbitrarily revoked.

The junta also regularly resorts to internet shutdowns to prevent journalists from working, communicating or disseminating information, creating news "black holes" in certain regions.

Myanmar ranks 166th out of 180 countries and territories in the 2026 RSF World Press Freedom Index. The country is the world's third-largest jailer of journalists, just behind China and Russia.

How to access the radio contents?

- On short wave radio: 17665 KHz frequency | From 7 am to 8 am every Sunday in Myanmar.
- Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/voiceofindependentmyanmar>
- YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/@VoiceofIndependentMyanmar>
- Spotify - <https://open.spotify.com/show/033YEu4QeqpEeFKA5Uj39G>
- X - <https://x.com/vimradio>
- Mizzima Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/MizzimaDaily>
- Mizzima Burmese - <https://bur.mizzima.com/>
- Mizzima YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/@mizzimanewsTV>





Photo: AFP

THAILAND AND MYANMAR ISSUE A JOINT STATEMENT ON THE OFFICIAL VISIT OF THE MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER TO BANGKOK

Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has released a joint statement on the occasion of the official visit of Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing to Thailand on 6 August.

The following is the statement:

Joint Statement by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand and the President of Republic of the Union of Myanmar on the occasion of Official Visit of the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to the Kingdom of Thailand

1. His Excellency U Min Aung Hlaing, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, paid an Official Visit to the Kingdom of Thailand from 6 to 7 August 2026 at the invitation of His Excellency Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand. During the visit, the two leaders held warm and cordial bilateral discussion.

2. The two leaders underscored with great satisfaction the longstanding ties of friendship, cooperation, and good neighbourliness between Thailand and Myanmar, and reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening cooperation in all areas of mutual interest, for the shared prosperity and advancement of the two countries and the region.

3. The two leaders stressed the importance of further strengthening and deepening bilateral cooperation in the following key areas:

3.1 Political and Security Cooperation

3.1.1 Both sides agreed to further deepen dialogue at all levels and exchanges of high-level visits to strengthen bilateral cooperation in all dimensions, including the convening of the Joint Commission (JC) at an early date. They welcomed and supported the strengthening of cooperation between the two Ministries of Foreign Affairs, particularly through Political Consultations, capacity-building programme for Myanmar's newly recruited and mid-level diplomats, and an exchange programme for diplomats of the two countries as well as closer cooperation between the Devawongse Varopakarn Institute of Foreign Affairs (DVIFA) of Thailand and the Myanmar Diplomatic Academy (MDA).

3.1.2 Both sides welcomed the robust and longstanding partnership in defence and security cooperation between Thailand and Myanmar, and noted with satisfaction the continued progress achieved through relevant bilateral mechanisms, including the 38th Regional Border Committee (RBC) Meeting held in Kyaing Tong from 29 June to 1 July 2026. They looked forward to the 9th High-Level Committee (HLC), to be held in Bangkok from 19 to 21 August 2026.

3.1.3 Both sides welcomed the upcoming Security Dialogue between the Secretary-General of the National Security Council of Thailand and the National Security Advisor of Myanmar to strengthen security cooperation at strategic level.

3.1.4 Both sides expressed their joint commitment to achieve a peaceful and stable Thailand-Myanmar border, which will ensure safety, security and better livelihoods of the people on both sides.

3.1.5 Both sides agreed to step up joint efforts to combat transnational crimes, particularly online scams and narcotic drugs. They agreed to enhance coordination among relevant agencies to crack down on scam centres along the Thailand-Myanmar border through information sharing and joint efforts to disrupt the financial flows of transnational criminal networks. They agreed to build on existing cooperation between the anti-money laundering authorities of both countries, particularly through capacity-building programmes. The Thai side further expressed its support for Myanmar's membership in the Egmont Group to facilitate financial intelligence sharing. Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation on prevention and suppression of narcotic drugs and related precursor chemicals.

3.1.6 The two leaders encouraged closer cooperation between the National Assembly of Thailand and the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw of Myanmar.

3.2 Economic Cooperation

3.2.1 With a view to achieving the bilateral trade target of USD 12 billion, both sides agreed to closely cooperate with each other to promoting and facilitating bilateral trade. The two leaders welcomed the 8th Joint Trade Commission Meeting between the two countries scheduled to be held in Thailand within 2026, with addressing regulatory barriers and issues to improve the trade flow between the two countries. The leaders also agreed to encourage their relevant authorities to explore ways to further facilitate legitimate cross-border trade and investment.

3.2.2 Both leaders welcomed the reopening of the border checkpoint at the Second Thailand-Myanmar Friendship Bridge (Myawaddy-Mae Sot), which plays a vital role in bilateral border trade. Both sides discussed ways to facilitate and expedite cross-border trade through the said border checkpoint, which will boost trade and connectivity between the two countries. Both sides also agreed to consider reopening of additional border trade posts / checkpoints, subject to mutual agreement and prevailing security situation on the ground in order to further promote border trade and connectivity between the two countries.

3.2.3 Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening connectivity through enhanced transport and infrastructure linkages. They underscored the

importance of establishing a Joint Working Group on Enhancing Connectivity between the two countries to coordinate overall multi-modal connectivity plan covering road, maritime, port and cross-border linkages, and to facilitate greater coordination and, where appropriate, alignment of relevant policies, procedures and regulations, in accordance with the respective national laws of both countries. Areas for future discussion may include mutually beneficial maritime connectivity between Ranong Port and appropriate ports in Myanmar; the promotion of commercially viable coastal shipping services; improvement of the Ban Phu Nam Rom-Htee Khee-Dawei transport corridor; advancement of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, facilitation of cross-border transport and the exploration of suitable Special Economic Zones and logistics facilities along the border, subject to mutual agreement, relevant feasibility studies, and the respective national laws and procedures of both countries. These efforts are expected to enhance trade, logistics efficiency, facilitate trade and investment, and strengthen connectivity between the two countries and the broader region. Both leaders also welcomed the contribution of Thailand's Neighbouring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (NEDA) to infrastructure development in Myanmar.

3.2.4 Both sides recognised energy security as a strategic priority and reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing cooperation in the energy sector, particularly in the development of natural gas resources, in order to ensure a stable and reliable energy supply and promote the sustainable economic development. Both sides agreed to support the continuity of existing projects and facilitate ongoing processes related to future projects to enhance the energy security and mutual interest of both countries.

3.2.5 Both sides welcomed the signing of the new Memorandum of Understanding on Labour Cooperation and the Agreement on Employment of Workers between the two countries.

3.2.6 Both leaders welcomed the convening of the Thailand-Myanmar Business Forum in Bangkok on 6 August 2026 to strengthen networking and cooperation between the private sectors of the two countries. They encouraged closer engagement among private sector organisations, including the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), the Thai-Myanmar Business Council (TMBC), the Thai Business Association of Myanmar (TBAM) as well as direct cooperation between provincial chambers of commerce in the border areas.

3.3 Cooperation on Environmental Issues

3.3.1 Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen cooperation in addressing transboundary environmental challenges, including haze pollution, open burning, and water pollution.

3.3.2 Both sides welcomed the ongoing cooperation in forest fire prevention, including through the development of forest fire monitoring systems and training programme. They further underscored the importance of close coordination, continuous information sharing, and capacity building, including under the CLEAR Sky Strategy and through bilateral cooperation, in promoting effectiveness and sustainable solutions.

3.3.3 The two leaders welcomed the signing of the Terms of Reference for the Joint Working Group on Water Quality Management in Boundary and Transboundary Rivers between the two countries. They tasked the relevant agencies to closely cooperate in the area of water quality management and to hold the meeting of the Joint Working Group at an early and mutually convenient time.

3.4 Socio-Cultural Cooperation

3.4.1 The two leaders underscored the importance of people-to-people exchanges as a cornerstone of the longstanding friendship between Thailand and Myanmar. The two sides welcomed the continued implementation of the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding on Tourism Cooperation and agreed to further strengthen cooperation between their respective tourism authorities through the exchange of information and best practice exchanges, capacity-building, tourism promotion, tourist safety, and sustainable tourism development.

3.4.2 Both sides looked forward to the adoption of the 3-Year Development Cooperation Programme (2026-2028) between Thailand and Myanmar at the 17th Thailand-Myanmar Technical Cooperation Meeting. The 3-Year Development Cooperation Programme reflects the shared commitment to strengthening capacity-building, human resource development, and sustainable socio-economic development for the mutual benefit of the two countries, particularly in the areas of health, education, MSME development, agriculture and the environment.

3.4.3 The leaders also welcomed Thai Airways' launch of an additional Bangkok-Yangon flight in the fourth quarter of 2026, which is expected to contribute to enhanced connectivity and promote tourism and

business exchanges between the two countries.

3.4.4 Both leaders welcomed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Geo-Informatics and Space Technology Development Agency (GISTDA) of Thailand and Myanmar Space Agency (MSA) to enhance partnership on Earth Observation technology and its applications, particularly in the fields of disaster, agriculture and environmental management.

4. Cooperation at the Regional Level

4.1 Both sides agreed to strengthen cooperation and mutual support across regional platforms, including ASEAN, BIMSTEC, the ACMECS and Mekong mechanisms with a view to promoting regional peace, stability, sustainable development, and shared prosperity.

4.2 Thailand reiterated its unwavering support to Myanmar for its ACMECS Chairmanship and looked forward to successful convening of the upcoming 11th ACMECS Summit.

4.3 Thailand reaffirmed its commitment to supporting and continuing to work closely with Myanmar for Myanmar's full and equal participation in ASEAN mechanisms and processes in accordance with the ASEAN Charter, principles and procedures. Myanmar expressed its appreciation for Thailand's constructive role in facilitating the normalisation of its relations with ASEAN.

5. Other Matter: Thailand welcomed Myanmar's continued commitment in advancing the peace talks with the goal of achieving lasting peace through a Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-led process. Thailand's support in this regard, in close consultation with Myanmar, was welcomed.

6. The official visit of President U Min Aung Hlaing reaffirmed the long-standing friendship and close partnership between Thailand and Myanmar and the shared commitment of both countries to further strengthen cooperation for the mutual benefit of the two countries. Both sides agreed to continue close engagement at all levels.

7. The President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar expressed his sincere appreciation to the Royal Thai Government for the warm hospitality extended to him and his delegation during the visit, and extended a cordial invitation to the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand to visit Myanmar at a mutually convenient time.



Thailand's Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow.
Photo: AFP

THAILAND AND MYANMAR SIGN TERMS TO ADDRESS TRANSBOUNDARY RIVER POLLUTION

THAI PBS

Thailand and Myanmar signed Terms of Reference (TOR) for the establishment of a joint working group on water quality management for boundary and transboundary rivers, such as the Sai and Kok rivers, which have been contaminated with arsenic and other heavy metals from unregulated gold and rare earth mining activities in Myanmar's Shan state.

A separate TOR for cooperation in the use of space technology for peace between Myanmar and Thailand's Geo-Informatics and Space Technology Development Agency (GISTDA).

Permanent Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Raweewan Bhuridej, who signed the TOR on behalf of the Thai government, said that the agreement marks an important step forward in cooperation between the two countries in addressing this unresolved pollution problem.

She admitted, however, that there are obstacles which may hamper the efforts of the two governments because the Myanmar government is not in full control

of the Shan state, which is known to be controlled by several armed minority groups, particularly the United Wa State Army.

The TOR, which will remain in effect for three years, calls for joint water quality monitoring, data sharing and technical cooperation to address transboundary pollution.

Raweewan said that the joint working group will comprise representatives of the two countries and relevant agencies and will address the health problems of those affected by the pollutants, adding that the agreement does not bar technical experts from a third country from helping in addressing the problem.

She expects the joint working group to start functioning this month.

Courtesy of Thai PBS



THAILAND'S MAIN OPPOSITION PARTY STATES ITS OPPOSITION TO THE VISIT OF MIN AUNG HLAING TO THAILAND

Thailand's main opposition People's Party (PP) has opposed the official reception of Myanmar junta chief turned President Min Aung Hlaing, urging the government to reconsider inviting him to future state events and warning that doing so risks legitimising a regime accused of widespread human rights abuses, according to a report on 6 August by Khaosod.

PP MP Anusorn Thammajai called on parliament and the government to reaffirm their commitment to human rights and ASEAN's five-point consensus, while

proposing the creation of a joint peace committee involving Thailand, Myanmar's opposition groups, ethnic organisations and civil society.

The party argued that embracing Myanmar's military leadership undermines Thailand's democratic image and could damage the country's international standing, including its aspirations to join the OECD.

THAI GROUPS CONDEMN THE THAI GOVERNMENT REGARDING ITS STANCE TOWARDS MIN AUNG HLAING

The following is a statement by the Thai Allied Committee with Desegregated Burma Foundation (TACDB), the Union for Civil Liberty (UCL), the Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD), the World Peace Working Group, the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD), and the Thai Civil Society Networks condemning the Thai government regarding the stance it has adopted toward Min Aung Hlaing:

Thai government Unethical, Misjudged Myanmar Dictatorial Leader, and Devalues the people of Myanmar

Regarding Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's visit to Thailand on August 6–7, 2026, for discussions with Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, it is understood that his visits to Thailand and other ASEAN nations represent an effort to gain recognition and secure a role on the regional stage, given that the Myanmar government lacks full international acceptance.

Efforts are being made to project an image of transition; however, the actual power structures in many areas remain outside military control, staying instead under the influence of ethnic groups that are fighting against the Myanmar military.

The Thai government must acknowledge the fact that Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and his associates staged a coup d'état, seizing power from a legitimately

elected government that enjoyed international recognition.

Furthermore, they have persecuted, detained, and prosecuted Aung San Suu Kyi and other elected leaders, while employing force to arrest, imprison, assault, and torture individuals, enforcing conscription, and committing atrocities and brutal killings against the civilian population - all of which is substantiated by abundant, undeniable evidence. Even during the post-earthquake crisis, airstrikes against civilian targets - including schools and hospitals - have continued unabated. United Nations figures indicate that more than 5,000 people have been killed since the coup in Myanmar.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and his delegation are neither the country's legitimate leaders nor representatives of the people of Myanmar; rather, they are criminals subject to an arrest warrant issued by an Argentine court under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Furthermore, legal proceedings regarding crimes committed against the Rohingya people are currently underway at the International Criminal Court (ICC); on November 27, 2024, the ICC Prosecutor filed a request with the judges for an arrest warrant against Min Aung Hlaing for crimes against humanity.

EXPERT URGES COOPERATION TO ADDRESS MYANMAR-THAILAND BORDER RIVER POLLUTION

Cooperation among experts, scientists, media, political leaders, and local communities from both countries is crucial to finding long-term solutions to transboundary river pollution caused by rare earth mining along the Myanmar-Thailand border, said Professor Malee Sitthikriengkrai from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Chiang Mai University.

Responding to inquiries from Mizzima, Professor Malee emphasized the need for mutual cooperation across various sectors to halt rare earth mining operations.

"Our academic community is gathering ground-level data, while scientists are measuring and assessing the extent of the environmental impact," she said.

She also pointed out that news media must deliver the collected data to local residents and communities in a timely manner.

Political leaders need to witness and understand the actual harm faced by local populations due to toxic pollution, adding that protecting the citizens is the duty of political leaders.

"Politicians should protect the people, not the mines," Professor Malee said.

According to her, if mining operations were transparent and adhered to environmental standards, they would not raise concerns among Thai civil society and the international community.

Furthermore, she urged political leaders to carefully decide whose interests they will prioritize and whose side they will stand on.

She warned that if current issues remain unaddressed and ignored, natural water resources could face severe destruction within the next five to ten years, causing long-term impacts on the entire ecosystem and community livelihoods.

"Prioritizing the mining sector just because it generates high revenue would be equivalent to trading away our environment and the future of upcoming generations," Professor Malee said.

Sustainable development for the entire community can only be achieved by prioritizing environmental conservation and individual well-being, she added, emphasizing the importance of national leaders implementing long-term, visionary policies.

THAILAND, THE NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR: AN ICEBREAKER OR A RANK-BREAKER FOR ASEAN?

NICHOLAS KONG



Thailand and Myanmar share a long, complex, and often ambivalent history. Their relationship has been shaped by centuries of rivalry and territorial conflict, but also by economic interdependence, shared security concerns, and unusually close ties between their military institutions. Today, Thailand, Myanmar's next-door neighbor in the ASEAN family, is arguably its most consequential interlocutor. As an ASEAN founding member, Bangkok therefore occupies a unique position: it can serve as an icebreaker between Myanmar and ASEAN or, if bilateral interests take precedence over collective commitments, risk becoming a rank-breaker within the bloc.

A Multi-Dimensional Relationship

For more than five centuries, Thailand-Myanmar relations have evolved across three overlapping dimensions: traditional state-to-state security, economic interdependence, and non-traditional security challenges.

The Burmese Toungoo and Konbaung kingdoms invaded Siam several times from the sixteenth century until the Anglo-Burmese wars culminated in the British annexation of Burma in 1885, while Siam remained an independent buffer state.

After Burma gained independence in 1948, civil war and ethnic insurgencies emerged along the Thai border, making border security and informal trade central to bilateral relations. Following General Ne Win's 1962 coup, the military dominated political and economic life, and Myanmar descended into one of the world's least developed countries, while Thailand emerged as one of Southeast Asia's rising economies. Cross-border smuggling expanded, while the Golden Triangle became a major center of the global opium trade.

After Myanmar's 1988 political upheaval and military coup, refugee flows, undocumented migration, and human trafficking intensified. Methamphetamine

production increasingly overtook opium as a regional and global problem.

During Myanmar's period of quasi-democracy from 2010 to 2020, bilateral trade expanded, and Thailand became one of Myanmar's largest investors. Yet narcotics trafficking, irregular migration, and other cross-border problems persisted.

The 2021 coup dramatically intensified these challenges. Conflict, displacement, and humanitarian needs expanded, while the border area around Myawaddy, including Shwe Kokko and KK Park, became cyber-scam hubs operated by transnational criminal networks and Border Guard Forces under Myanmar military command. The Golden Triangle also remains a major center of synthetic drug production.

A Long-Standing Military Relationship

The military relationship between Thailand and Myanmar is closer than is often recognized. Since the 1960s, military-to-military contacts have survived periods of political disagreement and border tension. Both countries have experienced strong military influence over politics, creating institutional familiarity between their armed forces.

There is, however, an important contrast. Thailand's military institutions have coexisted with an increasingly diversified economy and political system, while Myanmar's military has retained exclusive control over the state and economy. Myanmar's generals and their cronies have accumulated enormous wealth and influence through control of national resources and lucrative enterprises, contributing to the country's prolonged economic decline.

Since the 2021 coup, military cooperation has continued in areas including border security and technology, while the Myanmar military has expanded airstrikes and drone warfare against civilians across the country.

These historical bilateral relations help explain Bangkok's view that isolation alone cannot resolve the problems spilling across its border. But they also create a potential blind spot that could lead to political accommodation.

An Icebreaker - or a Rank-Breaker?

Thailand's desire for a dual-track approach is understandable. Bangkok must deal directly with border instability, refugee flows, transnational crime, cyber-scam networks, narcotics trafficking, migration, and humanitarian pressures.

Bangkok has pushed to promote Myanmar's gradual reintegration into ASEAN and has described itself as a "bridge." Its engagement can therefore be constructive if it uses that access to encourage compliance with ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus (5PC) and facilitate broader political dialogue. But there is a clear trap.

Thailand is hosting the junta leader on August 6–7, providing an opportunity for engagement while raising concerns that such high-level contact could inadvertently contribute to the junta's search for legitimacy. If such bilateral engagement is perceived as normalization without accountability, it could unintentionally reduce the diplomatic costs of the junta's continued non-compliance with the 5PC.

Thailand's challenge is therefore not whether to engage Myanmar. It is how to engage without weakening ASEAN's collective framework.

As a founding member of ASEAN, Thailand has a responsibility to safeguard the organization's unity and the credibility of its commitments. Its bilateral diplomacy should reinforce ASEAN's collective leverage rather than provide a bypass.

The Wise Broker

Thailand can play a valuable role precisely because of its access to Myanmar's military leadership and its geographical proximity that many other ASEAN members do not possess. But a broker must also recognize the limits of bilateral diplomacy.

A durable political settlement will require engagement with stakeholders beyond Naypyidaw, including ethnic armed organizations (EOs), political parties, civil society actors, and the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) - a collective leadership body established by the National Unity Government (NUG), Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), and major EOs including the Karen National Union (KNU), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), Karenni National Progressive Party/Interim Executive Council (KNPP/IEC), and Chin National Front (CNF).

Engaging the SCEF as a coalition entity and other EOs outside the coalition does not require Thailand or ASEAN to recognize or endorse any particular actor. Acknowledging Myanmar's political reality through broader engagement with all major stakeholders, based on political inclusivity rather than institutional control, would give Thailand and ASEAN a more complete understanding of developments on the ground and increase the prospects for an eventual political settlement.

Thailand's ASEAN Responsibility

The people of both countries have interests that transcend military-to-military relations. They seek peace, border stability, lawful cross-border commerce, economic opportunity, legal employment and migration, humanitarian protection, and cultural and educational exchange. Ultimately, they share an interest in living peacefully within the ASEAN community.

Thailand's unique position can therefore become an asset for ASEAN. Bangkok can use its established channels with Myanmar to encourage dialogue, humanitarian access, and implementation of the 5PC. But engagement must be accompanied by accountability.

The key litmus test is whether Thailand's diplomacy lowers the cost of non-compliance or increases the incentive for meaningful implementation. A bilateral relationship that normalizes the junta without demanding progress would weaken ASEAN's collective position. A calibrated relationship that uses Thailand's access to press for compliance and broader dialogue could strengthen it.

Thailand can be ASEAN's icebreaker - but it should not become its rank-breaker.

As Myanmar's next-door neighbor, Thailand has legitimate national interests that require engagement. As an ASEAN founding member, however, it also has a regional responsibility to ensure that engagement does not undermine the bloc's collective commitments. The wisest course is neither isolation nor unconditional normalization, but calibrated diplomacy anchored in accountability.

Thailand's greatest contribution may therefore be to use its unique relationship with Myanmar not to bypass ASEAN, but to bring Myanmar closer to a credible, inclusive, and sustainable regional political process.

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The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of Mizzima Media.

DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI, THE PHOTOGRAPH, AND THE BURDEN OF TRUTH

WHY THE WORLD
MUST DEMAND MORE
THAN A CAREFULLY
MANAGED IMAGE

— BY ALAN CLEMENTS —

ONE PHOTOGRAPH MAY SHOW SHE IS ALIVE. ONLY THE TRUTH CAN SET HER FREE.

There are moments in history when a single photograph arrives carrying the emotional weight of an entire nation. Such images appear before us as though they possess the authority of revelation itself. They seem to answer questions that have haunted families, governments and ordinary citizens for years. They appear to dissolve uncertainty into certainty, silence into testimony and absence into presence. Yet history repeatedly reminds us that photographs possess no independent moral authority. They do not explain themselves. They do not reveal what occurred before the camera was raised or after it was lowered. They cannot disclose the circumstances under which they were made, who controlled the room, who selected the moment, who approved their release or what remained deliberately beyond the frame. A photograph is never the whole truth. At its most powerful, it is an invitation to seek the truth with greater care, greater discipline and greater moral seriousness.

The recently released photographs of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi meeting with Arnaud de Baecque, the Resident Representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Myanmar, have now travelled around the world. Millions of people who have lived with profound uncertainty since the military coup of February 1, 2021, looked upon those images with understandable emotion. Her sons, Kim and Alexander Aris, who have endured years without direct communication with their mother, finally saw her standing before them once again. Friends, colleagues and supporters across Myanmar and throughout the international community experienced a moment of relief after years in which even the most elementary humanitarian question had become impossible to answer with confidence. Was she alive? Was she still capable of standing? Had the world lost one of its most courageous democratic voices behind walls of secrecy from which no independently verified evidence had been permitted to emerge?

No compassionate observer should underestimate what these photographs may have meant to those who love her. Nor should anyone dismiss the significance of the International Committee of the Red Cross confirming that one of its senior humanitarian representatives met privately with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi according to its established procedures for visiting people deprived of liberty. After more than five years of almost complete isolation from the outside world, that confirmation represents an important humanitarian development. It deserves recognition, gratitude and cautious hope.

But hope is not the same as proof, and compassion cannot be allowed to replace evidence. The responsibilities of journalism begin precisely where emotion threatens to outrun verification. The greater the symbolic importance of an event, the greater our obligation to distinguish carefully between what has been established, what remains uncertain and what those in positions of power may wish us to assume without sufficient evidence. The emotional power of these photographs is undeniable. Their evidentiary limits are equally undeniable. To acknowledge one without the other is to abandon the discipline upon which both serious journalism and democratic accountability ultimately depend.

For more than five years, Myanmar's military authorities exercised almost complete control over everything the world was permitted to know about Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. They determined the accusations brought against her, the courts before which she appeared, the proceedings through which she was convicted, the sentences imposed upon her and the locations in which she was detained. They restricted meaningful access by her lawyers, denied sustained communication with her family and withheld independently verifiable information concerning her health and wellbeing. One of the world's most recognizable political leaders effectively disappeared into a system of controlled invisibility designed by those responsible for her imprisonment. Throughout those years, the international community was repeatedly

asked to trust official assurances while being denied the very access through which those assurances could have been independently verified.

That extraordinary inversion of moral responsibility should remain at the center of every discussion concerning these newly released photographs. In every society governed by the rule of law, the burden of proof rests upon those who exercise power over another human being. Governments that imprison individuals carry an affirmative obligation to demonstrate that detainees are being treated lawfully, humanely and transparently. The military authorities in Myanmar attempted precisely the opposite. They asked the world to accept their assurances while refusing the independent access necessary to evaluate those assurances. They expected governments, journalists and humanitarian organizations to rely upon official declarations in place of independently established fact. That inversion of responsibility was never acceptable in 2021. It has not become acceptable merely because carefully selected photographs have now entered the public domain.

Authoritarian systems rarely survive by force alone. They survive because they learn to govern perception as carefully as they govern territory. They understand that information is itself a political landscape to be occupied, defended and administered. They appreciate that when independent witnesses are excluded, official narratives begin to assume the appearance of uncontested reality. Over time, carefully managed appearances replace lived experience. Public memory becomes increasingly dependent upon whatever fragments of evidence those in power choose to release. The distinction between documentation and performance gradually dissolves until citizens begin confusing the presentation of reality with reality itself.

Myanmar's military has practiced this politics of controlled perception for generations. Entire villages have disappeared while official statements spoke

of stability. Journalists have been imprisoned while authorities proclaimed respect for the rule of law. Civilian communities have endured devastating airstrikes while military spokespersons invoked the language of national security. Democratic elections have been emptied of their essential meaning while constitutional language continued to decorate profoundly authoritarian institutions. Throughout this long history, language itself has repeatedly become a casualty of power. Words such as peace, security, democracy, legality and stability have too often been appropriated to describe their opposite.

It is against that historical background that these photographs must now be understood. They should neither be dismissed nor romanticized. They should instead become the beginning of a deeper investigation into truths that remain hidden beyond the visible image itself. The photographs strongly suggest that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was alive when the meeting occurred. That conclusion carries enormous humanitarian importance. Yet the same photographs cannot establish whether she has received adequate medical care throughout her imprisonment. They cannot tell us whether prolonged isolation has damaged her physical or psychological health. They cannot reveal whether she has been permitted regular exercise, sufficient nutrition or necessary medication. They cannot disclose whether she spoke freely during the meeting or whether every sentence carried the silent knowledge that her future remained entirely under the control of those responsible for her captivity. Nor can they establish whether the encounter represented the beginning of meaningful humanitarian access or a single carefully managed occasion designed for international consumption.

These are not technical distinctions. They are the very distinctions upon which truth depends. A camera records appearance. It does not measure freedom. It does not diagnose health. It does not verify consent. It does not expose fear. It does not reveal coercion. It cannot distinguish between an authentic humanitarian opening and a meticulously orchestrated political

performance. Those questions remain unanswered because they cannot be answered by photography alone. They require continued access, independent verification and the willingness of governments, humanitarian institutions and journalists alike to insist that evidence must always reach beyond the image itself.

For precisely that reason, the international conversation must now move beyond the understandable emotional response produced by these photographs and return to the far more demanding work of accountability. The world has now seen Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. What it has still not received is the sustained, independently verifiable body of evidence necessary to determine the full truth of her condition, her circumstances and her future. That responsibility now belongs, first and foremost, to those who continue to hold her liberty in their hands.

The first and greatest burden now rests squarely upon the military authorities. No government that genuinely believes it has acted lawfully should fear independent verification. If the regime wishes the international community to believe that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is being treated humanely, then it possesses every opportunity to demonstrate that claim through transparency rather than symbolism. It should disclose the precise location where she is being held. It should permit unrestricted and confidential access by her lawyers. It should authorize an independent physician, acceptable to her family, to conduct a comprehensive medical examination. It should restore regular communication between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her sons. It should permit the International Committee of the Red Cross to return as often as humanitarian practice requires, and it should allow those visits to become an established practice rather than an isolated event. Above all, it should understand that no photograph, however carefully composed, can substitute for the elementary human right of a prisoner to speak freely in her own voice.

The International Committee of the Red Cross likewise finds itself at an important historical crossroads. For more than a century and a half, the ICRC has earned the confidence of prisoners throughout the world because it has honored the difficult discipline of confidentiality. That discipline has often preserved access where public denunciation might have caused doors to close. Those who have never negotiated with authoritarian governments may underestimate how delicate that balance can be. Humanitarian access is frequently secured through quiet persistence rather than public confrontation, and countless lives have undoubtedly benefited from that approach.

Yet confidentiality must never become an unintended instrument through which an authoritarian government acquires legitimacy it has not earned. The ICRC is under no obligation to reveal Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's private words, disclose confidential observations or jeopardize future access by violating the trust placed in it by a detainee. It is, however, entirely appropriate to clarify the procedural facts surrounding its visit. The organization can explain how long the meeting lasted, whether future visits have been requested, whether a physician accompanied the delegation, whether medical access was sought, whether Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was offered an opportunity to communicate with her family and whether the organization believes its presence has been accurately represented by the authorities. Such information would not compromise humanitarian confidentiality. Rather, it would strengthen public confidence that the ICRC's indispensable work cannot be appropriated to validate political narratives extending beyond what its representatives are able to verify.

Arnaud de Baecque now occupies an unusual place in this unfolding history. He is no longer simply the head of the ICRC delegation in Myanmar. He has become the only publicly identified international humanitarian representative known to have sat face to face with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi after more than five years of almost complete isolation. His responsibilities

therefore extend beyond the ordinary obligations of diplomacy. They include protecting the integrity of humanitarian witness itself. He need not disclose what Daw Aung San Suu Kyi entrusted to him in confidence. Indeed, he should not. But he can help ensure that neither his presence nor the emblem of the Red Cross is interpreted as certifying conclusions that the visit itself could not establish. Humanitarian neutrality should never be mistaken for political endorsement, and humanitarian access should never become a substitute for independent accountability.

There is another danger that deserves equal attention. Governments eager to normalize relations with Myanmar may find these photographs emotionally convenient. They may quietly persuade themselves that the most difficult questions have now been answered, that humanitarian concerns have been adequately addressed and that regional diplomacy may safely return to familiar patterns of accommodation. Such conclusions would be profoundly mistaken. The suffering of Myanmar did not begin with the disappearance of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, nor will it end with the publication of her photograph. The country continues to endure armed conflict, widespread displacement, political imprisonment and the systematic destruction of civilian life. Thousands remain imprisoned for exercising the most basic democratic freedoms. Countless families continue to live between grief and uncertainty, uncertain whether loved ones remain alive, where they are held or whether they will ever return home.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has always represented something larger than herself. She became a symbol not because she sought symbolic status, but because millions of people recognized in her a rare willingness to place conscience above personal safety. Her imprisonment therefore cannot be separated from the imprisonment of Myanmar's democratic aspiration itself. To demand her freedom while forgetting the thousands of unnamed political prisoners would diminish the very principles for which she has spent so

much of her life sacrificing her own liberty. Likewise, to celebrate a single humanitarian visit while neglecting the continuing suffering of an entire nation would mistake one important development for the resolution of a far deeper tragedy.

During the many conversations I shared with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Yangon while preparing *The Voice of Hope*, one quality impressed me above all others. It was not merely her courage, remarkable though it was. Nor was it her discipline, intelligence or political vision. It was her unwavering confidence that truth possesses a resilience exceeding the power of fear. She understood that dictatorships may imprison individuals, suppress newspapers, outlaw political parties and silence public speech, but they ultimately remain unable to extinguish the human capacity to recognize truth once it is spoken clearly and lived with integrity. That conviction sustained her through years of earlier confinement. It now places an obligation upon all of us who continue to speak publicly about her life and about Myanmar's future.

Our obligation is therefore neither to romanticize nor to despair. It is to insist, patiently but unwaveringly, that evidence must continue where photographs end. It is to welcome every humanitarian opening while refusing to confuse a beginning with an ending. It is to support the indispensable work of organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross while recognizing that humanitarian access must ultimately lead toward greater transparency, greater accountability and greater freedom. It is to remind governments throughout the democratic world that diplomacy devoid of moral courage becomes little more than the polite management of injustice.

The photographs released on August 3 should therefore be remembered not as the conclusion of an international campaign but as the beginning of a new and more demanding chapter. They have answered one question that weighed heavily upon the conscience of the world. They have not answered the many others

that naturally and necessarily follow. Where, precisely, is Daw Aung San Suu Kyi? Under what conditions does she live? Has she received appropriate medical care? Can she communicate freely with her family? Will independent physicians and lawyers be permitted to see her? Will the Red Cross be allowed to return regularly? Will she be permitted to address the people of Myanmar in her own words? Most importantly, when will this extraordinary injustice finally come to an end?

Until those questions receive credible, independently verifiable answers, the burden of truth remains exactly where it has belonged from the beginning: upon those who continue to deprive an eighty-one-year-old prisoner of conscience of her liberty. The world should welcome this humanitarian opening with gratitude. It should also recognize that gratitude without vigilance becomes complacency, and complacency is the ally of every authoritarian system that has ever hoped to substitute carefully managed appearances for the liberating power of truth.

About the Author

Alan Clements is an author, investigative journalist, former Buddhist monk, and international human-rights advocate whose work has explored Myanmar's struggle for democracy, conscience and freedom for more than four decades. He is the co-author, with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, of *The Voice of Hope*, based on their extended conversations in Yangon during her earlier years of confinement. His books include *Burma: The Next Killing Fields?*, *Burma's Revolution of the Spirit*, the four-volume *Burma's Voices of Freedom* (co-authored with Fergus Harlow), *Conversation with a Dictator*, *Unsilenced: Aung San Suu Kyi—Conversations from a Myanmar Prison*, and *Politics of the Heart: Nonviolence in an Age of Atrocity*. His writing examines the intersection of human dignity, democracy, contemplative practice, nonviolence and the moral responsibilities of truth in an age of authoritarianism.



MEETING BETWEEN AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND ICRC DUE TO DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS, SAYS NUG

The National Unity Government (NUG) and the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) told Mizzima that the meeting between detained State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was the cumulative result of domestic and international pressure, warning that negotiations alone cannot yield positive outcomes.

NUG Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung made this comment regarding the 3 August meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and Mr. Arnaud de Baecque, the ICRC Resident Representative to Myanmar.

"I view this development as reflecting the collective impact of resolute domestic and international efforts, human rights demands, and international diplomatic engagements," NUG Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung told Mizzima.

Similarly, CRPH spokesperson Sithu Maung pointed out that negotiations alone, without pressure and active struggle, cannot secure the release of political leaders.

"This could sadly be described as a state-sponsored prison visitation day, where an unjustly detained state leader is paraded before the public. We

want the release of political prisoners to be based on the rule of law, rather than relying on the mercy and goodwill of a particular group," he told Mizzima.

Furthermore, Sithu Maung cautioned the public not to forget that this meeting was permitted solely under prison manual procedures. He urged people to remember that top NLD leaders, including Pyithu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker Tun Tun Hein, and other political prisoners have died in prison due to inadequate medical care, while others were unjustly executed.

The ICRC officially confirmed the meeting on the afternoon of August 3, stating that it was a private meeting conducted in accordance with established procedures.

However, the organization stated that its findings and recommendations would not be made public but would be shared confidentially only with the military junta.

While news of the meeting brought a glimmer of hope for the first time in five years, her son, Htein Lin (Kim Aris) said, he has not yet received independent confirmation regarding his mother's health.

"A single meeting cannot answer all the questions our family has held in our hearts since the military coup. I only hope this is the beginning of the end, leading to my mother's release," he said, reiterating his call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson for the NUG Prime Minister's Office, urged the international community not to fall for this trick, stating that the military junta acted in this manner solely to seek international recognition.

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) also pointed out that permitting access only to the ICRC treats Aung San Suu Kyi as a mere prisoner rather than recognizing her as the publicly elected state leader, thereby deceiving the international community.

Furthermore, the Political Prisoners Network Myanmar (PPNM) has urged the ICRC to transparently release details of Aung San Suu Kyi's health condition and to request access to other political prisoners as well.

The 81-year-old State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained since the military coup on 1 February 2021, and has been sentenced to 27 years in prison, reduced to 18 years, under various charges.



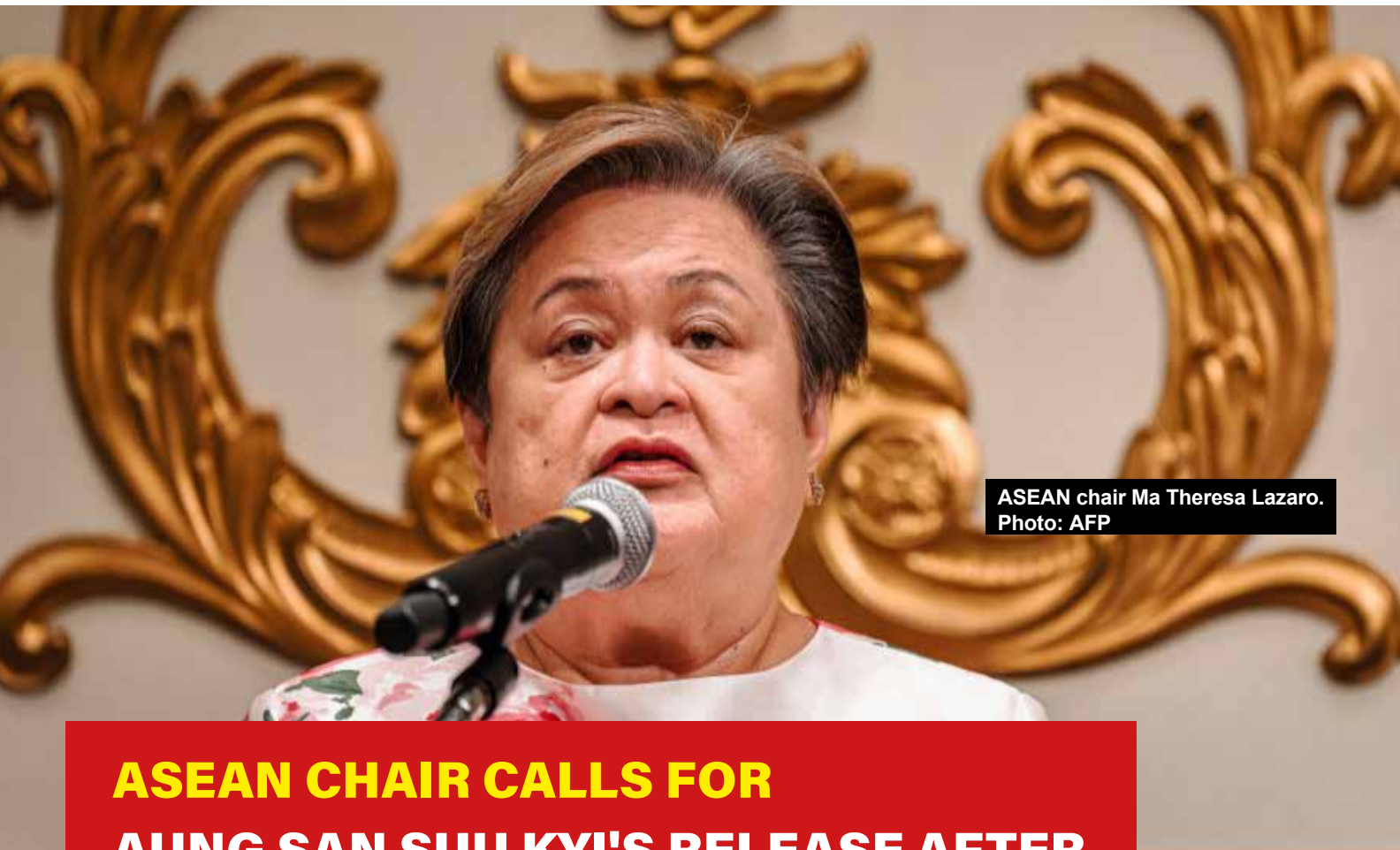
US WELCOMES ICRC VISIT TO SUU KYI, CALLS FOR REGULAR HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

The United States has welcomed the ICRC's confirmed visit to detained former State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, with the U.S. Embassy saying it hoped the meeting marks "the beginning of regular humanitarian access" to her and opens a pathway to greater access for all political prisoners.

The embassy repeated Washington's call for Suu Kyi's immediate and unconditional release, urging Myanmar's military-backed authorities to guarantee

her access to medical care and family visits, and called for the release of all those it described as unjustly detained.

It also urged the military to engage in dialogue with all parties to end the conflict in Myanmar, adding Washington's voice to a growing list of governments, including the UK, that have responded to Monday's ICRC-confirmed visit with renewed demands for Suu Kyi's release.



ASEAN chair Ma Theresa Lazaro.
Photo: AFP

ASEAN CHAIR CALLS FOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S RELEASE AFTER ICRC MEETING

ASEAN's chair on 7 August called for the release of all those arbitrarily detained in Myanmar, including Aung San Suu Kyi, describing her 3 August meeting with a delegate from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as a positive step toward inclusive national dialogue and reconciliation.

In a statement issued through the Philippines, which holds ASEAN's rotating chairmanship this year, the bloc said it hoped the meeting between Suu Kyi and ICRC resident representative Arnaud de Baecque would open the way for regular, sustained access to her family, legal counsel, medical professionals and other appropriate humanitarian representatives.

ASEAN repeated a call it first made after the February 2021 coup for expanded access to everyone

held in detention in Myanmar, urging Suu Kyi's "complete and unconditional release" alongside that of other detainees.

The meeting marked Suu Kyi's first confirmed contact with an outside party since the military ousted her elected government in 2021, following years of pressure from her son Kim Aris and rights groups demanding proof of her wellbeing. The ICRC confirmed the visit in its own statement Monday, and the United States, the United Kingdom and the United Nations have separately called for her release since the meeting became public.



PDF fighters. Photo: Supplied

ACLED WARNS FIGHTING LIKELY TO INTENSIFY IN CENTRAL MYANMAR OVER NEXT SIX MONTHS

Fighting in Myanmar is likely to intensify across Sagaing, Magway and Mandalay regions over the next six months as the military shifts more forces toward the country's centre and targets weakened and fragmented resistance groups, conflict monitor Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) said in a new outlook.

Myanmar has been engulfed in conflict since the military seized power in a February 2021 coup, prompting armed resistance from newly formed People's Defense Forces alongside long-established ethnic armed organizations.

ACLED said in its 6 August report that ceasefires and reduced fighting with some ethnic armed organizations could allow the military to redeploy troops from former conflict zones into central Myanmar, where large numbers of post-coup resistance forces continue to operate.

Sagaing, Magway and Mandalay already ranked first, second and third respectively for their share of political violence events recorded by ACLED between January and July 2026. The same three regions also held the top positions during the second half of 2025.

"Conflict is likely to rebalance" towards areas where post-coup resistance groups are concentrated, ACLED said, warning that further ceasefires in ethnic states could free additional military forces for operations in the densely populated central plains. The plains already face a distinct pattern of violence, including frequent paramotor and gyrocopter attacks, which ACLED said could intensify further as more troops are redeployed to the region.

The assessment comes after the junta announced a 100-day peace initiative in April. ACLED said, however, that fighting had remained intense and argued that the

regime's approach appeared focused less on reaching a broad political settlement than on recovering lost territory, expanding its control and further fragmenting resistance forces.

The report noted that by 31 July, when the 100-day period ended, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing announced that 13 ethnic armed organizations had joined the peace talks, though none of them are currently fighting the military, according to ACLED. Groups aligned with the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), including the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Kachin State, maintain that any genuine dialogue must include forces linked to the 2020 election results — a position the junta has rejected.

By the end of July, the junta had recaptured about 27 towns and important trade corridors, including the Mandalay-Lashio and Myawaddy-Kawkaireik roads, according to ACLED. While military administration has not been fully restored in all of these areas, ACLED said the gains have disrupted resistance groups' economic and logistical links and contributed to a shift away from larger coordinated offensives towards more defensive guerrilla warfare.

ACLED also linked the changing battlefield to the struggle for strategic roads, foreign investment areas and natural resources.

It said military operations during the first half of the year targeted roads and towns connecting ethnic-controlled border areas with central Myanmar, where key military bases, logistics routes and parts of major investment corridors are located. Some operations intensified after military leaders held talks with representatives of China, India or Russia, countries with economic interests in conflict-affected areas, ACLED noted.

However, the timing and geographic overlap do not by themselves establish that foreign investment directly caused individual military operations.

Competition for natural resources is also becoming increasingly important to the conflict, according to the outlook, as both the military and resistance forces seek revenue to sustain their operations.

ACLED said central Myanmar contains crude oil sites, gold and copper mines, as well as military bases and defense factories. It warned that growing competition over these areas could combine with existing fighting to cause further displacement and economic disruption, affecting transportation, agricultural production, food security and local markets.

The military has also been advancing towards strategically important areas including Pauk and Myaing townships, where oil resources are located, ACLED said.

Despite recent military gains, ACLED does not expect the regime to achieve a decisive victory over the resistance in the near term.

Instead, the organization forecasts a prolonged war of attrition, with resistance forces continuing to oppose military rule while the junta faces its own longer-term pressures, including outward migration, a shrinking pool of potential recruits and a weakened economic base.

ACLED said these pressures could make it increasingly difficult for the military to sustain costly operations even if it retains the upper hand in the short term.

The conflict is therefore likely to continue nationwide, with rising humanitarian costs and few decisive military victories in sight, the report concluded.

ASEAN



CIVIL SOCIETY CALLS FOR DECISIVE ASEAN ACTION TO HOLD THE ILLEGAL MYANMAR MILITARY JUNTA ACCOUNTABLE

Civil society groups are calling on the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to hold the Myanmar junta to account for its illegal usurping of power and the negative behaviour against its people according to a statement issued at the end of a forum held in Manila.

Here is their 4 August statement:

The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP), together with Myanmar and Philippine civil society and women organizations, convened the Forum “Strengthening Regional Accountability through the Lens of the Women, Peace, Security, and Humanitarian Situation in Myanmar” to examine how ASEAN can strengthen its response to Myanmar’s deepening human rights and humanitarian crises through the effective implementation of its Women, Peace and Security (WPS) commitments and the Five-Point Consensus (5PC).

The Forum was held on 3 August in Manila.

Bringing together approximately 80 representatives from Burma-Myanmar women’s rights organizations,

civil society organizations, humanitarian and peace actors, regional and international experts, academics, members of the diplomatic community and the media, the forum critically assessed the implementation of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (ASEAN RPA on WPS). The Forum examined the widening gap between ASEAN’s commitments and the realities faced by women and conflict-affected communities in Myanmar, and put forward concrete recommendations to strengthen ASEAN’s accountability, protection efforts and humanitarian response.

WPS is a critical global priority framed by the UN Security Council’s Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security.

The forum was organized around two thematic panels addressing the interconnected dimensions of the WPS agenda and the humanitarian situation in Myanmar. A photo exhibition, HER Archive, was also set up by the Myanmar civil society group – A New Burma at the venue.

The first panel examined the current WPS landscape through the lived experiences of Myanmar women directly affected by the conflict. Alongside video testimonies from a former woman political prisoner and a young woman resistance fighter, panelists highlighted the gendered impacts of the military's ongoing violence, widespread displacement, and the junta's systematic attacks on civic and humanitarian space. At the same time, they underscored the leadership of Myanmar women as human rights defenders, peacebuilders, humanitarian responders, and agents of democratic change. Panelists made concrete recommendations urging ASEAN to strengthen implementation of its WPS commitments by advancing accountability for the military junta, ensuring meaningful and full participation of women in decision-making, and responding more effectively to the protection needs of conflict-affected communities.

The second panel focused on the humanitarian consequences of Myanmar's ongoing conflict, highlighting the experiences of diverse communities affected by the military's campaign of violence that deepened the human rights and humanitarian crisis. Panelists examined how local frontline responders, women's organizations and community-based humanitarian actors continue to sustain life-saving assistance, strengthen community resilience and protect the dignity of affected populations despite severe resource constraints, restricted humanitarian access and escalating security risks.

Regional experts further situated these realities within the broader WPS agenda, examining the regional implications of the Myanmar crisis and assessing ASEAN's humanitarian and political responses.

Despite ASEAN's commitments under the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, the 5 Point Consensus (5PC) and the ASEAN RPA on WPS, women and conflict-affected communities across Myanmar continue to face systematic and widespread violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. The military's ongoing aerial bombardments, ground offensives, forced displacement, weaponization of humanitarian assistance, and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) continue to inflict devastating harm on civilians while humanitarian and civic space remain under severe attack. These realities underscore the widening gap between ASEAN's commitments and their meaningful

implementation, reinforcing the urgent need for stronger, coordinated and people-centered regional action.

The forum served as a platform to elevate the voices, expertise and policy recommendations of Myanmar women, civil society leaders and regional experts within ASEAN's policy discourse on peace, security and humanitarian action. It fostered dialogue between Myanmar civil society, regional stakeholders and the diplomatic community on the regional implications of Myanmar's protracted crisis, ASEAN's responsibility to uphold its human rights and humanitarian commitments, and practical pathways for strengthening implementation of 5PC and the WPS agenda.

Panelists underscored that the military junta's escalating attacks against civilians, women and humanitarian actors demand a more principled and effective regional response. Despite ASEAN's continued reaffirmation of the 5PC, civilians across Myanmar continue to face widespread violence, forced displacement, forced conscription, humanitarian blockades, and other grave human rights and humanitarian violations. These realities highlight the urgent need to translate ASEAN's WPS commitments into concrete action through stronger accountability, meaningful engagement with affected communities, and tangible protection outcomes.

Throughout the forum, Myanmar women shared not only their lived experiences, but also their analysis and recommendations for addressing the crisis. Their contributions demonstrated that women are not merely among those most affected by conflict - they are leading humanitarian responses, protecting their communities, fostering social cohesion, documenting violations, and advancing pathways towards sustainable peace under extraordinarily challenging circumstances.

Participants reaffirmed that the knowledge, leadership and policy recommendations of Myanmar women must be meaningfully integrated into ASEAN's responses to the crisis.

The panelists called for the recognition of Myanmar women and conflict affected communities not only as those most affected by the crisis, but as indispensable partners in shaping regional responses. They stressed that the Philippines' ASEAN Chairship

presents an important opportunity to translate ASEAN's commitments into meaningful action that protects civilians, safeguards humanitarian space, and advances a just and sustainable peace in Myanmar.

Emphasizing the importance of recognizing and supporting locally led humanitarian responses, Yasmin Ullah of Rohingya Maiyafuinor Collaborative Network said:

"The Rohingya and others from Myanmar are very much capable of creating and sustaining systems of humanitarian processes as we have done for decades."

Reflecting and analyzing on the forum's assessment of ASEAN's WPS agenda, Val of Myanmar WPS observed: "The overall WPS situation in Myanmar is not a peripheral indicator but a reflection of the lived realities of the people of Burma/Myanmar, against which the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action (RPA) must be measured, and when measured against those realities by Myanmar's affected communities themselves, the conclusion is clear: the ASEAN RPA is overall, failing."

Speaking to the leadership of Myanmar women in responding to the crisis, Naw K'nyaw Paw, Chairperson of the Karen Women's Organisation (KWO) and advocacy team member of the Women's League of Burma (WLB), said: "The women of Burma are not waiting for someone to save us. We are building courts, training judges, drafting constitutions, feeding the displaced, and healing the wounded - with almost nothing, under fire, every single day. We are only asking the world to stand with us while we do it."

Reinforcing the central role of women in sustaining communities throughout the crisis, Hnin of Women Advocacy Coalition - Myanmar (WAC-Myanmar) said: "Local women are the backbone of survival in Burma/Myanmar. Stand with them, resource them directly and champion their leadership for durable peace."

Reflecting on the implications of Myanmar's evolving conflict dynamics for regional humanitarian responses, humanitarian and peacebuilding expert Adelina Kamal said: "Myanmar's complex and decentralized conflict landscape means that there are multiple systems of territorial control, access, service delivery, protection, and local authority. A single state-facing mechanism cannot reliably reach all these realities—especially when the military authority is the principal perpetrator of the crisis, weaponizes humanitarian aid, and deliberately

dismantles local systems that sustain communities. In this context, humanitarian action must move beyond delivering relief. It must also defend dignity, justice, and our shared humanity. Humanity is not simply a core humanitarian principle; it is the ultimate goal. And in practicing humanity, we must re-center justice and equity as our guardrails."

Addressing ASEAN's responsibility to translate commitments into action, Khin Ohmar, Chair of Progressive Voice, called on the ASEAN Special Envoy to demonstrate principled leadership: "The Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary and ASEAN Special Envoy Ma Lazaro must urgently undertake the ASEAN's October 2025 Summit decision by directly supporting locally led, border-based mechanisms to deliver non-discriminatory humanitarian aid to conflict-affected communities."

Tom Andrews, the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, provided the forum with an analysis and a path forward to protect human rights and democratic values. The forum further emphasized that the Philippines' ASEAN Chairship presents a timely opportunity to reinforce ASEAN's vision of a people-centered, rights-based and accountable regional community. It stressed that Myanmar represents the clearest measure of ASEAN's commitment to implementing its WPS agenda and called on ASEAN and its Member States to translate regional commitments into sustained, coordinated, and people-centered action.

The forum stressed a shared commitment to continue strengthening collaboration among Myanmar and Philippine civil society and women's organizations, humanitarian actors and regional partners in advancing the WPS agenda and supporting the Myanmar people's pursuit of a federal democratic future. The forum concluded with a set of concrete recommendations directed to the Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary and ASEAN Special Envoy Ma. Theresa Lazaro to undertake a more principled, coordinated and effective regional response to the crisis.

SIF SENDS OPEN LETTER TO CHINA OVER MYANMAR POLICY

Strategic Initiative Forum (SIF) sent an open letter on 4 August to the People's Republic of China regarding China's involvement in Myanmar affairs.

The following is the letter:

The Honorable Government of the People's Republic of China (The State Council)

The Strategic Initiative Forum (SIF) expresses its profound concern regarding the ongoing political, security, and humanitarian crises in Myanmar. As an immediate neighboring country and a major regional power, we acknowledge that China's policies and decisions hold significant weight and directly impact Myanmar's peace, stability, and future trajectory.

Accordingly, we earnestly call upon the Chinese government to refrain from any form of interference in Myanmar's internal politics and armed conflicts, and to cease actions or decisions that risk prolonging the

hostilities. The future of Myanmar must be determined solely through democratic means and in alignment with the sovereign will of the Myanmar people, rather than exploited for foreign political interests.

Furthermore, we express grave concern regarding reports of arbitrary detentions, threats, and human rights violations targeting Myanmar citizens. In particular, regarding the detention of U Min Zin, Executive Director of the Institute for Strategy and Policy (ISP-Myanmar), who was detained in Kunming, China, in the first week of June 2026 under allegations of espionage and threatening national security, we demand a transparent review conducted in full compliance with international law and human rights standards, leading to a prompt and appropriate resolution.

It is entirely unacceptable that the violent military junta continues to sell off the nation's resources by exporting Myanmar's natural wealth and raw materials to China through various channels at artificially low prices. Moreover, the Chinese government's signing

of agreements with the military junta to resume the Myitsone Dam project at the confluence of the May Kha (N'Mai Hka) and Malikha (Mali Hka) Rivers—the lifeline of Myanmar—disregards the explicit opposition of the entire Myanmar public and violates international environmental conventions.

The extraction of natural resources and rare earth minerals, along with the implementation of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects and other major infrastructure developments, must prioritize public consensus, environmental conservation, and sustainable development. Proceeding with such projects during a period of political crisis and without the consent of the people erodes trust and risks deepening the conflict.

Exploiting Myanmar's natural wealth purely for commercial gain, persisting with environmentally damaging projects, and disregarding public dissent will severely impair bilateral trust and jeopardize regional stability. We firmly condemn all cronies, business actors, and international entities that collude with the violent military junta in resource extraction and project implementation.

We sincerely trust that the Chinese government will champion an approach grounded in peace, inclusive political dialogue, respect for human rights, and international law—one that unequivocally honors the aspirations of the Myanmar people. Respecting Myanmar's national sovereignty, the fundamental rights of its citizens, and its democratic aspirations serves as the firmest foundation for enduring bilateral friendship and regional tranquility.

We formally call upon the Government of the People's Republic of China to:

Immediately cease all cooperation with the violent military junta that compromises Myanmar's sovereignty, interferes in its internal political affairs, or seeks to exert political influence.

Uphold the human rights of Myanmar nationals and ensure the immediate, unconditional release of U Min Zin and all arbitrarily detained individuals, treating them with dignity and in accordance with international norms.

Halt all economic decisions and activities—including BRI projects and rare earth mineral extraction—that prioritize financial interests at the expense of exacerbating conflict and instability.

Constructively support political solutions aimed at peace and national reconciliation that are genuinely grounded in the sovereign will of the Myanmar people.

Respectfully,

Strategic Initiative Forum (SIF)

The Strategic Initiative Forum (SIF) is a political coalition uniting key anti-junta actors, including ethnic armed organizations, political parties, and strike committees across Myanmar. Driven by a four-part strategy to build a federal democratic union, SIF operates both on the ground—mobilizing anti-sham election actions across 100+ townships—and internationally, organizing high-level meetings with key stakeholders in neighboring countries. Through this dual approach of diplomatic engagement and grassroots pressure, SIF actively works to counter the military junta's legitimacy and advocate for Myanmar's democratic movement. <https://sif-mm.org>



MYANMAR PDF COMMANDERS MAP OUT FUTURE PLANS TO TRANSITION FROM DEFENSIVE WAR TO 'STRATEGIC OFFENSIVE'

Senior commanders of the People's Defense Force (PDF) under the Ministry of Defense of the National Unity Government (NUG) have decided to upgrade the People's Defensive War to a "Strategic Offensive," according to a decision made at a senior commanders' meeting.

The plans were approved and adopted during the four-day Commanders' Meeting (2/2026), held from 3 to 6 August. Officials from 10 military regions, one division, and various departments under the General Headquarters attended, the NUG Ministry of Defense announced 7 August.

The adopted plans include strategic participation in the Military Strategic Coordination and Command Committee of the Steering Committee for the Establishment of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) in accordance with the three unity principles, as well as

coordinated offensive plans with allied Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) across various military regions.

On the final day of the meeting, NUG Acting President Duwa Lashi La and Union Prime Minister Mann Win Khaing Than attended, where senior PDF commanders received political leadership and guidance, the statement said.

This is described as the second commanders' meeting of its kind, following an inaugural meeting held in February of this year.

Combat operations under the PDF General Headquarters are currently conducted across 10 military regions: Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, Southern Shan-Kayah (Karenni), Naypyidaw, Bago, Yangon, Ayeyarwady, Tanintharyi, and a Special Military Region.

Sai Zaw Thaike

MYANMAR PHOTOJOURNALIST SAI ZAW THAIKE WINS CPJ PRESS FREEDOM AWARD WHILE SERVING 20-YEAR PRISON SENTENCE

Myanmar Now photojournalist Sai Zaw Thaike will receive the Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) 2026 International Press Freedom Award, the New York-based press rights watchdog announced on 5 August, alongside journalists from five other countries who have faced imprisonment, exile and surveillance for their reporting.

CPJ will present the awards at its 36th annual gala in New York on 19 November, chaired by NBCUniversal News Group chairman Cesar Conde, with New York Times journalist Lulu Garcia-Navarro serving as master of ceremonies. "They have endured targeting, imprisonment, exile, and surveillance for simply reporting the news," CPJ CEO Jodie Ginsberg said of this year's honorees.

CPJ's other 2026 honorees include Christina Assi, a photojournalist for Agence France-Presse (AFP) injured in a 2023 Israeli strike at the Lebanon-Israel border that killed her colleague, Reuters correspondent Issam Abdallah; the Eritrea 16, a group of journalists arrested in a 2001 crackdown on independent media, some of whom remain jailed without charge or trial 25 years on; Szabolcs Panyi, a Hungarian investigative journalist charged with espionage this year after exposing the foreign minister's ties to the Kremlin; and Estefany Rodríguez, a Colombian-born reporter in Tennessee detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs

Enforcement (ICE) agents in March after covering immigration raids in Nashville, despite living in the country legally.

Separately, Salvadoran journalist Carlos Dada, who co-founded the digital outlet El Faro in 1998 and now leads its newsroom in exile from Costa Rica, will receive CPJ's Gwen Ifill Press Freedom Award, given annually for an individual's sustained commitment to press freedom. CPJ Board Chair Jacob Weisberg said Dada's newsroom continues investigative reporting despite the erosion of press freedom under El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele.

Sai Zaw Thaike was arrested on 23 May 2023 while covering the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha in Sittwe, where the storm killed many members of the persecuted Rohingya minority. A military tribunal sentenced him that September to 20 years with hard labour in Yangon's Insein Prison, one of the longest known journalism-related sentences since the military ousted Myanmar's elected government in the 2021 coup. CPJ said he has been subjected to physical abuse and torture, and denied medical treatment for serious ailments, while imprisoned. Myanmar was ranked the world's second-worst jailer of journalists in CPJ's 2025 prison census, with 30 documented cases - a record CPJ said reflects the military regime's campaign to jail journalists and silence critical coverage.



Myanmar refugee workers in Thailand. Photo: AFP

'DON'T HAVE TO HIDE': THAI IDS, LEGAL WORK GIVE HOPE TO MYANMAR REFUGEES

Next to a mound of black earth, Myanmar refugees feed soil and rice seed into a clacking conveyor machine that arranges them into ready-made planting trays for Thai farms.

The farmworkers are among their Thai boss's newest employees, with a fresh sense of job security after Thailand began permitting Myanmar refugees living in camps to work legally and granting them non-citizen identity cards.

"I do not tire from the work. I can do it," Ney La Jaw, 25, told AFP.

He spent much of his life confined to the Mae La refugee camp, the largest of nine temporary shelters along the border with Myanmar, according to the United Nations.

But he now lives and works more than 200 kilometres (124 miles) away on a farm in Thailand's Nakhon Sawan province, earning around 3,000 baht (\$90) per week -- a life-changing sum for many refugees.

"I send all of my money home to my mom" in the camp, he said.

After decades of being barred from leaving the camps and working legally, Myanmar refugees and their children began receiving non-citizen Thai ID cards in June, a step away from statelessness and towards gainful, legal employment.

About 4,600 people from Myanmar living in camps have sought permission to work legally from October 2025 to July this year, the Thai interior ministry said.

They are a fraction of the about 80,000 people who have fled conflict-torn Myanmar and live in the camps, according to UN figures.

Myanmar migrants have long toiled in neighbouring Thailand, but the country's civil war, triggered by a 2021 military coup, has sent even more fleeing across the border.

Myanmar's leader, ex-junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, arrived in Bangkok on Thursday, with the two nations signing an agreement on labour cooperation.

'My own future'

In Prachinburi province, AFP journalists saw 15 displaced people collect their new ID cards at a district office in July, smiling and taking photos of the pink documents to send to their families.

"After getting the card, I don't have to be afraid anymore when travelling around," said Gay Lah, a Myanmar refugee who fled to a Thai camp with her family at the age of six.

She said her job as a scaffolder was tiring but going smoothly.

"I want to work hard, save money, buy a place, build a house and then bring my family out of the camp, that's what I imagine," she added.

Sit Nyein Aye also fled Myanmar as a child and lived most of his life "in misery" in another border camp.

Being allowed to work in construction and having an ID card gave him the chance to start fresh.

"Since I have the opportunity, I'm going out to work," the 27-year-old said. "I have my own future."

'Self-reliance'

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) welcomed Thailand's move to issue ID cards in June, calling it a "landmark step towards inclusion, protection and self-reliance for one of the world's most protracted refugee populations".

Thailand's porous borders and reputation for religious and cultural tolerance have long drawn those seeking sanctuary, but Bangkok does not legally recognise refugees or offer asylum.

However, the government began authorising legal employment for longstanding refugees last year, with more than 5,500 refugees joining the workforce since October, UNHCR said in June.

Phil Robertson, director of Bangkok-based Asia Human Rights and Labour Advocates, said the shift was a "huge step forward" and "long overdue".

"With these so-called 'pink cards', the refugees can access health and other services, work to support their families, and enjoy greater freedom of movement," he said.

Peace of mind

At the farm in Nakhon Sawan, owner Manas Lohsuwan said he had previously hired Cambodian migrants.

But since deadly border clashes between Thailand and Cambodia broke out in July last year, hundreds of thousands of Cambodian workers have returned home, leaving Manas short of labourers.

While Manas said Cambodians had more skills and experience than Myanmar refugees, the latter were cheaper to employ and required to stay with the same employer.

"If they do not want to work with us, they have to return to the camp and wait to be recruited again," he said.

For 29-year-old Ko Ko Oo, who was born and grew up in a Thai refugee camp, an ID card provides more than permission to work and earn a higher income.

It has also granted him peace of mind, especially when officials come around checking workers' papers, he said.

"I do not have to hide."

AFP



NEW KAREN COALITION DEMANDS END TO INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR MYANMAR JUNTA

A coalition of Karen community groups from Myanmar, Thailand and the diaspora launched the Karen Worldwide Advocacy Network (KWAN) in Bangkok on 5 August, demanding that foreign governments cut financial and military support to Myanmar's junta and pursue accountability for abuses against Karen civilians under universal jurisdiction laws.

According to KWAN's founding statement, the network brings together Karen organizations from inside Myanmar, Thailand and diaspora communities abroad around a shared set of priorities: protection of Karen civilians, expanded humanitarian assistance for displaced communities, accountability for junta abuses, self-determination through federal democracy, and protections for Karen refugees and migrant workers.

The network's immediate demands include ending international recognition of the junta's political legitimacy, increasing humanitarian aid to internally displaced Karen communities and along the Thai border, and using universal jurisdiction mechanisms to pursue accountability for rights violations. KWAN also called for stronger action against human trafficking and

scam operations run out of Karen-controlled territory, along with expanded protections for Karen migrant workers and refugees living abroad.

The Karen National Union (KNU), the ethnic armed group that administers parts of Karen State, has fought Myanmar's military for decades over Karen self-rule, a conflict that predates the 2021 coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government. Renewed military offensives since the coup have displaced additional Karen civilians, driving many into camps along the Thai border or into diaspora communities overseas, a pattern KWAN's founders cite as the basis for organizing across borders.

KWAN urged the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union to support Karen self-determination efforts and increase pressure on the junta. Naw Htoo Htoo, a co-founder of KWAN, said the network reflects decades of displacement and repression endured by Karen communities under Myanmar's military rule, and called on the international community to end the junta's impunity.



Photo: Supplied

ONLY BORDER MARKET REOPENED IN PANSAUNG, NOT BORDER GATE, SAYS ENWA

The Eastern Naga Women's Association (ENWA) says the recent reopening between Pansaung in Nanyun Township, Sagaing Region's Naga Self-Administered Zone, and Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh, India, is merely the reopening of a border market, not a border gate.

The Pansaung border market on the India-Myanmar border had been closed for over six years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and armed conflict before reopening on 30 July. Authorities from both countries have scheduled the market to open on the 10th, 20th, and 30th of every month.

"Opening a border market is not the same as opening a border gate. Opening a gate means locals must have freedom of movement and trade. It is crucial that there are no restrictions. We do not consider it a border gate reopening when it is labeled as such but only 30 people are allowed entry with numerous restrictions. It is indeed a border market reopening, but we cannot say the border gate has opened," an ENWA official told Mizzima.

The official said the Naga region has historically enjoyed free movement across generations, and that the general public and some media outlets are mistaking the current restricted entry for a complete border gate reopening.

Currently, only 30 people per day are allowed to cross into India for shopping and visits. Only two boxes of snacks or confectionery are permitted per person. Essential items like gasoline and medicine can be purchased on the Indian side but are banned from

being brought back across, with Indian border soldiers confiscating them, according to the ENWA official.

While welcoming the reopening of the market, ENWA said in its 4 August position paper that opening it with so many restrictions must not lead to a system that benefits only a select few.

The statement urged authorities to restore free movement and trade for locals as it existed before COVID-19, and to reopen the border gates in accordance with the rights of Indigenous Naga people and human rights standards.

It also demanded the removal of unnecessary restrictions on transporting goods and the immediate halt of border fencing projects, which are opposed by the Naga people.

ENWA said it will monitor whether authorities address these demands and will continue its advocacy until they are met.

The reopening ceremony of the Pansaung border market was attended by Arunachal Pradesh's Minister of Trade and Commerce, members of parliament, and leaders of the United Tangshang Naga Council (UTNC) from the Myanmar side.

Although detailed matters regarding border trade were not discussed at the ceremony, the United Tangshang Naga Council said Tangshang Naga representatives from both countries discussed the long-term sustainability of the border market and price stability for local products.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR RANKS NEAR BOTTOM GLOBALLY FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Myanmar has fallen to 173rd out of 174 countries worldwide in the 2026 Academic Freedom Index, scoring just 0.023 out of a possible 1.0 and ranking ahead of only Nicaragua, as academic freedom in the country continues a decade-long collapse.

According to the Academic Freedom Index Update 2026, Myanmar's score fell from about 0.40 in 2020 to roughly 0.03 in 2021, the year the military ousted the country's elected government in a February coup. The index put Myanmar's score at around 0.36 in 2015, meaning academic freedom has dropped by more than 90 percent over the past decade.

The index, produced jointly by researchers at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) in Germany and the V-Dem Institute at Sweden's University of Gothenburg, assesses conditions through the end of 2025 and places Myanmar in the bottom 10 percent of the 174 countries measured. Drawing on standardized evaluations from 2,357 country experts

worldwide, it scores academic freedom across five areas: the freedom to research and teach, academic exchange and dissemination, institutional autonomy, campus integrity, and academic and cultural expression.

Beyond Myanmar, the index recorded statistically significant declines in academic freedom in 50 countries over the past decade, against only nine countries that improved. The Czech Republic, Estonia and Belgium ranked among the highest-scoring countries in 2025.

The report also flagged a rapid deterioration in institutional autonomy in the United States, where researchers said the decline since 2020 has been faster and steeper than in other countries experiencing democratic backsliding, including Hungary, India and Türkiye. They said institutional autonomy is closely tied to individual academics' ability to research and teach freely, making its erosion a key indicator of broader pressure on academic freedom worldwide.



Photo: AFP

MRAUK-U AIRSTRIKES FORCE RESIDENTS INTO BOMB SHELTERS OVERNIGHT

Residents of Mrauk-U, Rakhine State, spent the night in fear inside bomb shelters after the military junta launched a 30-minute airstrike targeting its former military bases, local sources reported.

On 4 August at around 10:00 PM, the junta deployed three jet fighters and a Y-12 transport aircraft, dropping over 40 bombs on former military sites - Light Infantry Battalion (540) and Police Battalion (31) - in Mrauk-U.

"They dropped 10 bombs from jet fighters and over 30 from the Y-12 onto Battalion 540 and Police Battalion 31. We had to hide in fear inside the shelters. The bombardment lasted continuously for about half an hour; we couldn't even raise our heads. The planes came one after another, dropping bombs continuously. It was terrifying, like the end of the world," a male resident of Mrauk-U told Mizzima.

Whether civilians living near Battalion 540 and Police Battalion 31 sustained casualties in the airstrike

could not be independently confirmed as of 5 August.

Another Mrauk-U resident said: "No civilian casualties have been reported so far. They mainly targeted areas where junta forces were previously stationed. However, residents remained awake all night, monitoring the situation out of fear of further airstrikes."

The Arakan Army (AA) seized complete control of the historical heritage town of Mrauk-U on 28 February 2024.

The junta has previously targeted civilian sites in Mrauk-U with airstrikes. On the night of 10 December 2025, the military dropped two 500-pound bombs on Mrauk-U General Hospital, killing over 30 healthcare workers and patients and severely injuring nearly 80 others - one of the deadliest recorded attacks on a healthcare facility in Myanmar since the 2021 coup.



Photo: Supplied

WORKERS DEMANDING WAGE HIKES AT SPRING MOON GARMENT FACTORY FACE THREATS, STUM REPORTS

Workers at the Spring Moon Garment Factory in Industrial Zone (4), Hlaingtharyar Township, Yangon Region, have reached agreement on four of their collective demands and signed a bilateral contract, the Solidarity of Trade Unions Myanmar (STUM) announced 11 August.

The four agreed terms are: raising the daily allowance (general subsidy) from 10,000 MMK to 11,000 MMK; adjusting the overtime (OT) rate from 2,000 MMK to 2,200 MMK per hour for up to 28 hours of OT, and 2,300 MMK per hour for any hours exceeding 28; awarding a monthly line production target bonus of 15,000 MMK by grade upon reaching production targets; and granting a monthly target bonus of 6,000 MMK for other departments, including Finishing QC, ironing, and buttoning, upon target completion.

"We did not secure the remaining five demands. Regarding Sunday pay deductions for taking gate passes, although it is legally defined, we will have to file complaints in the future if they continue to dock Sunday pay for gate passes. Since the strike dragged on and our workers could no longer hold out financially, we had to settle despite our dissatisfaction," a participating worker told Mizzima.

Both parties also agreed to grant participating workers an attendance bonus of 10,000 MMK for the

first 15 days of the month and 20,000 MMK for the subsequent 15 days.

The bilateral agreement takes effect on 1 August. The 133 participating workers were set to resume work on 12 August, according to STUM.

"With the workers agreeing not to make further demands regarding these settled terms, the labour dispute at the Spring Moon Garment factory, which lasted over 30 days, has been peacefully resolved," the statement added.

Spring Moon Garment is a Chinese-owned CMP (Cutting, Making, Packing) factory with over 200 workers. On 8 July, 177 workers initiated protests demanding nine points, including wage increases. The workers' initial demands, compared to previous rates, were: raising daily wages from 10,000 MMK to 13,000 MMK; OT rates from 2,000 MMK to 2,500 MMK; attendance bonuses from 40,000 MMK to 50,000 MMK; skill bonuses of 60,000 MMK for Grade A, 50,000 MMK for Grade B, and 40,000 MMK for Grade C; no Sunday pay deductions for absences; double daily wage for Sunday OT, emergency leave allowances; seniority bonuses calculated based on daily wages, and no Sunday pay deductions for taking gate passes.

MOHR SAYS 3,742 CIVILIANS KILLED IN MYANMAR'S CENTRAL REGIONS AS JET FUEL SANCTIONS GO UNENFORCED

The Ministry of Human Rights (MOHR) of Myanmar's opposition National Unity Government (NUG) has renewed calls for international sanctions on jet fuel and financial resources reaching the military junta, as new tallies from the ministry show military attacks have killed 3,742 civilians across Sagaing, Mandalay and Magway regions since the 2021 coup attempt — even as aviation fuel shipments to the military continue reaching Myanmar through disguised trade routes.

According to MOHR, the killings occurred during raids, airstrikes and drone attacks the military has carried out since seizing power from Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government on 1 February 2021, a takeover that triggered nationwide armed resistance under the Spring Revolution. The three regions, part of Myanmar's central dry zone, have been among the hardest-hit areas of the conflict; MOHR says the regime has treated them as a single zone of operations in an effort to crush the unyielding resistance movement that emerged there.

MOHR's tally, compiled from online monitoring and ground reports through 15 July, recorded 2,202 civilians killed in Sagaing region, 791 in Mandalay region and 749 in Magway region, including 523 children under 18 and 452 people aged 60 or older across the three areas combined. The ministry documented 12,757 separate rights violations in total — including targeted killings,

aerial and drone bombardments, and arson attacks on homes — and referred 393 of the most serious, verified cases to the UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) for possible future prosecution.

Despite years of similar appeals, jet fuel has continued reaching the junta. Aviation fuel imports to Myanmar nearly doubled between 2024 and 2025, from 64,562 to 106,604 metric tonnes, according to Justice For Myanmar, a monitoring group that has separately pressed Western governments to sanction the supply chain. An investigation published by The Diplomat found that a company was still supplying jet fuel to Myanmar as late as June 2026, using a Bangladeshi port of call as cover for the shipment's actual destination.

The fuel appears to be sustaining the same kind of operations MOHR's report documents. On 25 July, military aircraft dropped bombs on Monhla village in Khin-U township, Sagaing region, killing a 60-year-old woman and injuring two others, according to local media reports. MOHR again called on the international community to act swiftly and effectively to sanction the jet fuel and financial resources keeping the junta's air force flying — an appeal the ministry and rights groups have repeated for years without a comprehensive international ban materializing.



CNO-CNDF CHAIRMAN DISMISSED FOR SECRET MEETING WITH MYANMAR JUNTA'S NSPNC REPRESENTATIVES

The chairman of the Chin National Organization/Chin National Defence Force (CNO/CNDF), based in Falam Township, Chin State, has been dismissed from his post for holding an unauthorized separate meeting with representatives of the junta-established National Solidarity and Peacemaking Negotiation Committee (NSPNC) in New Delhi, India, sources said.

The meeting became public after junta chief Min Aung Hlaing named the CNO/CNDF among 13 armed groups his peace committee has held talks with, during a state address on 31 July. The CNO subsequently removed the chairman over the unauthorized meeting.

"The chairman is the Commander-in-Chief, who holds the ultimate responsibility for the entire policy of the organization. Because he is accountable for this meeting as well as other policy matters, our organization took action to dismiss him," Salai Tin Mi Htut, spokesperson for the CNO/CNDF, told Mizzima.

He declined to disclose the identities of other attendees or further details, saying they are personal matters.

Salai Tin Mi Htut wrote on social media that the CNO/CNDF does not represent any single ethnic group or individual, and that the revolution is ongoing. He said the revolution will continue until consensus, unity, and transparent discussions among all Chin people are achieved.

According to a statement released by the CNO on the night of 3 August, the separate meeting between certain officials and junta representatives was conducted of their own accord, without any recognition, decision, or agreement from the organization's Central Council (CC), Central Executive Committee (CEC), Political Steering Committee (PSC), or Defence Council (DC).

Following an investigation into the unauthorized meeting, the chairman accepted primary responsibility and tendered his resignation. The Central Council subsequently approved his dismissal, according to the statement.

The statement added that the matters discussed during the meeting do not represent the official stance, decisions, or policies of the CNO, and that no political or military agreements, commitments, or understandings were reached with the NSPNC representatives.

The CNO affirmed it will not engage in unilateral talks or political negotiations with the junta without the consensus and collective decision of fellow members, including the Chin Brotherhood, the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC), and allied revolutionary forces.

Separately, the Falam Clan Guardians Association released a statement on 3 August expressing support for the meeting, saying it aimed to benefit the development of the Falam region and the future of the Falam people. The association said it supports negotiations and peace efforts between the CNO and junta officials to facilitate the rehabilitation of Falam Township, enabling local residents to return home safely and make a peaceful living.

The CNO/CNDF said it will continue working alongside allied revolutionary forces to prioritize organizational unity, its constitution, policies, and revolutionary interests, aiming to meet public trust and achieve the revolution's ultimate goals: establishing a federal democratic system and completely ending military dictatorship.

The Chin National Organization/Chin National Defence Force (CNO/CNDF) was founded on 13 April 2021 and is currently conducting armed resistance against the junta in Falam Township, northern Chin State, and the Kalay-Kabaw region of Sagaing Region, in cooperation with allied forces.

KAREN MIDWIVES HONOURED ON INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

August 9th marks the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, a celebration of Indigenous cultures, traditions, knowledge, and their vital role in protecting and caring for nature, according to the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network.

This year, we honor our Indigenous Karen midwives, whose knowledge and care for our newborn have safeguarded the wellbeing of our communities for generations. We are committed to passing on these traditional practices so that our Karen youth are able to continue to strengthen this part of our culture and heritage.

In Kawthoolei, despite ongoing threats from the Burmese military government and the Global Climate Crisis, Indigenous Karen communities continue to

safeguard themselves and their unique relationship with nature.

Their stewardship demonstrates the important role Indigenous peoples play in safeguarding nature and sustaining their lands for future generations.

Indigenous peoples like us continue to face challenges, including threats to their rights, lands, cultures, and ways of life. On this day, we recognize, respect, and promote the rights of our fellow Indigenous peoples and vow to continue to protect our communities, cultures, and natural environment with equality, dignity, and justice.

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/18h5mrc6Yi/>



Malaysia Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Photo: AFP

MALAYSIA SAYS WILL NOT REPATRIATE MYANMAR REFUGEES IF LIVES ARE AT RISK

Malaysia will not send 5,000 refugees back to Myanmar if authorities conclude their lives would be at risk, a government spokesman said Wednesday, while preparations continued for the potential repatriation.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced last week that Myanmar had agreed to take back 5,000 members of the persecuted Rohingya minority, in a rare repatriation push that has prompted concern from rights groups.

Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil, without specifying the refugees' ethnicity, told a news briefing that "Malaysia, as a responsible country, will not send them back if they would either be persecuted or their lives would be threatened".

"The junta government in Myanmar is ready to receive them, but we will examine what the criteria are. And if appropriate, we will implement" the repatriation plan, he said.

"We cannot send them back if their lives are threatened. So there are several matters that are being looked into by the foreign ministry."

Myanmar authorities have made no public comment on the plan.

Malaysia hosts more than 215,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with the UN refugee agency, including more than 126,000 Rohingya from Myanmar, the country's largest refugee community.

The repatriation plan was announced after Malaysian authorities last week detained more than

100 Rohingya who had gathered outside the UN refugee agency's office in Kuala Lumpur.

The refugees were being threatened with eviction from an informal settlement in northern Penang state.

They were later released after officials confirmed they held valid UN documentation.

Malaysia's home ministry has since begun documenting and screening refugees ahead of the planned repatriation, according to state news agency Bernama.

The news agency quoted Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution Ismail as saying 4,000 people in immigration detention identified for the process "will undergo screening and be placed at one depot instead of being spread across 19 depots, to facilitate the process".

Malaysia's main Rohingya rights group urged the government to halt the plan, saying their lives would be at risk if returned.

Malaysia, which shelters one of Southeast Asia's biggest refugee populations, is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not formally recognise refugee status.

AFP fact-checkers have found that Rohingya refugees in Malaysia have been targeted by online disinformation campaigns that rights advocates say are fuelling xenophobia and intimidation.

Many of the Rohingya, a mostly Muslim group, escaped Myanmar during a brutal military crackdown in 2017.

AFP

An Update to Mizzima Readers

Mizzima continues independent journalism for Myanmar despite repression, censorship, security risks and financial pressure.



1. FUNDING REALITY

Donor funding is now almost none, although we continue to seek support.

2. HOW MIZZIMA IS SUSTAINING ITSELF



YouTube and digital monetization



Training and Mizzima Media Training Institute



AI and Mizzima EAE for research, content regeneration and production



Content repackaging across TV, Facebook, YouTube and digital platforms



Mizzima Weekly, Mizzima English and policy products



HH Channel and diaspora community services



Production services, events, partnerships and sponsorships



Agriculture, tea and coffee, restaurants, shops and marketplace initiatives



Thank you for standing with Mizzima.

Mizzima

Truth. Voice. Future.

- YouTube and digital monetization
- Training and Mizzima Media Training Institute
- AI Technology through Mizzima EAE for research, content regeneration and production
- Repackaging content across TV, Facebook, YouTube and digital platforms
- Mizzima Weekly, Mizzima English and policy products
- Home Away From Home - HH Channel and diaspora community services
- Production services, events, partnerships and sponsorships
- Non-media business initiatives.

AI does not replace our journalists. It helps us work faster and smarter, while human editors remain responsible for accuracy, verification, ethics and editorial judgment.

AN UPDATE TO MIZZIMA READERS AND FRIENDS

Since the 2021 coup, Mizzima has continued independent journalism under very difficult conditions — revoked licenses, office raids, frozen bank accounts, arrests, surveillance, censorship, security risks and financial pressure.

But we continue because Myanmar still needs independent, reliable and verified information.

Today, one difficult reality is that donor funding is now almost none, although we continue to seek support wherever possible.

At the same time, Mizzima is working hard to sustain itself through self-generated revenue and new initiatives, including:

Mizzima is not only trying to survive. We are adapting, modernizing and building for the future — through media, technology, community services and practical business initiatives that can support our public-interest journalism.

Thank you to our readers, viewers, partners, friends and supporters for standing with Mizzima.

Truth. Voice. Future.

#Mizzima #Myanmar #IndependentMedia
#PressFreedom #MizzimaEAE #MediaResilience
#MediaSustainability



BANGLADESH 'OUTRAGED' EXILED LEADER AND 'MASS MURDERER' SHEIKH HASINA ALLOWED TO SPEAK TO MEDIA IN INDIA

Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a late-night rebuke to their exiled former leader Ms Sheikh Hasina being allowed to speak "virtually" to the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia on 5 August.

In a press release at midnight, the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs had the following to say about the speech:

Bangladesh is outraged that the absconding convicted genocider Sheikh Hasina was allowed this evening to engage in live interaction with the media in New Delhi where she and her henchmen launched venomous vitriol against the State of Bangladesh and her people.

Dhaka deeply regrets that in spite of concerns conveyed apriori to the Government of India about the likely ramifications of this event on the reset of our bilateral relations, this public event was permitted to be held.

On a day when the people of Bangladesh are observing the second anniversary of the July Revolution, this interaction by Sheikh Hasina on the Indian soil stands as an affront to the sovereignty of Bangladesh and a grievous insult to the martyrs of the July Revolution.

The denial of facts established by the United Nations, including gruesome killing of the innocent

civilians including minor children during July-August 2024 by the fascist regime, stands as a futile attempt by the absconding convicted mass murderer Hasina and her criminal cohort to reverse the tide of history. The people of Bangladesh had already rejected such heinous attempts in the past and continue to do so now.

Upholding the spirit of the July Revolution, our people have firmly resolved that our nation will never again go back to the dark days of fascism and that Bangladesh will never be a client State. Convicted mass murderer Hasina and her mafia enterprise will never have a place in the polity of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh desires to maintain a constructive, mutually beneficial, and forward-looking relationship with India based on sovereign equality, mutual respect, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and national dignity. Regrettably, Bangladesh's repeated requests to the Government of India for returning convicted criminal Hasina to Bangladesh under the Extradition Treaty signed between Bangladesh and India in 2013, has not yet elicited a response. On the contrary, allowing her the opportunity to openly interact with the media under any pretext is deeply hurtful to our people's sentiment and detrimental to the development of harmonious bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India.



Photo: Supplied

MOUNT TAI FENCED OFF: HOW THE CCP IS TURNING NATURE INTO PROFIT

SUN LEE

Mount Tai, one of China's most revered mountains, has stood for millennia as a symbol of openness, inclusiveness, and spiritual heritage. Yet in recent years, this sacred landscape has been transformed into a fortress of razor wire, walls, and surveillance systems. Videos circulating online show 135 kilometers of razor wire fencing encircling the mountain, stacked in double coils nearly as tall as an adult. What was once a public treasure has been turned into a controlled zone, sparking outrage among residents, outdoor enthusiasts, and netizens across China.

Residents of Shandong province filmed footage of the fencing, describing it as "border-level security standards" imposed on a mountain that belongs to the people. Critics argue that the fencing harms wildlife, blocks traditional walking paths, and even prevents locals from gathering wild vegetables. Online commentators mocked the authorities, saying, "If the sun and moon could be fenced in, they would definitely do it and sell tickets."

The Mount Tai Scenic Area Management Committee initially defended the installation, claiming it was for fire prevention and pest control. But official WeChat posts revealed the true purpose: blocking over 800 unauthorized entry points to enforce ticket sales. The project, dubbed the "forest fire prevention corridor," cost approximately 25.193 million yuan.

The controversy quickly escalated. Many netizens suspected corruption, questioning how ticket revenue could possibly recover such massive costs. Others pointed out that the fencing project itself was the profit engine, benefiting local officials and contractors. After widespread criticism, the committee announced that 80% of the fencing had been removed, with the remainder scheduled for clearance by July 10. Yet removal itself added another round of expenses, doubling costs and fueling suspicions of profiteering.

The replacement plan involves "smart security systems" such as infrared alarms, AI voice deterrence, and expanded forest patrols. Critics argue this is simply

another costly project that will generate revenue for officials while burdening the public.

Mount Tai is not an isolated case. Similar barriers have appeared at Mi Snow Mountain, Hukou Waterfall, Qinghai Lake, and even along roads near temples and rivers. Visitors complain of walls blocking scenic views, forcing them to pay for entry. In April 2026, a wall near the Shenon Temple scenic area sparked debate over whether authorities were deliberately blocking free views to monetize access.

This trend reflects a broader policy of enclosure and commercialization. During China's "zero-COVID" years, razor wire and barricades surrounded residential communities, schools, and government offices. Even after restrictions lifted, barriers remained, repurposed to control homeless populations and petitioners. In May 2026, bridge underpasses along Beijing's Yongding River were fenced with barbed wire to prevent people from sleeping there.

Underlying these policies is the CCP's control over all land and resources. Since the abolition of private property in the 1950s, scenic areas have been state-owned, allowing officials to exploit them for revenue. In recent years, local governments have even attempted to monetize the sky. In 2024, Pingyin County in Shandong sold 30-year concessions for "low-altitude economy" rights, valued at over 900 million yuan. Public outrage forced central authorities to halt the deal, but the episode revealed the desperation of local governments facing financial shortfalls.

The CCP's obsession with monetization extends to every corner of life. From enclosing waterfalls to fencing mountains, from selling airspace to charging for shuttle buses, the pattern is clear: public resources are transformed into commodities, while citizens are stripped of access.

For ordinary people, these policies mean exclusion from landscapes that have been part of their cultural identity for centuries. Farmers, hikers, and villagers find themselves blocked from mountains, rivers, and temples unless they pay. Students see their campuses surrounded by barbed wire, resembling prisons rather than places of learning. Homeless citizens are fenced

out of bridges and underpasses, forced further into precarity.

Mount Tai's razor wire became a symbol of this broader reality: nature itself is being enclosed, controlled, and sold. The backlash shows that people are unwilling to accept such commercialization of their heritage.

Latest Data

- Mount Tai fencing project: 135 km of razor wire installed.
- Investment cost: 25.193 million yuan.
- Unauthorized entry points blocked: 800+.
- Removal status: 80% dismantled by July 2, remainder scheduled for clearance by July 10.
- Replacement plan: Infrared alarms, AI voice deterrence, expanded forest patrols.
- Ticket prices at other scenic sites: Hukou Waterfall – 100 yuan; Qinglouko Waterfall – 40 yuan toll for highway access.
- Low-altitude economy concession (Pingyin County, Shandong): 30-year rights sold for 900 million yuan, later halted.

Mount Tai's fencing scandal is more than a local controversy. It epitomizes the CCP's broader policies of enclosure, commercialization, and control. What should be shared national assets - mountains, rivers, and skies - are treated as commodities to be fenced, ticketed, and sold. The razor wire around Mount Tai may be dismantled, but the deeper issue remains: a system that prioritizes profit and control over public welfare.

Until transparency, accountability, and genuine respect for public resources are restored, China's natural heritage will remain under siege - not by nature, but by policy.

Sun Lee is a pseudonym for a writer who covers Asia and geopolitical affairs.



NO SAFE SHELTER

When Hla Hla Win heard her sentence — twenty-seven years in prison at age twenty-three — she did not collapse into disbelief. She recalibrated. “I decided that in politics, the way things change, I will be released. I know it clearly.” She would measure time day by day, not by the weight or the finality of that number. This instinct — to narrow her field of vision to what she could control — runs through her life as a seasoned reporter, political prisoner, and war correspondent.

Hla Hla Win’s career began in the wake of the 2007 Saffron Revolution. At the time, she was working as a teacher, but after having witnessed soldiers attack monks and civilians, she decided she “wanted to do something against this military,” and joined Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB). She had little formal training. “I was new in journalism, I didn’t know much,” she admits. What she had instead was proximity — she listened to monks who described killings in Pakokku and abuses by soldiers and police. But the footage she recorded was confiscated before she could upload it, and within days, she was arrested.

The interrogations were relentless. “For four nights I didn’t sleep,” she recalls referencing the security agents who demanded the location of DVB’s secret office in Yangon. Her method was simple: answer most questions truthfully, then lie just once. “They asked ten questions; I answered nine questions true, and then one is false... Because those nine questions are true, they didn’t know the one that is false.” To this day, Hla Hla Win radiates pride that no one in the Yangon office was arrested because of her.

Prison did not unfold as she had feared. After a stint in Insein, she was transferred north to Katha Prison. The physical conditions, she insists, were “good,” relative to what came later after the 2021 coup for those student activists and other unfortunate enough to land in the regime’s crosshairs. In fact, her entire prison experience resulted in a kind of psychological inversion. Before her arrest, she slept badly, always waiting for motorbikes to stop outside her door, and police to barge in. But in prison, strangely enough, she notes, “I slept every day and every night.” She read, taught other inmates’ children, and learned ethnic languages. “Depression was more frightening for me,” she adds, than confinement ever was. Ironically, the fear of imminent arrest had been worse than incarceration itself.

Released after two and a half years, Hla Hla Win declined invitations to rejoin the NLD Youth, as her prison time had focused her resolve. “If the government or the NLD party or other people make some mistake, I will report them,” she says. “Everyone!” Journalism, not party loyalty, was now her cause. Why? Because “media can change the world.”

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here:

<https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/7/6/episode-569-no-safe-shelter>



MYANMAR JUNTA REBUFF'S ASEAN CHAIR'S STATEMENT, DISMISSES CALL FOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S RELEASE

Myanmar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement on 8 August taking offence at the ASEAN Chair's "interference" in the incarceration of former leader Aung San Suu Kyi and calling for an end to the new Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair.

The following is the statement:

The meeting of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi with Mr. Arnaud de Baecque, Resident Representative of the ICRC was held on 3 August 2026. The said meeting was conducted in accordance with the existing laws and regulations of Myanmar, as well as the standards and procedures of the ICRC. Following the said meeting, it is learned that an ASEAN Chair's Statement was issued on 7 August 2026.

While Myanmar acknowledges the positive elements contained in the statement, it is disappointed to note that certain language and the calls contained therein do not reflect the constructive efforts undertaken by the Member State concerned. In particular, the calls for "further expansion of access to persons held in detention in Myanmar" and "Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's complete and unconditional release" carry implications for the relevant judicial process and the fundamental principles of the rule of law in a sovereign State. As she was found guilty of committing electoral fraud, corruption and maladministration, prosecution was carried out against her in accordance with the law. Although the government has commuted her sentences based on humanitarian considerations, the matter of a full and unconditional release shall only

be carried out in accordance with the law.

For the past five years, Myanmar has extended its cooperation with the successive Special Envoys of the ASEAN Chairs on Myanmar to the full extent possible, and will continue to cooperate with the current Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair. At present, the government, which emerged from the multiparty democratic elections reflecting the genuine will of the people has assumed State responsibility. Therefore, Myanmar is of the view that the appointment and the continued role of the new Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair are no longer necessary.

As a rules-based regional organization with sovereign States, ASEAN should continue to uphold the principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter, particularly respect for the principles of independence, sovereignty, equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of the ASEAN Member States. In addition, it is necessary for the ASEAN Member States to adhere to these principles while refraining from actions that could be tantamount to exerting undue pressure, or interference in the internal affairs of any Member State.

Myanmar will take appropriate countermeasures, on a case-by-case basis in response to the unconstructive and discriminatory treatment. In line with its Foreign Policy and based on the realities on the ground, Myanmar will continue to enhance its engagement with ASEAN through a Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-led approach while upholding and safeguarding its national interests and sovereignty.



Photo: Supplied

MYANMAR JUNTA CHIEF DRAWS ONLINE CRITICISM AFTER BANGKOK VISIT

Images of Myanmar military chief Min Aung Hlaing's red-carpet welcome in Bangkok dominated online discussion last week, as his two-day visit to Thailand on 6-7 August drew sharp criticism from social media users questioning whether the reception helps him gain political legitimacy.

Min Aung Hlaing, who led Myanmar's 2021 military coup, was sworn in as president in April. Thailand, pursuing what it calls "calibrated re-engagement," welcomed him with an honour guard at Government House and hosted him at a business forum with Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul.

On Facebook, some Myanmar users mocked the visit, with one saying the photos were meant to send the message "See? I'm normal," while another wrote "Everything is so rigged." Posts questioned whether Thailand's practical gains, such as cooperation

on migrant labour, were worth handing Min Aung Hlaing valuable images of international acceptance. Discussion also revived doubts over ASEAN's five-point peace plan.

During the welcome ceremony at parliament, an opposition Thai MP was removed after chanting for peace. Separately, migrant worker groups and Thai citizens protested outside the UN office in Bangkok, and Thai civil society organisations issued a joint statement opposing the visit.

Myanmar's military-backed government has been barred from ASEAN's top meetings since 2021 over stalled progress on the peace plan, making Bangkok's formal welcome a rare exception for a leader still shunned by much of the world.

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



DIGITAL MAGAZINE

Our relaunched magazine Mizzima Weekly provides readers with a more focused read on what matters in Myanmar and the wider region, with an emphasis on analysis, insight and providing key talking points.