

ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



'WE'RE THE SILO

**What the aid system owes Myanmar's civil society,
and what real solidarity would look like**

**Nearly Six Years On: What Is Going Well for Myanmar's
Revolution, What Is Not, and How to Do Better**

James Shwe

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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.

WASHINGTON'S MYANMAR GAMBLE OVER RARE EARTHS AND SCAM THREATS RISKS LEGITIMISING THE JUNTA

The Trump administration's renewed secret talks with Myanmar's military-backed rulers raise an uncomfortable question: is Washington pursuing a pragmatic foreign policy, or helping rehabilitate a regime whose legitimacy remains deeply contested?

Two rounds of discussions in a month, including meetings in Naypyidaw and Tokyo, the latest meeting reported by Reuters, mark a striking reversal of the US approach following the February 2021 military coup.

The latest engagement suggests that Washington is increasingly prepared to deal directly with the generals, despite their record of repression, the devastating civil war, continuing allegations of serious human rights abuses, and the fact that democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi remains incarcerated.

The immediate American priorities appear straightforward. Washington wants cooperation in shutting down scam centres responsible for defrauding Americans of billions of dollars, while also exploring access to Myanmar's valuable heavy rare earth deposits. These minerals are essential to technologies including electric vehicles and wind turbines, and reducing dependence on China has become a strategic priority for the United States.

Combating organised cybercrime is a legitimate objective. Myanmar's scam operations have inflicted enormous financial and personal damage, and international cooperation is essential to dismantling them. But there are serious questions about relying on a military-backed administration when researchers say many scam operations function in territories out of the direct control of the junta, with some funds flowing to the military.

Can Washington realistically expect the generals to dismantle networks connected to their own sphere of influence and income? Without independent verification, concrete enforcement measures and accountability, diplomatic promises risk becoming a substitute for

meaningful action.

The pursuit of rare earths presents an equally difficult challenge. Many deposits lie in territory controlled by ethnic armed organisations fighting the military, while China remains the principal buyer. Any American strategy built around access to these resources must confront the realities of Myanmar's fragmented territorial control rather than treating the country as though the junta commands it in its entirety.

More fundamentally, Washington risks allowing commercial and strategic interests to overshadow the democratic aspirations of Myanmar's people. Min Aung Hlaing remains under US sanctions over human rights abuses, his role in the coup and the military's persecution of the Rohingya. The armed forces have continued to wage a devastating war against resistance forces and civilians.

Dialogue is not inherently wrong. Governments must sometimes engage with unsavoury actors to secure practical results. But engagement without clear conditions can confer legitimacy on those who seized power by force.

Japan's tentative moves towards renewed cooperation add another dimension to this diplomatic shift. As Washington and Tokyo reassess their interests, they must not confuse access with influence, or negotiations with progress.

The test of American policy should be whether it delivers measurable benefits to ordinary people, advances accountability and supports a credible path towards democracy.

If the principal gains instead accrue to the military leadership and its commercial partners, Washington may find it has secured a transaction while undermining the very principles it once claimed to defend.

Chances are the Trump administration will not get far in Myanmar in obtaining rare earths or cracking down on scammers defrauding US citizens.

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Cover photo by José María Arraiza



Storm in Dala, Yangon, 2025.
Photo: José María Arraiza

'WE' ARE THE SILO: WHAT THE AID SYSTEM OWES MYANMAR'S CIVIL SOCIETY, AND WHAT REAL SOLIDARITY WOULD LOOK LIKE

JOSÉ MARÍA ARRAIZA

Myanmar's seafood restaurants are a never-ending party. People talk loudly over beer and cheap whisky, sweet-and-sour fried crab, watergrass and snail soup. Children run around, bumping into waiters who weave between mosquito traps.

A few years ago I was heading to one of my favourite Yangon seafood places, by Kandawgyi Lake, for dinner with colleagues from a UN office. They were not at the tables. A waiter led me to a "VIP room": because we were foreigners, someone (one of us or the staff) had set us apart, in air-conditioning. Inside sat a collection of expats from East and West, awkward at a work dinner.

One of them took a selfie to send to the head of the agency. Somebody made a nasty joke about it. I missed my Myanmar colleagues, who would have been far better company. I felt trapped in my privilege.

For a decade (formally since the 2016 Grand Bargain, in reality much longer), the aid world has talked about localisation and "breaking the silos" between humanitarian, development, human rights and peace work, and between agencies, clusters and taskforces. But the most tangible silo I know was at that dinner. Inside the VIP room, the expats. Outside, a silo called reality.

Who is "we"?

"We" are the humanitarian, development and peace expats: perhaps a dying breed. I was, and still feel like, one of them. I have seen things many wouldn't believe. Myself as the unlikely temporary administrator of a municipality in Kosovo. Windowless planes flying into scorched East Timor. The smoke of burning villages, people on the move, the infuriating sight of a malnourished child. People in Myanmar heading hopefully to the polls in November 2020, only for the military to seize power less than three months later. What I felt after the coup, Silvio Rodríguez calls *cristales molidos* in "Canción del elegido": ground glass turning in your head. Ethnic clashes on a bridge blocked by tanks. The distant thud of heavy machine guns and falling bombs.

That is the privilege that comes with the work: the moral kind, the one we put in our bios. Then there is the privilege the work comes with. I have mostly enjoyed the second. Protection conferences in five-star hotels. Beach bars in Cabo Delgado, their car parks full of white 4x4s with agency logos, a mile from the displacement camps. Expensive, stillborn strategies launched over lunch by Lake Como or at The Hague's Peace Palace. Expats reoccupying coveted colonial-era spaces in Jerusalem, Maputo, Khartoum and Yangon.

And then the things less spoken about: senior international staff banking leave, stretching lunches into the afternoon, flying business class between capitals

while national colleagues carry the operational weight. In my hometown, the municipal official you are looking for is often "having breakfast". In the UN, he is "on R&R". This is not a caricature. In Ukraine, Refugees International found that international staff cost five times as much as national staff, and 17 times as much as local NGO staff. Aid workers say this in private, but rarely in meetings.

The funding collapse that began with the dismantling of USAID in 2025 may cost "us" some of that privilege, lost like tears in rain. But the system's instinct for self-preservation has never been more visible: community-based approaches were "among the initiatives most affected by funding cuts", according to ALNAP's 2026 State of the Humanitarian System. The wars go on, and so does the suffering of the displaced.

A relationship without a name

Donor-partner relationships have a dynamic the sector rarely names. International organisations hold the money, the information and the terms. Local organisations must meet requirements designed elsewhere, report in formats and languages not their own, and follow priorities set by people who have never visited their communities. Push back, and they risk losing access. Conform, and they risk losing their purpose.



Jump: Photo: José María Arraiza

This has the structure of an abusive relationship: dependency, asymmetric power, the slow erosion of the weaker party's autonomy, and a public language of "partnership" masking private control. Myanmar civil society experts call some international partners sesame sprinklers: a Burmese expression for people who add needless flourishes to someone else's work to show off their own skill. Each sprinkle chips away at trust and signals that local knowledge counts for little.

Power is also information. When one Myanmar organisation asked an international intermediary managing multimillion-dollar funds about coordination, the meeting was short. It was told to go through the intermediary's partners, with no names or contacts given. The door shut.

Who are "them"?

Outside the international "we" there are, first, the powerholders. In Myanmar, that means the military that seized power in 2021 and, after staged elections in December 2025 and January 2026, installed coup leader Min Aung Hlaing as president in April 2026: a civilian façade over the same rule. Then there are the ethnic resistance organisations, many of them fighting the military on and off since 1948, and the resistance forces born after the coup. And then there are the civil society organisations of recent decades, largely treated as sub-contractors by UN agencies and international NGOs.

Even "local" is not neutral. Myanmar civil society researchers have documented how the term has

been stretched to cover state authorities, community groups and, increasingly, entities created by international agencies to tick the localisation box while keeping control of money and strategy. "Local" has become a position in the aid system rather than an identity: organisations count as local because they can navigate funding and compliance, not because they are rooted in communities. The deeply rooted but administratively light are filtered out.

Ten years after donors pledged, in the 2016 Grand Bargain, to channel a quarter of humanitarian funding "as directly as possible" to local and national responders, most of what reaches Myanmar's civil society still arrives second-hand: as sub-grants from INGOs, UN agencies and pooled funds, with overheads taken and conditions added at each layer. Local organisations are kept busy and valued for their capacity, but mostly to deliver emergency responses shaped by that funding. The risk is outsourced with the work: Myanmar ranks among the ten most dangerous places to deliver aid, though many attacks on local responders there are never recorded.

What international solidarity actually requires

Watching the international order and its "responsibility to protect" being dismantled, from Ukraine to Gaza and Sudan, I began supporting Myanmar civil society organisations pro bono while scouting for consultancies to pay the bills at home. Side by side with



In Mya Nyi Gone in 2025.
Photo: José Maria Arraiza.

them, I came to understand the precariousness and disenfranchisement they face daily, so unlike the safety net international staff take for granted. UN bodies, including the very pooled funds meant to reach local responders, often answered our requests with silence. Many of these organisations are now contemplating closing down. All this while the UN counts 16.2 million people in need in 2026, a third of the Myanmar population, and over four million displaced.

I had seen another way before. In 2015, a year before the World Humanitarian Summit put localisation on the agenda, I moved to Myanmar to help isolated communities obtain civil documentation. The national staff were extraordinarily knowledgeable and committed; the expats came and went, absorbed in internal power struggles. I was lucky to be posted to Dawei, in Tanintharyi, an almost expat-free zone where I saw national organisations fight to protect farmers from land grabs. The efforts were imperfect but sincere, and they showed me that a different way of working is possible. Later, when I worked remotely for a UN agency, the contrast was sharp: the further from the field, the more the system revolved around itself. Meanwhile, the protection that actually reached villages was being delivered by civil society organisations.

Talking about localisation while not funding or trusting national actors is the central dishonesty this piece names. Myanmar civil society is asking for concrete things:

- Quality, multi-year, flexible funding that reaches them directly;
- real seats where priorities are set, not consultations after the fact;
- genuine risk-sharing, instead of pushing security and legal risks downwards;
- transparency about where decisions are made and where money flows.

In Myanmar, solidarity must not be co-opted by a military now dressed as a civilian government, nor consumed by the institutions delivering it.

Myanmar's civil society researchers put it plainly: real partnership is not an optional extra of development; democracy depends on it. Without it, Myanmar's civil society organisations will remain implementers in a system that needs them as strategists and as the voice of the people it claims to serve. There is only one useful strategy going forward: support national actors, and hold international ones accountable, using them only when necessary. The door of the VIP room has to be opened from the inside.

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



Melancholy of a fisherwoman in 2018.
Photo: José María Arraiza

ANALYSIS & INSIGHT



Min Aung Hlaing on a visit to Cambodia.
Photo: AFP

MIN AUNG HLAING'S LEGITIMACY GAMBLE

Since assuming Myanmar's presidency in April 2026, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has pursued an intensive diplomatic campaign, visiting neighbouring, regional and international partners in an apparent effort to overcome years of isolation following the 2021 coup. However, although these visits have expanded diplomatic engagement and economic cooperation, they have not resolved questions about his political legitimacy or Myanmar's continuing conflict.

His first foreign visit as president was to India from May 30 to June 3, followed by China from June 15 to 19 and Laos from July 3 to 5. He subsequently visited Thailand on August 6–7, Russia and Belarus from August 17–23, Vietnam from September 4–6, Cambodia from September 11–12 and Malaysia on October 7–8. The sequence demonstrates an effort to strengthen bilateral relations while seeking a pathway back into regional diplomacy.

The visits have produced discussions and agreements covering trade, investment, security, infrastructure and cultural cooperation. During his Vietnam visit, seven memorandums of understanding were reportedly signed, while his Cambodia visit resulted

in four agreements, including arrangements concerning double taxation, investment protection, culture, and media and information cooperation. In Thailand, he attended an economic forum and promoted increased bilateral trade and investment. These engagements offer the military-backed administration opportunities to attract investment and present itself as a functioning government.

China and Russia remain particularly important to the junta's international position. Beijing has supported engagement with Myanmar's new administration, emphasising stability, border security, economic cooperation and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor. China also has strategic interests in protecting its investments and infrastructure projects. Russia, meanwhile, has maintained close political and military relations with Myanmar. Min Aung Hlaing's August visit included meetings with President Vladimir Putin and other senior officials, reinforcing a relationship that provides diplomatic and military support. However,

neither country's engagement alone resolves the broader question of domestic political legitimacy.

ASEAN presents a more complicated challenge. Min Aung Hlaing's repeated visits to Southeast Asian countries suggest an effort to restore Myanmar's regional standing, but member states remain divided over how to respond to the military-backed administration and its failure to make meaningful progress on ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus. Thailand's decision to host him for an official visit marked a significant opening. Nevertheless, Thai officials stressed that engagement should not automatically be interpreted as recognition of the legitimacy of his presidency. Reuters and other international reporting have described the visit as part of his campaign to gain international acceptance.

Min Aung Hlaing's October visit to Malaysia further exposed the tension between diplomatic engagement and human rights concerns. Discussions focused on the



The Myanmar junta is continuing to look for cannon fodder for the frontlines. Photo: AFP

repatriation of Myanmar nationals, with approximately 1,500 people returned in the first phase aboard three Myanmar naval vessels. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights condemned the visit, warning that receiving Min Aung Hlaing could legitimise military rule and that returns could expose vulnerable people to further danger.

The National Unity Government (NUG) has likewise criticised governments that prioritise their national interests while engaging with the junta. Political analysts argue that Vietnam and China share an interest in regional stability, although Hanoi also remains attentive to Beijing's growing influence in Myanmar.

Ultimately, Min Aung Hlaing's diplomatic campaign has achieved greater access to foreign leaders and created opportunities for economic and security cooperation. Yet diplomatic meetings, trade agreements and official ceremonies are not equivalent to broad international recognition. His central challenge remains converting bilateral engagement into wider regional acceptance while the civil war continues and ASEAN's political divisions on the Myanmar question remain unresolved.

Junta continues its military conscription drive

Myanmar's military junta continues to rely on compulsory conscription to replenish its manpower amid ongoing battles across the country. While the military has completed 26 batches of conscripts, with an estimated total of around 130,000 recruits, the programme is reportedly exposing young people to forced recruitment, rapid frontline deployment and alleged extortion by pro-junta networks.

The 27th to 29th batches are currently undergoing the conscription process, with approximately 5,000 recruits in each batch. The 27th batch is expected to complete its training this month. Meanwhile, junta-controlled media have reported that conscripts from the first four batches completed their military service, with their training periods ending in October 2024. However, these reports do not establish how many recruits have actually been discharged or how long they subsequently served.

Under the conscription law and its regulations, recruits are supposed to be assigned to military units near their respective hometowns. In practice, however, reports indicate that many conscripts are deployed directly to frontline areas, sometimes without spending significant time at their designated units. The military's growing dependence on conscripts has become particularly apparent in active battlefields, including Rakhine State.

A recent report that a conscript died at the frontline just 10 days after being promoted to lance corporal has drawn attention to the dangers facing newly recruited soldiers. Although the circumstances require further verification, the case illustrates concerns about the speed at which inexperienced personnel may be exposed to combat.

Two conscripts who defected from the Kyaukphyu battlefield to the Arakan Army (AA) recently described their experiences, according to reports. The two men said they had been recruited after being apprehended while commuting to work in Yangon. They alleged that authorities used a fabricated drug-related case as a threat to pressure them into accepting military service.

According to their accounts, they underwent three months of basic training followed by one month of refresher training. After spending only around two weeks at their designated military unit, they were sent to the frontline in Sane, Kyaukphyu. They reportedly experienced discrimination from permanent soldiers and severe hardships in combat. One recruit said he had attempted to escape during training but was recaptured and beaten. Reports that some conscripts have attempted suicide or deliberately injured themselves to avoid frontline deployment point to the extreme pressures some recruits may face, although the scale of such incidents remains unclear.

Beyond forced recruitment itself, alleged extortion has become another source of insecurity for young people and their families. In Yangon, pro-junta individuals reportedly target young men returning home from work, abducting them in vehicles and

concealing their identities with black bags. Families are then contacted and asked to pay money for their relatives' release, with payments reportedly arranged at ward administrators' houses.

These allegations suggest that conscription has created opportunities for networks to profit from young people's fear of military service. For families, refusing to pay may mean risking the loss of a relative to forced recruitment, while paying offers no guarantee of protection from future targeting.

As the junta continues to recruit thousands of people in successive batches, the central issue is no longer simply how many conscripts it can mobilize. It is whether forced recruitment can sustainably address the military's manpower shortages when recruits face frontline deployment, alleged mistreatment and a growing climate of fear among civilians.

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NEARLY SIX YEARS ON: WHAT IS GOING WELL FOR MYANMAR'S REVOLUTION, WHAT IS NOT, AND HOW TO DO BETTER

JAMES SHWE



Myanmar's Spring Revolution is approaching its sixth year. Among its supporters, frustration is growing louder: "The leadership is weak." "They sit abroad and issue statements." Since Washington opened direct talks with the generals, some fear the revolution has been abandoned. Others insist that victory is near. Neither despair nor cheerleading helps us see clearly. What is needed is an objective assessment of what is going well and what is not, and an honest discussion of how to do better.

That assessment must begin with where the leadership started. Most of its leaders were lawmakers, doctors, students, business owners and activists. None had prepared to confront an army with air power, artillery, a national treasury and a diplomatic network, and they began with almost no weapons, money or experience. Acknowledging this does not excuse weakness; it is where fair assessment begins.

The Yardstick

The first yardstick is a clear grasp of the goal. Democracy means more than elections or the absence of a dictator. Its essence is the rule of law, the separation of powers, the protection of minorities and civilian control of the armed forces. Federal democracy goes further. Sovereignty is shared by constitution between the Union and the states, a principle the SCEF has formally adopted (NUG). A confederation is different again: its sovereign units keep most of their powers and delegate only limited matters. People who miss these distinctions misread ethnic allies' demands as "secession" and dismiss negotiations among allies as "a waste of time."

The second yardstick is that the revolution is fought on many fronts at once. Supporters celebrate a captured town but dismiss diplomacy as "just talk," yet every war ends in politics. The military, political, diplomatic, administrative and narrative fronts become real strength only when they reinforce one another, and the revolution must be judged across all of them.

What Is Going Well

The first achievement is endurance, and the ground it has won. The junta expected to crush resistance within months. Nearly six years later, it has lost 14 of Rakhine's 17 townships to the Arakan Army (Fortify Rights).

The second is progress toward strategic coherence. In March, the NUG, CRPH, KIO, KNU, KNPP and CNF formed the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) (NUG). It has not stayed on paper. It has appointed a joint military coordination leadership, and the Sagaing and Mandalay interim administrations have joined it (DVB). Abroad, it has briefed diplomats from 24 countries in Bangkok (NUG MFA) and the US Congress in April (DVB) and July (BRI). It has also met Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong (CRPH Support Group). Every delegation has brought the NUG and ethnic organizations together, presenting the revolution as a federal alliance.

The third is that the legitimacy front has held. On October 9, after the junta had convened its new parliament, the Inter-Parliamentary Union decided to keep recognizing the CRPH as its interlocutor (CRPH). ASEAN still bars Min Aung Hlaing from its summits, Singapore maintains that the Five-Point Consensus

remains valid, and Timor-Leste has initiated legal proceedings over war crimes (The Straits Times). These positions, held without firing a shot, show the value of the fronts dismissed as "just talk."

The fourth is that Washington's own record undercuts the junta's pitch. On September 15, the very day a senior US diplomat met Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw, the President's counternarcotics determination named Myanmar one of four countries that had "failed demonstrably" to meet their obligations (State Department). The House passed the BRAVE Burma Act unanimously (Congress.gov). A bipartisan group of senators has introduced it in the Senate, where it targets the jet fuel that sustains the air campaign (Senator Bennet).

What Is Not Going Well

The first problem is a weak ability to turn military gains into lasting results. Under Chinese pressure, the MNDAA handed Lashio, the biggest prize of Operation 1027, back to the junta (The Diplomat). Capturing territory is not enough. A victory lasts only when the ground can be held, governed and diplomatically protected.

The second is the inability to defend against air attack. A UN report counted 657 aerial attacks in 100 days and at least 8,302 civilians killed since the coup (The New York Times). On September 28, a strike on Kyauktaw market killed at least 50 civilians (Fortify Rights). The UN Secretary-General, the EU and the UK condemned it (Reuters). Yet on October 11 and 12, the air force launched 30 strikes on villages in Sagaing's Wetlet Township and destroyed the memorial buildings of the Mahasi monastery in Shwebo, killing at least five civilians (DVB). Condemnations have not stopped the bombs. Objectivity also requires noting that the UN human rights chief cited abuses against the Rohingya by the Arakan Army as well as the military (UN News). The revolution's moral legitimacy rests on accountability on its own side, not only on exposing the enemy's brutality.

The third is that the junta's legitimacy campaign is gaining ground. Min Aung Hlaing has visited five ASEAN states, and about half the bloc is normalizing ties (The Business Times). Malaysia received him with anthems and a guard of honour (Bernama) while denying that this meant recognition (The Star). This is not naivety but calculated ambiguity: denial in words, recognition in conduct. The Lowy Institute's Hunter Marston called the visit a form of de facto recognition,

while ISEAS's Moe Thuzar warned that dialogue must not come at the expense of compliance and accountability (CNA). The visit was also tied to returns. Some 1,476 Myanmar nationals were shipped home from detention on September 29, without UNHCR being able to assess whether their choice was free, and Malaysia has not disclosed their ethnic composition (DVB). Foreign Policy's Southeast Asia columnist now "leans toward yes" on whether Myanmar is on the path to normalization with ASEAN (Foreign Policy). The yardstick for progress has quietly shifted from less bombing to more visits.

Washington's contact, however, should not be read the same way as ASEAN's state visits, because its setting, purpose and substance differ. There was no guard of honour: a senior US official met Min Aung Hlaing in September on a narrow mission to free the American businessman Adam Castillo, though Reuters has since reported direct talks on scam centers and minerals. One source said Naypyidaw asked in return for official US engagement "at the appropriate level" (Asia Times). As the Myanmar democracy activist Nicholas Kong notes, the two cases are not identical, but a limited purpose can still open the way to wider accommodation without reciprocal progress (CRPH Support Group). Contact is not recognition, and no sanctions relief or minerals deal has been shown to follow. Nor is the West one bloc: the EU and the UK condemned the Kyauktaw bombing (Reuters), and in Washington, Representative Gregory Meeks called the shift "contrary to both our values and our interests" (Asia Times).

Our own side's visits must be weighed just as objectively. The meeting with Australia's foreign minister was the highest-level of them, yet Canberra issued no statement (LuduNwayOo). In Pattaya, SCEF members were invited one by one rather than as a body (CRPH Support Group). Having doors opened is not the same as being recognized as a collective interlocutor.

The fourth is incomplete unity. The Three Brotherhood Alliance is still outside the SCEF (Asia Times), and the Arakan Army, whose leader has described its goal as a confederation (DVB), is not a member. Yet that preference should be read alongside a warming relationship. The AA and the SCEF met online on July 23 and October 8 (MoeMaKa), and the AA's deputy commander-in-chief opened the Spring Revolution Alliance's September conference alongside the SCEF's representative (DMG). A federal union flexible enough to combine different degrees of

autonomy could accommodate that aspiration (Lowy Institute). Until these ties are formalized, outside powers such as China can still pressure each group separately.

The fifth lies with the public. Supporting only the military front and blaming leaders at every setback deepen the revolution's weaknesses. Leaders widen the gap when they fail to explain what their diplomacy achieves.

How to Do Better

For the leadership, the first task is to turn the SCEF from a coordinating structure into a force that acts on common plans. It should bring in the Three Brotherhood Alliance and the Arakan Army as members or firm allies, on terms flexible enough to respect different degrees of self-government, and speak with one voice abroad. Working services in held territory are the strongest answer to the fear that "without the junta there will be chaos." Washington wants Myanmar's rare earths, but most mining areas are held by ethnic armed groups (Thairath). On such issues, the resistance must show that no one can bypass it.

The second is to keep demanding that governments' engagement be measured by results. After every visit, we must ask whether the bombing has decreased and whether any prisoner has been freed. No new yardstick is needed. Singapore already insists on a durable ceasefire, prisoner releases and unhindered humanitarian corridors before normalization, and the 2008 ASEAN Charter commits members to democracy, the rule of law and human rights (The Jakarta Post). The revolution is not asking ASEAN to adopt new values, only to honour commitments it has already signed. Using the IPU decision, lawmakers in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines can hold their governments to those commitments. These benchmarks should reach them before the 49th ASEAN Summit in Manila in November. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights has already urged Malaysia to suspend further returns and stop inviting Min Aung Hlaing (DMG). The thresholds that still carry weight are the ASEAN summit seat, UN credentials and sanctions relief, and every high-level visit should be paired with a verified record of what happened on the ground afterward (DVB).

The third is discipline in our own advocacy: one agreed ask, carried by many credible messengers, with the direction set by the leadership inside the country. Advocates should separate fact from analysis and forecast. Predictions of imminent collapse that do not

come true, and claims that every diplomatic contact amounts to recognition, cost us credibility with the very officials we need to persuade (DVB).

The fourth is to measure our own visits by the same yardstick. Every meeting should carry specific asks, such as restricting jet fuel, cross-border humanitarian aid and admitting the SCEF as a body to every dialogue. Afterward, the public should be told what was achieved; honest briefings build more trust than victory announcements. In the United States, the most practical step with a direct bearing on the air campaign is asking senators to bring the BRAVE Burma Act to a vote.

For the public, the most important question is: "What am I actually contributing?" It begins with refusing both panic and complacency. Overdramatizing every setback does the propagandists' work for them, because demoralization, division and falling donations are exactly what the junta seeks. Beyond that, contribution need not be grand. It can start with learning the difference between democracy, federalism and confederation and explaining it to family and friends. It also means checking sources before sharing, refusing words that sow suspicion among allies and ethnic communities, and supporting displaced people, schools and clinics. Even criticism of the leadership, offered to improve rather than to tear down, is a form of participation.

A Warning and a Hope

Assessed objectively, the revolution is neither losing nor on the verge of victory. It has gained ground, built a structure for unity and held the legitimacy front. But it cannot yet defend against air attack or respond collectively to outside pressure, and governments' calculations are tilting toward the junta. The window is narrowing. If leaders cannot unify the fronts, or the public looks only to the battlefield, the war will drag on, civilians will pay the highest price and the junta's "civilian government" narrative will harden.

Yet understanding the basics does not mean abandoning hope. It means building hope on solid ground. People who began with almost nothing have endured for nearly six years. Turning that endurance into victory requires strategic coherence from the leaders and maturing understanding among the people, and each of us, inside and outside the country, has a role in it.



The late Václav Havel. Photo: Forum 2000

5 BIG IDEAS FROM FORUM 2000

"Simply being aware of problems is not enough—what also matters is the willingness of individuals and society to take responsibility for addressing them." — Jakub Klepal, Executive Director of the Forum 2000 Foundation

Thirty years after the first Forum 2000 Conference, more than 800 participants gathered in Prague under the title Reimagining the Power of the Powerless. Held in the year of the 90th anniversary of Václav Havel's birth, the conference returned to one of his central convictions: people who appear powerless can reshape societies when they refuse resignation and assume responsibility.

Across the conference, participants considered what this responsibility demands amid authoritarian pressure, geopolitical rivalry, war, and technological disruption. Their discussions pointed to five sources of democratic agency: the courage to live in truth, a stronger Europe within a rebalanced transatlantic alliance, democratic control over artificial intelligence, new forms of mobilization led by Generation Z, and the collective influence of small states. Together, these ideas suggest that democratic power is not simply held by governments or institutions. It is built when citizens and states choose to act.

1. HAVEL'S LEGACY: THE COURAGE TO LIVE IN TRUTH

"Change begins at the moment a person refuses to accept a lie as the norm and stops saying, 'That does not concern me,'" - Miloš Vystrčil, President of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic.

Nearly five decades after Václav Havel wrote *The Power of the Powerless*, the conference revisited his ideas and considered how they could be put into practice in a world once again shaped by authoritarianism, fear, and resignation.

Havel understood that oppressive systems are sustained not only by those who rule, but also by the everyday compromises of those who feel powerless to resist. For Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, leader of the Belarusian democratic opposition, living in truth is neither abstract nor romantic. The struggle for freedom, she reminded participants, is paved with "tears, suffering, and the sacrifice of ordinary people

who quietly do what is right, without any certainty of success." Living in truth means refusing to regard injustice as normal, dictatorship as permanent, or change as impossible.

Courage, however, must be joined by responsibility. "Havel symbolizes not only courage, but also a call to responsibility," noted Michael Žantovský, former Executive Director of the Václav Havel Library. Carl Gershman, Founding President of the National Endowment for Democracy, recalled another Havelian insight: even a moral act with no immediate or visible political effect can gradually acquire political significance. The powerless become powerful through accumulated acts of truth, responsibility, and solidarity.

Havel's legacy is therefore not a monument to the past, but a method for confronting the present. Democracy needs more than people who admire his courage. It needs people prepared to practice it—and to accept responsibility for the consequences of their words and actions.

2. A REBALANCED ALLIANCE MEANS A STRONGER EUROPE

"Without credible security and defense, there is no democracy. And it also works the other way around, because democracy underpins security and defense." — Benedetta Berti, Secretary General of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly

Recent tensions have prompted questions about the future of transatlantic relations. Yet the message

emerging from the conference was neither rupture nor a return to the old status quo. The partnership will endure, but with a different distribution of responsibilities and a stronger European pillar.

Dalia Grybauskaitė, former President of Lithuania, acknowledged that unpredictability from partners initially came as a shock. "But now it has made us stronger," she said. "It has made us stronger in defense and in our self-confidence. It teaches us how much we can do ourselves." Alexandr Vondra, Member of the European Parliament, reached a similar conclusion: NATO will survive, but the balance of power and responsibility within it must shift.

Ukraine is central to that transformation. Roderich Kiesewetter, Member of the German Bundestag, argued that Europe must say clearly that "Ukraine must win and Russia must leave Ukrainian soil." Europeans are not neutral intermediaries in this conflict. They must support Ukraine and pave the way for its membership in the European Union and NATO. Ukraine's battle-tested military capabilities should ultimately become part of Europe's defense architecture.

This rebalancing should strengthen rather than weaken the alliance. A Europe with greater political will, military capacity, and confidence would be better equipped to contribute to collective security and sustain cooperation with the United States. As Tawakkol Karman, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Yemeni human rights advocate, argued, "The international order has been destroyed, and the European Union should fill



Democracy activist Igor Blazevic speaking during the Forum 2000 Conference. Photo: Mizzima

the vacuum. The world needs European power and credibility." Europe's task is to develop that power while preserving the democratic values that give it legitimacy.

3. AI: THE NEW INFRASTRUCTURE OF POWER

"Technology should strengthen human freedom and resilience, not diminish our autonomy or place decisions about our future beyond meaningful public control." — Petr Pavel, President of the Czech Republic

Artificial intelligence was not confined to a technology panel. It surfaced in discussions about Generation Z, SLAPPs, elections, security, warfare, and geopolitical competition. Its near-constant presence conveyed one of the conference's clearest messages: AI is becoming part of the infrastructure through which power is exercised and contested.

Yuval Noah Harari, historian and Distinguished Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk at the University of Cambridge, warned that AI is more than another instrument for producing disinformation. Earlier forms of propaganda competed for mass attention. AI can create what he called "mass intimacy": individualized relationships through which political and commercial actors can understand, influence, and manipulate people at scale.

For journalists, activists, and public-interest organizations, AI presents both opportunities and risks. It can help analyze information, expose disinformation, and document human rights violations. It can also

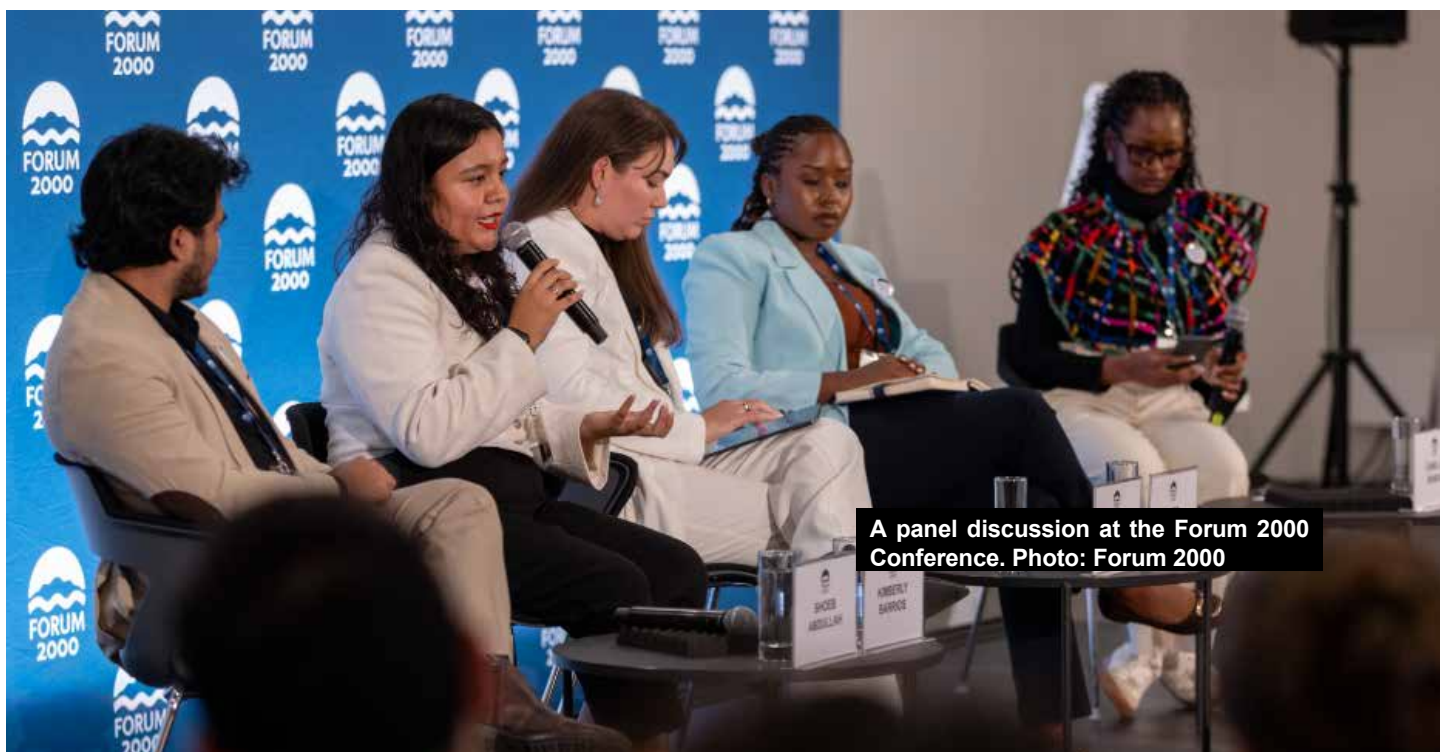
enable surveillance, generate convincing fabrications, and erode the shared trust in facts that democracy requires.

The geopolitical consequences are equally significant. "The US and China are leading the AI race. Everybody else is on the menu; they are not at the table," Harari warned. "And if they want to do something about it, they have to come together." Countries unable to develop or govern their technological infrastructure risk becoming dependent on decisions made elsewhere. Smaller democracies will therefore need international cooperation to retain meaningful influence.

This outcome is not inevitable. "The most basic safeguard is politics," Harari argued, rejecting the message that the AI revolution has already moved beyond democratic control. Governments can still require transparency and accountability, protect vulnerable groups, and ensure that people know when they are interacting with machines. The decisive question is whether citizens will retain the power to determine who controls AI, whom it serves, and where its limits lie.

4. SMALL STATES ARE NOT POWERLESS

"Multilateral organizations need to become more effective. We need strong and efficient international institutions." — Luis Abinader, President of the Dominican Republic



A panel discussion at the Forum 2000 Conference. Photo: Forum 2000

For small states, effective multilateral institutions represent an essential protection. As the international order becomes increasingly multipolar, smaller countries risk being confined to the spheres of influence of more powerful states. Yet the discussions at Forum 2000 challenged the assumption that size determines agency. Rules, institutions, and international cooperation allow smaller countries to defend their sovereignty and influence decisions that they could not shape alone.

That capacity also depends on democratic resilience at home. Abinader warned that corruption can become “a cancer for democracies”: elections alone cannot protect freedom when institutions are weak or the judiciary lacks independence. A state’s ability to act internationally begins with public trust, respect for the rule of law, and institutions capable of resisting internal and external pressure.

Small states can also expand their room for maneuver by avoiding dependence on any one power. Armen Grigoryan, former Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia, described how his country reduced the share of its arms purchases from Russia from 96 percent to less than 10 percent. His conclusion extended beyond defense: monopolies are dangerous not only in markets, but also in international relations. Diversification is therefore more than a diplomatic preference; it is a way of protecting sovereignty.

Regional integration can turn national agency into collective influence. Milo Đukanović, former President of Montenegro, pointed to European Union enlargement as one of Europe’s most successful policies, while warning that formal progress toward accession cannot substitute for democratic development. Luis Almagro, former Secretary General of the Organization of American States, added that cooperation must remain grounded in principles and a moral purpose.

Small states may lack the military and economic weight of larger powers, but they are not powerless. Strong institutions, diversified partnerships, regional cooperation, and an effective rules-based order can give them the collective capacity to shape their own future.

5. GEN Z: REDEFINING DEMOCRATIC POWER

“Young people do not necessarily want to belong to a single NGO or political party. They want to be part of change.” — Kimberly Barrios, Vice President and Co-

Founder, Network of Young Artists for Social Justice, Guatemala

From Africa and Latin America to Serbia, Bangladesh, and India, Generation Z has become a consequential force for democratic change. Digitally connected and skeptical of traditional organizations, young people are not withdrawing from public life. They are finding new ways to enter it.

In Africa, where young people represent a large share of the population, their democratic role is already visible. “Youth are leaders, organizers, funders, and so many other things,” said Anita Soina, Founder of the Soina Foundation and member of Democratic Solidarity Africa. Yet, as Shoeb Abdullah, Executive Director of Activate Rights in Bangladesh, observed, political infrastructure was built by others, not by young people. Gen Z therefore often mobilizes outside parties and established NGOs, through informal networks, digital communities, and art.

Myanmar shows what this resistance can demand. The 2026 Forum 2000 International Award for Courage and Responsibility honored the General Strike Coordination Body and activists Tayzar San, Nan Lin, and Htet Myat Aung. Their networks have continued to organize under extreme repression; Htet Myat Aung was tortured and sentenced to 37 years in prison. Their example shows that this generation can do more than mobilize quickly: it can sustain solidarity and keep a democratic movement alive at extraordinary personal cost.

The challenge is to turn mobilization into lasting democratic influence. Youth movements remain vulnerable to repression, exhaustion, internet shutdowns, and the loss of momentum after protests end. They need flexible funding, protection, intergenerational cooperation, and a genuine role in decision-making. The future of democracy may depend on whether established institutions are prepared to trust young people not only to protest, but also to organize and lead.

KIM ARIS CALLS TO FREE HIS MOTHER, AUNG SAN SUU KYI, AT THE 30TH FORUM 2000 CONFERENCE IN PRAGUE



Kim Aris at the event. Photo: Mizzima

The son of Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi Kim Aris spoke at the Forum 2000 today on 12 October in Prague calling on the Myanmar authorities to free his mother, who has been jailed for over five years.

The 30th Forum 2000 Conference is being held from 11 to 13 October in the capital of the Czech Republic focused on issues of democracy and human rights, including recognition of Myanmar nationals fighting for freedom for their benighted country that was illegally seized in a military coup in 2021. Aung San Suu Kyi was arrested on the day of the coup and is currently jailed for 18 years under trumped up charges. She is 81.

At a time when democracy is under pressure from both external authoritarianism and internal weakening,

the Forum 2000 conference seeks to identify practical ways to build a renewed global democratic architecture.

Mr Aris took to the stage to highlight the campaign he is running entitled "Free Her" which is calling for the Myanmar authorities to allow her family to visit her, release her unconditionally, and calls for the release of all political prisoners in Myanmar.

The following is what he had to say:

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, friends of freedom and democracy. It is a profound honour to stand before you today on this auspicious occasion, one that marks two milestones - what would have been (Czech) President Václav Havel's 90th birthday and the 30th anniversary of Forum 2000 Foundation.

It has been 13 years since my mother addressed this forum, 13 years during which Burma experienced a vivid taste of progress, hope and freedom under a fledgling democracy, only to witness the military brutalise our nation and strip those hard-won freedoms away.

Following the 2021 military coup, Burma has been locked in a devastating civil war and its democratically elected leadership, including my mother, has been imprisoned. When I was 12, I was with her when she was first put under house arrest. Even after I returned to England, I at least knew where she was.

But over the past five years, her exact location has been hidden and for a long time we could not even be certain that she was alive. Yet, standing here in Prague today, I am reminded of what my mother said when she addressed this forum in 2013. She spoke movingly of President Havel's commitment to living in truth and love.

She shared how, during her long years of house arrest, President Havel made her feel free because he was free and because he never stopped speaking out for her. Every single year, despite knowing she was unable to reply, President Havel faithfully sent her an invitation to Forum 2000, a symbolic monument of global solidarity. Reading Havel's words taught my mother that the ultimate freedom is the ability to live in truth.

When she spoke here, she delivered another type of truth - that democracy can never rely on single, iconic individuals. It requires robust institutions, the

rule of law, and above all, the collective responsibility of its citizens.

Today, as Forum 2000 asks us to reimagine the power of the powerless, we see that truth unfolding in Burma. Ordinary citizens, especially Generation Z, have picked up the democratic mantle. They are not waiting for a saviour, they are claiming their own future.

Building on the strength forged during those precious years of nascent democracy, they are charting their own civic agency. They are uniting, organising, innovating, and refusing to surrender the taste of democracy and the freedoms they grew up with. The regime commands weapons, but they do not command the future.

The overwhelming will of the Burmese people is not to retreat into the shadows of military rule, but to build a genuine, inclusive federal democracy rooted in true representation, equal rights, and justice for all ethnic communities.

In the spirit of President Havel, we continue to live in truth. The struggle in Burma is long and painful, and your continued support on the global stage is vital as the spirit of personal responsibility takes root in our people, ensuring that fundamental freedoms and federal democracy will prevail.

Thank you.



PRESIDENT-ELECT OF BELARUS SAYS 'DICTATORS CAN'T BE APPEASED' AT FORUM 2000 CONFERENCE

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, President-elect of Belarus and Head of the United Transitional Cabinet, had an important message to say at the opening ceremony of the 30th Forum 2000 Conference in Prague on 11 October.

"We must learn a very simple truth: dictators can't be appeased. And when you do that – you only strengthen them," she said.

"Believe me, dictators don't want peace, because war it's what fuels their regimes, justify terror, and keep them in power.

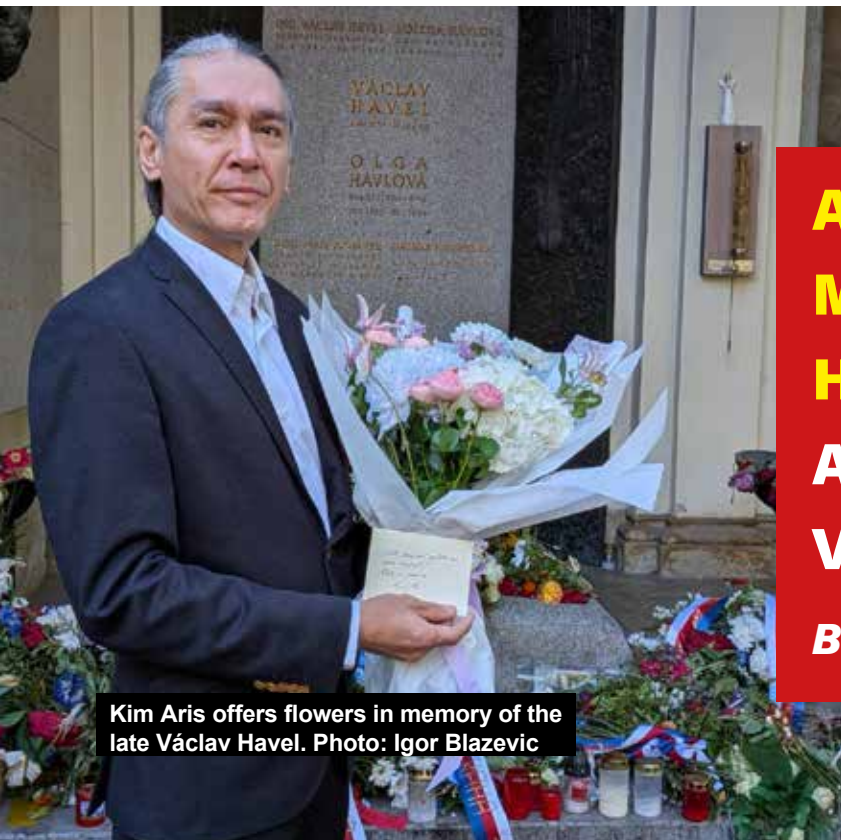
"Dictators understand only the language of strength. And it is high time for democracy to show its teeth.

"Not to prolong the war. But to force Putin into real negotiations to bring real and lasting peace.

"While we isolate dictators, we must never forget the people — those doing the invisible, daily work that keeps our societies alive.

"Journalists who tell the truth. Activists who build communities. Human rights defenders who document crimes. Artists who protect our identity.

"When regimes try to silence them, we must make their voices louder."



Kim Aris offers flowers in memory of the late Václav Havel. Photo: Igor Blazevic

A SON HONOURS THE MAN WHO STOOD BY HIS MOTHER – KIM ARIS PAYS TRIBUTE TO VÁCLAV HAVEL

BY IGOR BLAZEVIC

In 2013, Aung San Suu Kyi came to Prague to honour Václav Havel. Thirteen years later, her son followed in her footsteps

On Wednesday morning, October 14, Kim Aris, the son of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, took time out of his busy programme in Prague, where he was attending the 30th Forum 2000 Conference, to visit the grave of the late Czech President Václav Havel.

Kim laid flowers on Havel's grave and paid tribute to a man who had been one of his mother's most devoted friends and supporters, and one of the most steadfast international champions of Myanmar's struggle for democracy.

There is a moving story behind this simple gesture.

Václav Havel and Aung San Suu Kyi shared an extraordinary friendship, although they never met in person.

Their friendship began in 1991, when Havel, who had emerged from decades of resistance to communist dictatorship to become the first president of a democratic Czechoslovakia, nominated Aung San Suu Kyi for the Nobel Peace Prize.

At the time, Havel himself was widely regarded as a deserving candidate for the prize. But he believed that the international recognition would be more valuable to Aung San Suu Kyi and the people of Burma, whose

struggle for freedom was far from over.

She received the Nobel Peace Prize that year.

But Havel's solidarity did not end there. For the next two decades, until his death in December 2011, he remained a tireless advocate for her freedom, for Burma's political prisoners, and for the country's democratic movement.

He wrote letters, mobilized international support, appealed to world leaders, and repeatedly demanded her release. Every year, he invited Aung San Suu Kyi to attend the Forum 2000 Conference in Prague, even though he knew that, while under house arrest, she would not be allowed to come.

Those invitations were not merely symbolic gestures. They were a way of telling her that she had not been forgotten, that she was not alone, and that her struggle remained the struggle of people who believed in freedom and human dignity around the world.

And she never forgot that friendship.

When Aung San Suu Kyi finally came to Prague in September 2013 and delivered the keynote address at the Forum 2000 Conference, almost two years after

Havel's death, she spoke movingly about what his friendship had meant to her during her long years of isolation.

"When I was under house arrest I knew that here was a man speaking for me. He made me feel free," she told the audience.

She also recalled how she had first learned about Havel and Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution in 1989, listening to a small portable radio while she herself was under house arrest in Rangoon.

She followed with excitement the extraordinary events that transformed a communist dictatorship into a democracy and turned a former political prisoner and dissident into the country's president.

Little did she know then that this man, thousands of kilometres away, would become one of her closest and most loyal friends.

Their friendship was built not on personal encounters but on shared values, mutual respect, and a profound understanding of what it means to resist dictatorship.

As she beautifully put it: "There are no better friends than those with whom we share the same values."

There is also a touching story about Havel's wish to meet Aung San Suu Kyi. In 2005, he wrote that he hoped one day to meet her in person and present her with a rose, like the one she was holding in a photograph he kept in his study.

Sadly, that meeting never happened.

After Havel's death, his friends remembered his wish. Roses from his coffin were incorporated into a symbolic glass artwork created by the Czech artist Bořek Šípek, which was presented to Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar in 2012.

It was a final, deeply personal gesture of friendship from a man who had never stopped standing by her.

And now, thirteen years after his mother's visit to Prague, her son Kim Aris has returned to the same city, to the same Forum 2000 Conference, and to the grave of the man who stood by his mother through so many difficult years.

But Myanmar has since suffered another devastating setback in its long struggle for democracy. The democratic opening that once brought so much hope to Myanmar was brutally reversed by the military coup of February 2021.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, now 81 years old, is again imprisoned, completely isolated from her family and the outside world. Her son does not even know exactly where she is being held or what her health condition is.

And the people of Myanmar are once again fighting against military dictatorship, this time through an extraordinary nationwide struggle for liberation and federal democracy.

During his speech at this year's Forum 2000 Conference, Kim reminded the audience of Havel's legacy and the continuing importance of international solidarity.

He also spoke about a new generation of Myanmar's citizens, especially young people, who have taken responsibility for their country's future, who refuse to surrender the freedoms they once experienced, and who continue to organize, resist, and struggle for a democratic Myanmar.

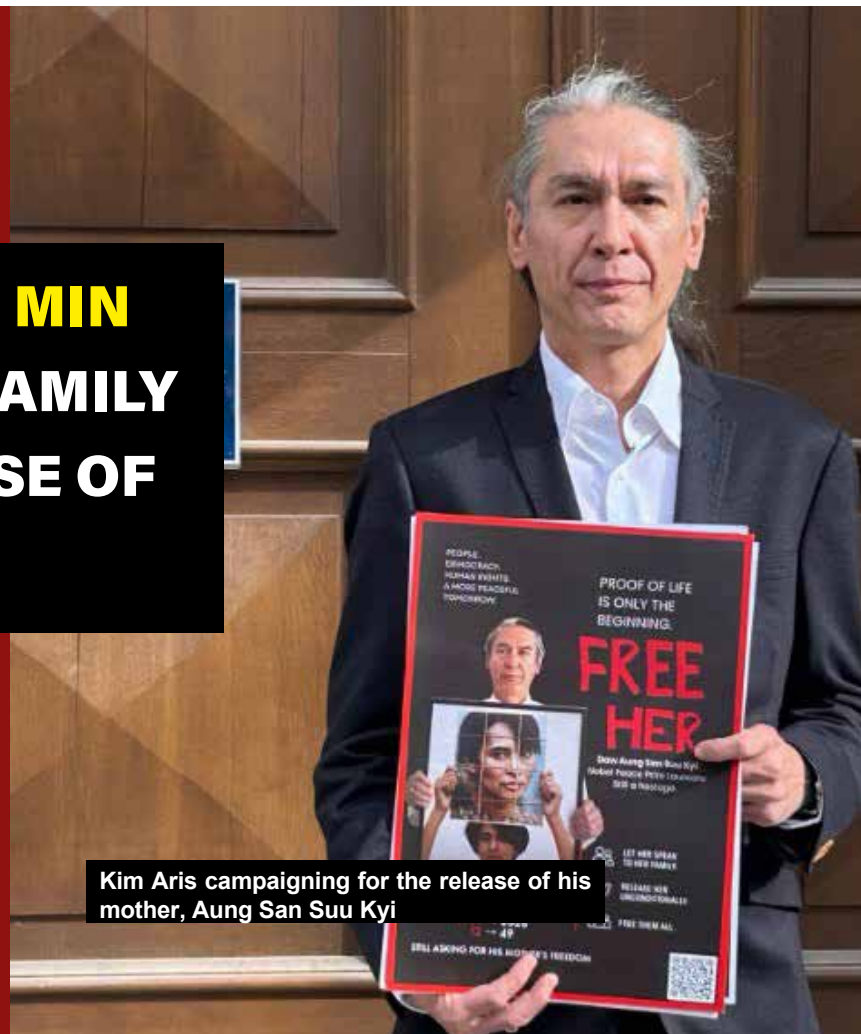
There is for me something deeply moving in this continuity between generations and across countries.

Havel was not simply a friend of Aung San Suu Kyi. He was a friend of the people of Myanmar. And his solidarity was not based on political convenience or calculations of geopolitical advantage. It came from a deeply held conviction that those who have won their freedom have a responsibility to stand by others who are still fighting for theirs.

That is the legacy that Kim came to honour.

The flowers Kim placed on Havel's grave were a gesture of gratitude, remembrance, and friendship. But they were also a reminder that the struggle for freedom in Myanmar continues — and that the solidarity Havel embodied is needed today as much as ever.

KIM ARIS WRITES TO MIN AUNG HLAING FOR FAMILY ACCESS AND RELEASE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI



Kim Aris campaigning for the release of his mother, Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi's son Kim Aris has written to the Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing calling for family access to the jailed democracy icon and for her release.

Mr Aris made this call known at the recent Forum 2000 Conference in Prague held on 11-13 October.

Mr Aris gave a speech at the conference calling for the freeing of not just his mother but also other political prisoners held in Myanmar and provided a copy of the letter. He personally delivered the letter to the embassy. No staff offered to receive the letter, so it was slipped under the door.

The following is a copy of the letter:

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing,

I have written to you before regarding my mother, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and my family's request for direct contact with her. I am writing again to renew that request.

The recent ICRC visit provides some reassurance. However, our family still has no direct contact with my mother and has not been informed where she is being held.

My mother is now 81 years old and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. She has been separated from her family for more than five years.

My request is simple and humanitarian: please grant my mother immediate and direct regular contact with her family, including the ability to speak with us directly, and permit her to receive the care packages we send for her well-being.

I also request the immediate and unconditional release of my mother, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, so that she can be reunited with her family.

At her age, family contact, proper healthcare, and humane treatment are essential.

I hope arrangements for direct family contact can be made without further delay.

Sincerely,

Kim Aris (Htein Lin)

Son of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi



MYANMAR CIVIL SOCIETY PRESSES WORLD BANK TO ENGAGE DEMOCRATIC AND ETHNIC GOVERNANCE ACTORS AND OPEN DIALOGUE AT 2026 ANNUAL MEETINGS

A delegation of Myanmar civil society organizations joined the 2026 IMF-World Bank Annual Meetings in Bangkok this week, calling on the World Bank Group to engage democratic and ethnic governance actors in Myanmar that are building a federal democracy from the ground up, with territorial control, administrative functions, and effective public service delivery systems, and to conduct a formal dialogue with Myanmar civil society under the Bank's new Fragility, Conflict and Violence Strategy, according to Progressive Voice and other CSOs.

The World Bank scaled down its country programming in response to the fragile and active violence in Myanmar since the attempted military coup of February 2021. Despite the enormous contextual and operational risks, the World Bank has maintained its presence in the country, as highlighted by the

operation of six humanitarian and resilience projects approved by the Board and management over the last five years. These projects have been implemented by third-parties that are mainly international humanitarian organizations. However, there is no clear partnership framework that enables democratic and governance actors and local civil society organizations involved in project design, management and delivery to manage risks and meet targeted results.

At the Civil Society Townhall on 12 October, Khin Ohmar, Founder and Acting Executive Director of Progressive Voice, directly asked World Bank Group President Ajay Banga why they have not engaged democratic governance actors and civil society as part of its Myanmar projects to help manage the safeguards and integrity risks necessary to avoid compromising these projects. President Banga was also asked to

instruct his Myanmar team to answer Myanmar civil society organizations' April 2026 letter and repeated meeting requests.

The delegation also held meetings with the executive director's offices of the World Bank. They were provided with a contextual update on Myanmar in relation to the Bank's projects and were asked to use their leverage to ensure that the Bank engages with local and regional governance actors outside military junta control. The Bank must open a series of constructive dialogues with Myanmar civil society and maintain the current policy that no Bank funds, whether grants, administered trust funds, or concessional loans, flow through junta-controlled systems. The Bank must have a clear partnership framework with Myanmar CSOs and local democratic actors in humanitarian and resilience initiatives and engage independent third-party monitors to ensure aid reaches the target communities, responds to priority needs, and avoids being instrumentalized to discriminate against civilians.

Khin Ohmar, Founder and Acting Executive Director of Progressive Voice, said: "Myanmar's vibrant civil society groups have had long-standing engagement with the Bank since before 2010, when the Bank developed its Myanmar's interim country strategy note for the reengagement with the country. Now, with the military junta's active campaign of violence against civilians while it actively bids for international legitimacy under civilian disguise, Myanmar is a test case for the Bank's Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) Strategy. The Bank must engage with civil society operating outside military control to give input into the operationalization of the 2026-2030 strategy into the Myanmar context so the Bank can implement its humanitarian responses through third parties with integrity, safeguards, and meaningful objectives."

Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, Director of Creative Home, stressed: "The March 2025 Sagaing earthquake taught

an important lesson for the Bank: Work with local actors to reach people struggling to survive from disasters. Myanmar's civil society organizations, alongside local responders, reached affected communities within 48 hours despite huge personal risks. Had the Bank enabled the participation of local democratic actors from design to implementation and monitoring, its response could have provided a genuine lifeline for more communities severely hit by recent disasters."

Han Gyi, Coordinator of Network for Human Rights Documentation – Burma (ND-Burma), emphasized: "Engaging local and regional governance units is critical. Even where the World Bank's humanitarian response projects since 2021 have been implemented by international humanitarian organizations, we have witnessed and reported gaps in transparency, consultation, and implementation arrangements, compromising the effectiveness and impact they seek to deliver. We asked whether their office would support engaging well-established, capable, functioning, tested, and people-supported governance units as service delivery partners to ensure aid is not weaponized to discriminate against people or perpetuate the military junta's abusive system."

ET, Program Manager of Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica, highlighted: "The military junta is bombing schools and clinics, which means Myanmar's human capital and future are being destroyed. On top of these atrocities, at least 100,000 young people have been forced into conscription, torn from their workplaces and schools, some used as human shields and forced laborers. At the same time, children in conflict-affected areas are cut off from basic health services like vaccination because the junta weaponizes aid and discriminates in its distribution. The Bank cannot reach these children and youth through junta-controlled systems. The Bank must work with the local governance actors and civil society that are capable of co-delivering such services with safeguards and accountability."



AMERICAN POLITICIANS LOBBY US AMBASSADOR TO UN OVER SUPPORT FOR MYANMAR AMBASSADOR KYAW MOE TUN

A number of American politicians have sent a letter on 14 October regarding the UN Credential Committee in support of the Myanmar Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun to allow him to retain his position representing his country at the United Nations.

The supporters include: Bill Huizenga, Co-Chair, Congressional Burma Caucus, Betty McCollum, Co-Chair, Congressional Burma Caucus, Jefferson Shreve, Member of US Congress, Gregory W. Meeks, Ranking Member House Foreign Affairs Committee, Young Kim, Chairwoman, East Asia and the Pacific, House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Ami Bera, M.D., Ranking Member, East Asia and the Pacific, House Foreign Affairs Committee.

The following is their letter to Mike Waltz, Ambassador, United States Mission to the United Nations:

Dear Ambassador Waltz,

We write in advance of the Burmese military junta's attempt to legitimize its sham electoral process before the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Credentials Committee by replacing the current Permanent Ambassador to the UN for Myanmar, U Kyaw Moe Tun, with a junta-appointed representative. We respectfully urge the United States Mission to the UN to continue

supporting the current Permanent Ambassador to the UN for Myanmar and oppose any effort to credential or seat a junta-appointed official.

Even before the most recent 2021 military coup in Burma, the United States has long supported democracy, human rights, and accountability in Burma. Following the coup and during the ongoing civil war, Burma's representation at the UN has remained unchanged due to the UN Credentials Committee deferment on the question. During this time, Burma's democratic representatives have been able to engage with the UN on humanitarian access, civilian protection, and atrocity prevention. Any change to that deferral would pose concrete risks to American interests and the United Nations' integrity.

As you well know, allowing the Burmese junta to align its UN vote and participation with American adversaries, like Iran and China, sends the wrong message abroad. The Burmese junta relies on these principal partners for diplomatic protection, military cooperation, economic support, and access to fuel for airstrikes against its own civilians. Additionally, the most recent electoral process occurred amid armed conflict, mass displacement, repression, detention of political opponents, and the exclusion of major democratic parties. This electoral façade does not change the underlying character of military rule, which continues to exercise power through coercion, violence, and emergency decrees. Nor does the rebranding of military control as civilian governance cure the absence of democratic legitimacy, constitutional authority, or popular consent.

Any such changes to UN representation do not reflect the will of the Burmese people or their democratic aspirations. Credentialing the junta would therefore reward a military regime for seizing power, repressing its population, staging a non-credible electoral process, and deepening reliance on foreign authoritarian backers. Timing is crucial, and the United States is especially well positioned to act.

As a leading UN Member State and a customary member of the Credentials Committee, we urge you to make your intentions clear by engaging early and directly with fellow Committee members, the Office of the President of the General Assembly, and like-minded Member States, to support continued deferral of the competing credentials. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to learning about your strategy to fulfill this request.

KYAW MOE TUN BACKS UN HUMAN RIGHTS CHIEF'S CALL FOR UNSC TO REFER MYANMAR TO ICC



Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, expressed support for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' recommendation that the Security Council refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to ensure accountability for the military junta's human rights violations and war crimes.

Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun delivered these remarks on 14 October during an interactive dialogue with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk at the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural) of the UN General Assembly in New York. More than 50 UN member states, including Myanmar, participated in the session.

The High Commissioner discussed the escalation of airstrikes by the military junta and the ongoing crisis preventing over one million Rohingya refugees from returning home safely.

Expressing gratitude to the High Commissioner and his team for highlighting Myanmar's crisis as a grave international concern, Kyaw Moe Tun noted that this marked his sixth participation in such dialogues with the High Commissioner since 2021.

The Ambassador asserted that the military junta continues to launch offensives intended to instil terror in innocent civilians, committing war crimes and crimes against humanity with total impunity. He emphasized that the junta's destruction of the rule of law has transformed Myanmar into a hub for transnational crime, causing unprecedented regional and international instability.

Kyaw Moe Tun criticized efforts by some nations to normalize relations with the junta amid delayed international action and waning global attention. He warned that such engagements embolden the junta to exploit national resources for self-interest while intensifying violence against the citizenry.

Reporting staggering figures, the Ambassador stated that over 8,500 people have been killed and more than 15,000 arbitrarily detained, with displacement figures continuing to rise. He stressed that democracy has been dismantled, leaving the population in a state of constant fear.

Highlighting the junta's failure to implement the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus and UN Security Council Resolution 2669, Kyaw Moe Tun argued that relying solely on diplomatic negotiations to change the junta's behaviour is unrealistic. He urged the United Nations to take concrete actions to ensure that international law, the UN Charter, and human rights standards are not merely "words on paper."

Furthermore, he fully endorsed the High Commissioner's September statement that Myanmar is a test of international political will and that all engagements must be grounded in human rights. The Ambassador concluded by querying how member states could be effectively encouraged to adopt and implement this human-rights-based approach.

The Permanent Mission of Myanmar to the United Nations in New York released a formal statement regarding Kyaw Moe Tun's remarks on 14 October.



REPORT ASSESSES THE SAGAING SEGMENT OF THE INDIA-MYANMAR-THAILAND TRILATERAL HIGHWAY

The Myanmar Policy Institute's latest report for October examines the troubled implementation of the India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway, focusing on the Tamu-Monywa section in Myanmar's Sagaing Region between June and September 2026.

It MPI report concludes that escalating armed conflict, contested territorial control, damaged infrastructure and the humanitarian consequences of military operations make the full restoration of the highway unlikely in the near future. The report also highlights the strategic challenges facing India as it attempts to advance regional connectivity while Myanmar remains engulfed in conflict.

Proposed in 2002, the approximately 1,400-kilometre highway is a major component of India's Act East Policy. It is intended to connect northeastern India with Southeast Asia through Myanmar, facilitating

trade, investment and transport links with Thailand and the wider region. The route runs from Moreh in India's Manipur State, crossing into Myanmar at Tamu before continuing through Kalewa, Monywa, Mandalay and other locations towards the Thai border at Myawaddy and Mae Sot. However, the February 2021 military coup and subsequent expansion of armed resistance have severely undermined implementation, particularly in Sagaing, where control is divided between the military and resistance forces.

The report divides the Sagaing section into three principal stretches. The Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa road, approximately 150 kilometres long, was built with Indian financing and handed over to Myanmar in 2009. A subsequent Indian-funded project to replace 69 ageing bridges was suspended following construction-quality concerns and has not been fully revived. The coup and conflict further halted the project, leaving damaged bridges and unreliable access. Local administrative

bodies affiliated with the National Unity Government (NUG) have undertaken limited repairs using local resources.

The approximately 121-kilometre Kalewa–Yagyi section has experienced intermittent progress. India approved grant assistance of INR 1,459.29 crore, approximately US\$175 million, for its upgrading in 2019. Although construction slowed after the coup, some work has continued where access could be negotiated. In 2025–2026, paving advanced into parts of Mingin Township under resistance influence, demonstrating that construction can proceed through practical arrangements with local governance bodies even without unified territorial control. The approximately 76-kilometre Yagyi–Monywa section has already undergone upgrading under a Myanmar-managed arrangement, but the report finds insufficient evidence to establish whether regular civilian and commercial traffic can reliably use the entire stretch.

Military operations intensified in June 2026, following Min Aung Hlaing's visit to India. The military launched an offensive along the Tamu–Kyigone–Kalewa corridor, deploying several columns and reportedly around 1,000 personnel. It recaptured settlements, including parts of the Khampat area, with support from pro-military militias and armed groups. However, resistance attacks continued behind advancing troops, demonstrating that territorial gains did not necessarily translate into lasting control. Similar operations along the Kalewa–Monywa corridor enabled the military to reach Kalewa and announce that the road had reopened. Subsequent ambushes and fighting nevertheless challenged claims that the entire corridor was secure.

The distinction between military advances and sustainable road access is central to the report's findings. Damaged bridges beyond Khampat continued to obstruct movement, while insecurity disrupted repairs and construction. Reopening individual stretches has limited value unless vehicles can travel predictably across the connected route.

The humanitarian costs have been severe. Military operations involving airstrikes, artillery and ground assaults reportedly killed and injured civilians, destroyed homes and displaced tens of thousands of people. More than 30,000 civilians were reportedly displaced along the Kalewa–Monywa corridor by late June, while displacement along the Tamu–Kyigone–Kalewa route affected residents of more than 50 villages by mid-August. Displaced families faced shortages of food, shelter materials and medicines. Looting, damaged homes and restricted access to farmland also undermined livelihoods and raised concerns about future food insecurity.

The crisis has spilled across the border into India. By early September, Manipur had recorded 24,475 undocumented Myanmar nationals, of whom 14,992 had reportedly been pushed back and 9,483 remained in temporary relief camps. These figures cover a wider period and cannot all be attributed to the 2026 offensive. The reported participation of Naga and Meitei armed groups fighting alongside the Myanmar military also raises concerns for Indian border security.

The report concludes that India must look beyond diplomatic engagement with Myanmar's military authorities in Naypyidaw. Progress depends on practical access arrangements with actors exercising effective authority along the route, including NUG-affiliated governance bodies. Rather than relying on official announcements or territorial claims, India should assess progress through completed bridge repairs, sustained construction and reliable civilian and commercial traffic.

Ultimately, the highway's future depends on security, functioning infrastructure and workable local arrangements. Without these conditions, the IMT Highway will remain an unrealised regional connectivity ambition, while the conflict continues to impose significant human costs on communities along its route.

MYANMAR ANALYSIS GROUP DELVES INTO CHINA'S POLICY ON WESTERN MYANMAR



China's policy towards western Myanmar, particularly Rakhine State, is driven primarily by the protection of its strategic infrastructure, energy security and competition with regional rival India, according to the October report by the Myanmar Analysis Group.

The report, "China's Calculus in Western Myanmar", argues that Beijing is pursuing a cautious, pragmatic strategy that combines formal diplomatic support for Myanmar's military authorities with informal engagement with the Arakan Army (AA), which now controls most of Rakhine State. Rather than seeking to resolve Myanmar's wider political crisis, China's immediate objective is to prevent the conflict from damaging its key investments around Kyaukpyu.

China's strategic interests in Rakhine State stem from its desire to reduce dependence on the Strait of Malacca for energy imports and international trade. The China-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines, operational since 2013 and 2017 respectively, run from Kyaukpyu

to China's Yunnan province and beyond. Worth approximately US\$2.5 billion, they represent China's largest investment in Myanmar. Although they carry only a fraction of China's total oil imports, they are important to energy security and the economies of southwestern China.

Beijing also envisages Kyaukpyu as a major Indian Ocean gateway through a proposed deep-sea port and special economic zone (SEZ). Additional plans include a railway and highway linking Kyaukpyu with Mandalay and the Chinese border. More recently, China has promoted the China-Myanmar-Bangladesh Economic Corridor, intended to connect Yunnan with Bangladesh through Myanmar. These initiatives could strengthen regional trade and Chinese influence while providing an alternative to routes vulnerable to geopolitical competition.

However, these ambitions have been undermined by Myanmar's civil war. Following renewed offensives after Operation 1027, launched in October 2023, the

AA expanded its territorial control, capturing 14 of Rakhine State's 17 townships. By October 2026, the military retained Sittwe, Munaung and Kyaukpyu. The AA's advance has created a serious dilemma for Beijing: many Chinese projects are located in territory increasingly contested or controlled by an armed organisation that China cannot readily compel to follow its wishes.

The operational pipelines remain functional, but the conflict threatens terminals, pumping stations and other infrastructure. Fighting has also forced Chinese workers to evacuate. Meanwhile, the deep-sea port, SEZ, railway and highway projects remain stalled, with little visible construction progress. A Chinese-funded power plant intended to supply the SEZ even had to be dismantled and relocated following clashes near the project site.

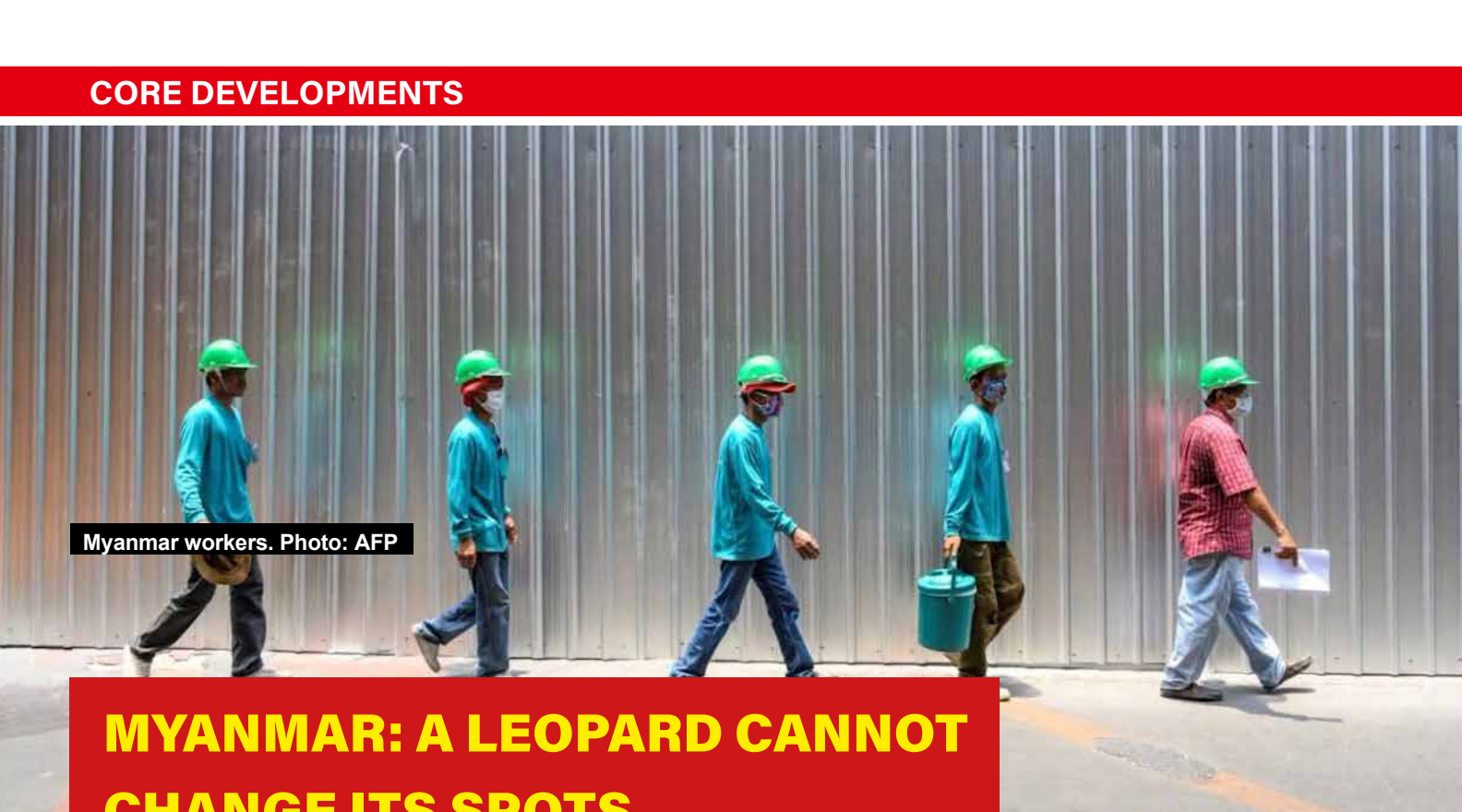
China's approach reflects its limited leverage over the AA. In northern Myanmar, Beijing has applied considerable pressure to ethnic armed organisations, including the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, to accept ceasefires and return captured territory. In Rakhine, however, the AA is geographically distant from China's border and can seek trade and other relationships with India and Bangladesh. Beijing therefore relies more on diplomatic persuasion, economic incentives and informal channels than coercion.

India's presence adds another dimension. New Delhi's Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project connects India's northeastern state of Mizoram with the port of Sittwe. China regards this initiative as a potential challenge to its own ambitions at Kyaukpyu. Beijing's proposed economic corridor through Bangladesh and Myanmar could help counterbalance India's growing regional influence.

The report also examines China's handling of the Rohingya crisis. Beijing favours a state-led process involving Myanmar and Bangladesh, emphasising ceasefires, bilateral repatriation negotiations and economic development. Yet the AA's control of much of northern Rakhine undermines this approach, since the military authorities in Naypyidaw can no longer guarantee security across the areas from which many Rohingya fled. Reported abuses against Rohingya under AA administration further complicate prospects for safe and voluntary repatriation.

The report identifies three possible trajectories for Chinese policy. The most likely is continued engagement with the military authorities alongside informal contact with the AA, concentrating on protecting existing assets. A second possibility is greater accommodation of the AA if fighting subsides and strategic projects become viable again. The third, considered less likely, is more active Chinese intervention through mediation, pressure on armed groups or expanded security arrangements if Chinese infrastructure comes under serious threat.

Ultimately, the report concludes that China is unlikely to prioritise peace or political reconciliation in Rakhine State. Its policy is principally about safeguarding pipelines, protecting Chinese personnel and preventing India from gaining a stronger foothold. Beijing's ability to influence events remains limited, and its immediate strategy will depend heavily on the fighting around Kyaukpyu and the durability of ceasefires in northern Myanmar. China's approach is therefore likely to remain pragmatic and reactive, protecting its interests without committing itself to resolving the underlying conflict.



Myanmar workers. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR: A LEOPARD CANNOT CHANGE ITS SPOTS

BY U MAUNG MAUNG AND CECILIA BRIGHI

Political Profiles of Labour Ministers (2021–2026): Military Background, Parliamentary Record, and Anti Democratization Indicators show the weakness of the new fake civil regime. Next challenge: the ILO Governing Body discussion on the implementation of the Resolution on art.

The period from 2021 to 2026 has revealed a consistent and deliberate pattern in the appointment of Labour Ministers by the Myanmar military regime. Each individual selected to lead the Labour Ministry has been either a senior military officer, a hardline USDP politician, or a regime aligned bureaucrat with a documented record of opposing democratic reforms. This pattern demonstrates that the Labour Ministry has not functioned as a labour rights institution, but rather as a political arm of military governance designed to suppress independent worker representation and evade international accountability.

The political orientation and military background of these ministers have had direct implications for Freedom of Association (FOA), compliance with the ILO Commission of Inquiry (COI) recommendations, and Myanmar's engagement with the ILO under Article 33 measures. Their actions reflect a coordinated strategy to undermine genuine tripartism, mislead international institutions, and use regional mechanisms - particularly ASEAN- to bypass the consequences of Article 33.

Across these years, the Labour Ministry and the junta have actively persecuted, arrested, and even tortured trade unionists and labour activists. Banning independent trade unions and instead overseeing the creation of regime aligned entities such as the fake

CTUM, fake AFFM, fake IWFM, and fake BWFM. These organizations were not formed through democratic worker processes; rather, they serve as extensions of military administration intended to replace legitimate unions and mislead international observers and institutions. Their existence is part of a broader effort to fabricate a fake tripartite structure that does not meet ILO standards. By positioning UMFCCL as a compliant employer representative, appointing regime created "unions" as worker representatives, and presenting the Labour Ministry as a neutral state actor, the regime has attempted to construct a false image of tripartism that is structurally fraudulent.

The regime Labour Ministry has shown deep concern over the proper exclusion from the International Labour Conference (ILC), exclusion from the Governing Body, and the reputational damage associated with the approval of the Article 33 measures decided with the 2025 ILO Resolution. Despite all this, the regime has repeatedly attempted to mislead the ILO Director General by claiming to be implementing the ILO Commission of Inquiry (COI) recommendations, despite the fact that arrests of union leaders continue forced labour persists, FOA remains suppressed, slave-like working conditions continue and no credible independent, reliable monitoring mechanism exists.

This duplicity is reinforced by contradictory domestic messaging: while ministers attempt to reassure the ILO, they simultaneously tell the Myanmar public that the country “does not care about the ILO” and that foreign organizations cannot interfere in national affairs.

Recent statements by senior regime officials further expose the coordinated strategy to regain access to ILO processes without implementing the COI recommendations. On 10 September 2026, former Labour Minister U Khin Maung Soe claimed that Myanmar had been continuously implementing the COI recommendations and alleged that measures taken against Myanmar were based on “one-sided accusations and misinformation.” He also emphasized to his staff that cooperation between the ILO and ASEAN could help Myanmar resume participation in ILO meetings, revealing the regime’s intention to use ASEAN as a political shield. This directly contradicts domestic messaging that Myanmar does not care about the ILO and demonstrates the regime’s desire for reinstatement without compliance.

Similarly, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing’s recent statement that “sanctions are the issues stopping investment and the country from developing” reflects an acknowledgment of the economic impact of sanctions linked to labour rights violations. His remarks attempt to deflect responsibility for economic collapse and encourage ASEAN governments to advocate for sanctions relief, even as FOA violations and forced labour continue unabated.

The pattern of rapid ministerial turnover between 2024 and 2026 further underscores the regime’s anxiety over Article 33. The succession from U Myint Kyaing to U Aung Cho Htwe, U Tin Oo (interim), U Khin Maung Soe, and finally U Maung Myint is political, rather than administrative. It reflects the regime’s search for a minister capable of managing the Article 33 crisis and recalibrating external messaging as the 358th Governing Body session approaches. This turnover is a measurable indicator of the regime’s growing concern over Article 33 and its consequences.

A noticeable shift in tone has accompanied these changes. From 2021 to 2024, the regime publicly insisted that Myanmar did not care about the ILO, would not bow to foreign pressure, and rejected interference in internal affairs. By mid-2026, however, the tone had changed dramatically. During the 29th ASEAN Labour Ministers’ Meeting, U Khin Maung Soe told the ILO Director General that Myanmar regime needed to return to be active in the ILO and required the support of ASEAN countries. This shift reveals the regime’s recognition of the cost of isolation and its attempt to soften its image through a coordinated diplomatic campaign, without changing the substance of its violent, repressive actions.

The contradictions between external diplomacy and internal messaging reveal a regime under pressure.

Externally, it appeals for reinstatement and sympathy; Internally, it maintains a nationalist narrative that blames sanctions and misinformation. This dual messaging is characteristic of regimes facing significant international pressure and is a clear indicator of fear of Article 33 consequences.

Taken together, these developments demonstrate that Article 33 measures are exerting real pressure on the regime, despite rhetorical defiance and political support from Russia and China at the ILO. Sanctions and financial restrictions have quietly constrained the regime’s banking operations, cross border transactions, access to international financial systems, and movement of foreign currency. The regime’s sensitivity to FATF processes and intensified diplomatic activity around Article 33 reflect this pressure.

The abrupt replacement of U Khin Maung Soe with U Maung Myint, a more hardline minister, indicates that the regime is preparing for the Article 33 monitoring mechanism. Staged meetings claiming “implementation” and increased diplomatic outreach show that the regime is repositioning defensively rather than confidently. It has realized that Article 33 cannot be blocked, exclusion from the ILC and Governing Body is politically damaging, and ASEAN is the only remaining diplomatic channel.

The regime’s shift from hardline defiance (2021–2024) to solicitation and lobbying (2025–2026) is driven by economic pressure, diplomatic isolation, and the impending monitoring mechanism. Coordinated pressure - through Article 33, the ASEAN Five Point Consensus, FATF restrictions, and the needed banking sanctions - is essential to sustain and deepen the impact on the military regime.

In conclusion, the political profiles of the Labour Ministers appointed between 2021 and 2026 reveal a ministry functioning as a political instrument of military governance.

Its actions - creating fake unions, fabricating tripartism, misleading the ILO, and issuing contradictory domestic messaging - form part of a coordinated strategy to evade Article 33 accountability and suppress independent worker representation, while searching for an illegitimate normalization through an incredibly expensive international PR campaign.

Such regime’s recent behaviour confirms that sanctions work, pressure is being felt, and Article 33 is influencing internal decisions. Coordinated international and regional pressure remains essential to ensure accountability and protect labour rights in Myanmar.



INDIGENOUS MYANMAR LAWYER ZAR LI AYE RECEIVES 2026 IBA AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS

Zar Li Aye, a lawyer and human rights defender from Myanmar's Indigenous Chin community, has been honoured by the International Bar Association (IBA), the global voice of the legal profession, with the 2026 IBA Award for Outstanding Contribution by a Legal Practitioner to Human Rights.

Ms Aye received the Award during the 2026 IBA Annual Conference, in Copenhagen, in recognition of her commitment to advancing legal reform.

Ms Aye commented: "Receiving the IBA Outstanding Contribution by a Legal Practitioner to Human Rights Award is a profound honour. Coming from a triple-minority background through my ethnicity, gender and faith, becoming a lawyer gave me the opportunity to transform my experiences into a commitment to challenge injustice. Throughout my career, I have stood alongside people marginalised because of their ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or political beliefs, advocating before courts, lawmakers and other forums. This recognition belongs not only to me, but also to the courageous lawyers, human rights defenders and communities in Myanmar who continue pursuing justice despite extraordinary risks, particularly since the 2021 military coup. This Award strengthens my commitment to use the law, reform the law where it perpetuates injustice and work towards a future Myanmar where inclusive justice, judicial independence and human dignity are protected."

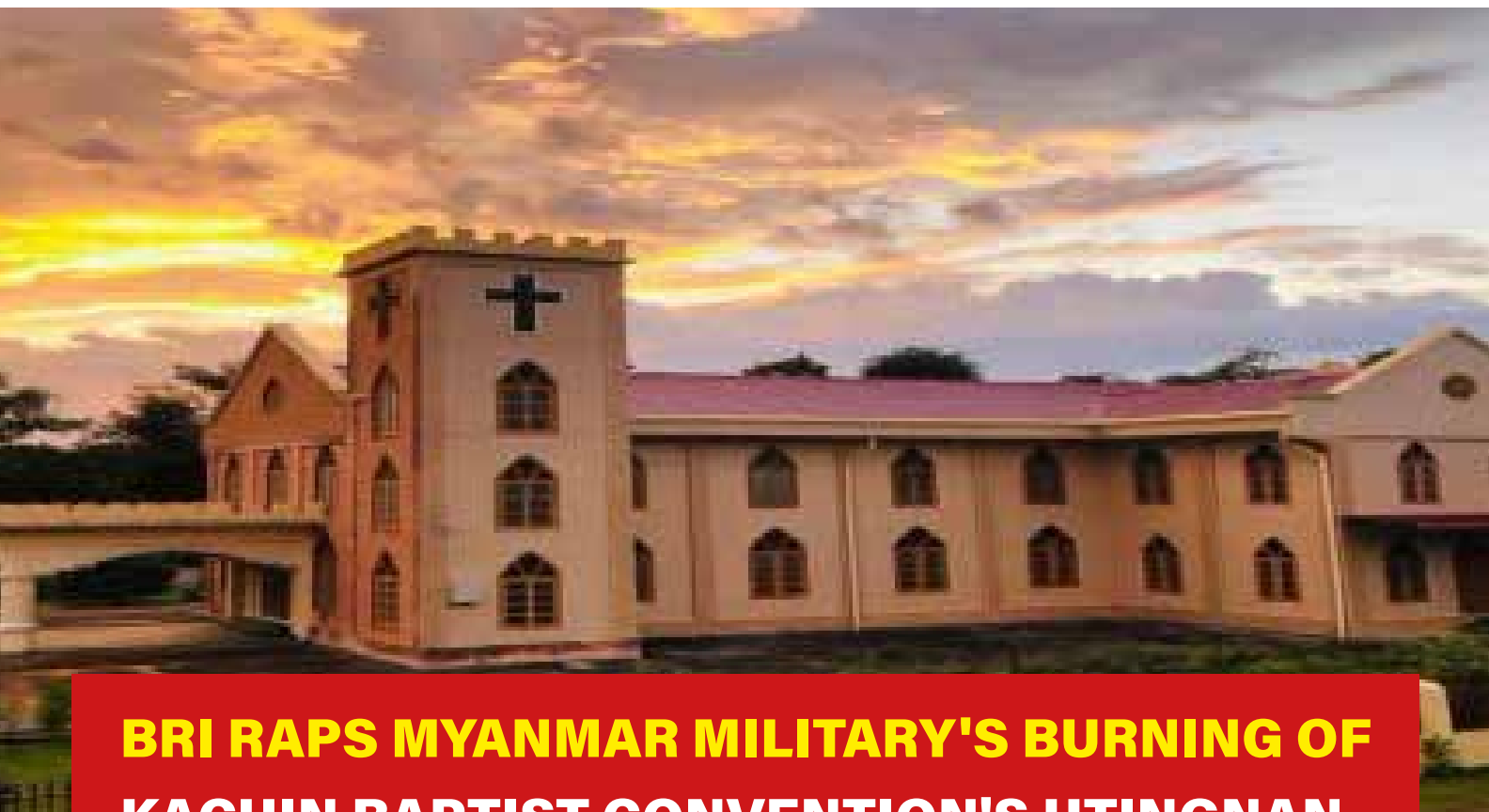
A Supreme Court advocate in Myanmar, Ms Aye has served as a Legal Adviser to the International Commission of Jurists since 2016 and has been a Team Leader of Lawyer For YOU since 2021. Her work combines direct legal representation with public education on digital security and privacy rights. Since the 2021 military coup, she has provided pro bono representation in more than 3,000 cases. Her work had contributed to the release of more than 500 people by 2023.

Beyond the courtroom, Ms Aye co-founded Justice for WOMEN (JFW) – an organisation working to advance women's rights and access to justice, including addressing gender-based violence and discrimination. Having moved on from JFW, she has supported communities affected by land seizures, and since 2019 has worked with CAN-Myanmar and a coalition of more than 35 LGBTQIA+ organisations to develop the proposed Myanmar Equal Treatment Act. The draft legislation seeks to protect LGBTQIA+ people, women, children, persons with disabilities and Indigenous peoples from discrimination.

Ms Aye's work has also reached international forums. In March 2026, she addressed a side event during the 61st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. There, she highlighted the escalating persecution of lawyers representing political detainees and human rights defenders in Myanmar. She has also contributed to international accountability efforts concerning enforced disappearances and the protection of human rights defenders at risk.

IBA judging panel statement

In a joint statement, the IBA judging panel said: "Zar Li Aye is an inspiring and devoted lawyer and human rights defender from the Indigenous Chin community in Myanmar. She has dedicated her career to defending human rights, advocating for access to justice for marginalised groups and bringing about systemic legal reform in Myanmar. Her clients have ranged from ordinary citizens to high-profile activists and human rights defenders arbitrarily detained or targeted for expressing dissent. In the face of political repression and significant security threats, Zar Li Aye continues her work from outside Myanmar. This award, which recognises lawyers who make exceptional strides in advancing human rights, honours Zar Li Aye's unwavering commitment and extraordinary courage to protect vulnerable groups and the rule of law."



BRI RAPS MYANMAR MILITARY'S BURNING OF KACHIN BAPTIST CONVENTION'S HTINGNAN KACHIN BAPTIST CHURCH

The Burma Research Institute (BRI) strongly denounces the Burmese military's burning of Htingnan Kachin Baptist Church in Banmaw (Bhamo), Kachin State, at approximately 3:30 p.m. local time on October 12, 2026, in a press release on 14 October.

The church is a member of the Banmaw Kachin Baptist Association, which is under the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC).

The church's motto, "Let justice roll down like a river" (Amos 5:24), was displayed in Kachin and Burmese above the pulpit in the church sanctuary.

A source familiar with the situation on the ground confirmed to BRI that the Burmese military troops burned down the church.

"These ongoing attacks on Kachin Christians in Burma are deeply troubling. They are part of a pattern of severe violations of religious freedom. The United States should stand up for persecuted Christians in Burma," said Ambassador Sam Brownback, former U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom under President Donald Trump. In 2019, he arranged a White House meeting where Rev. Dr. Hkalam Samson of the Kachin Baptist Convention told

President Trump about the persecution of Christians in Burma.

In a Kachin News Group (KNG) news story published in Burmese on October 14, 2026, a Kachin Independence Army (KIA) frontline source said that the Burmese military troops burned the church and nearby homes after being defeated in clashes with the KIA and its allied forces around Banmaw. The source identified the troops responsible as belonging to the military's 33rd and 88th Light Infantry Divisions.

"Please pray for God's protection over us. The military has stepped up its attacks against us," a Baptist leader in Kachin State told BRI, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

This is not an isolated incident but part of a continuing pattern of desecration of Kachin churches. As BRI reported on October 10, 2026, a militia aligned with the Burmese military held a graduation ceremony on September 23, 2026, inside the sanctuary of Nant Mun Baptist Church in Nanmun Town, Indawgyi region, Mohnyin Township, Kachin State. Militia members danced and drank alcohol inside the sanctuary. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and the Christian Post also reported on this desecration.



MYANMAR JUNTA BOMBING OF CHIN STATE CHURCH PROMPTS CALL TO MARK CHURCH ATTACKS AS WAR CRIMES

At approximately 2:30 p.m. local time on October 9, 2026, a Burmese military fighter jet bombed the Presbyterian Church in Mindat town, Chin State. The church belongs to the Victoria Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar, which is a partner of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

On the evening of October 10, Myanmar time, the day after the attack, two sources in Chin State confirmed the aerial bombing to the Burma Research Institute (BRI). A 500-pound bomb destroyed the church building, the pastor's residence, and the church's Victoria private high school, the sources added. The congregation built the church, completing it in February 2018. No injuries have been reported.

"We pray for Mindat and urge the Trump Administration to determine without further delay that the deliberate, ongoing, and systematic attacks on churches and church-related buildings constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes, as we have long been calling for," said Zo Tum Hmung, President and CEO of BRI.

This is not the first time the military has targeted this church. In August 2023, BRI, then known as the Chin Association of Maryland, reported that the military had detained the church's pastor, Htang Kay On, along with three elders, Chai Kay, Hon Chway, and Hon Kay. Two of the elders were later killed. The pastor and the third elder were released.

The military has targeted churches in Mindat since the early months of the coup. In its October 2021 report, *After the Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Challenges for Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees*, BRI documented that "the Burmese military occupied the Grace Baptist Church in Mindat township for approximately 5- months, from May to September 2021." On April 13, 2026, a military airstrike destroyed the Myoma Baptist Church in Mindat.

"The White House should publicly condemn these continuing attacks on Christians in Burma," said Rev. Dr. Van Bawi Kam, pastor of Emmanuel Farm Chin Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas. Dr. Van Bawi Kam formerly pastored the Presbyterian Church in Tlanglo village, Chin State, which the Burmese military also destroyed. "My heart is with the members in Mindat," he added.

Mindat has been a stronghold of resistance since Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the military's commander-in-chief, seized power in the February 2021 coup. Its residents formed one of the country's first armed resistance groups, at first fighting with *tumee*, the single-shot hunting guns traditionally made by local craftsmen. Acting President Duwa Lashi La of the National Unity Government has applauded their courage on previous occasions and reaffirmed it to BRI.

The Chinland Defense Force–Mindat (CDF–Mindat) controls the town. Its commander-in-chief, Salai Than Chun Pe (also spelled Than Chawn Pay), also chairs the resistance forces' political body, the Interim Chin

National Consultative Council (ICNCC), established in April 2021. The Chin resistance forces hold Mindat, Kanpetlet, and Matupi townships in southern Chin State, while their ally, the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA), controls neighboring Paletwa township, also in Chin State. These southern townships are strategically important, as they border Arakan State and Magway region, which is adjacent to Naypyitaw, the capital and seat of self-appointed President Min Aung Hlaing.

The military has intensified airstrikes on southern Chin State to retake the areas and weaken the resistance's alliance with the Arakan Army, displacing most residents. In neighboring Arakan (Rakhine) State, a September 28 airstrike on a busy market in Kyauktaw Township killed at least 50 civilians, including women and children. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk said the attack raises serious concerns about respect for international humanitarian law.

The bombing in Mindat is part of a wider pattern of attacks on places of worship in Burma. According to BRI (October 5, 2026) and Christian Solidarity Worldwide (October 8, 2026), on September 23, a militia allied with the Burmese military held a graduation ceremony inside the sanctuary of Nant Mun Baptist Church in Mohnyin Township, Kachin State, during which militia members drank alcohol and danced. The church is a member of the Kachin Baptist Convention, which is headquartered in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State.



Photo: Supplied

AT LEAST 13 KILLED IN A MONTH AS MYANMAR JUNTA AIR AND ARTILLERY ATTACKS HIT KYAIKTO AND BILIN

At least 13 people were killed in Myanmar junta air and artillery attacks on villages in Kyaukto and Bilin townships, Mon State, between 24 September and 14 October, according to Mizzima's tally of local reports. More than 20 others were injured.

Local residents said the junta attacked villages including Chaung Sauk, Kyaukhpayar and Hngetpyawta in Kyaukto Township and Alu Gyi in Bilin Township with fighter jets, Y-12 aircraft and drones. They also said artillery units based in the area, including howitzers from the 44th Division and Artillery Battalion 310 in Kyaukto, fire almost daily. Residents said no fighting was taking place in the areas hit and that civilians were being targeted.

Residents of at least 10 villages, including people living in farm huts, have fled to the hills.

A farm-hut resident near Chaung Sauk told Mizzima that suicide drones, which make no sound, are more frightening than aircraft or artillery, and that drones

from the Kyaikhtiyo side have come continuously over the past days.

On 13 October, a junta fighter jet carrying out attacks from Taungoo Air Base bombed Alu Gyi village in Bilin Township, near the Yangon–Mawlamyine road, and suicide drones also dropped bombs, killing five people including a 13-year-old child and injuring at least 10, residents said. On the same day, jets and a Y-12 dropped at least 30 bombs on Kyaukhpayar village in Kyaukto Township and artillery fire injured a woman and damaged about seven houses.

On 12 October, a junta drone bomb killed a middle-aged couple and the man's brother in Hngetpyawta village, and injured another person, residents said.

Between 24 September and 2 October, the junta dropped bombs at least 30 times with jets, Y-12 aircraft and drones around Kaw Kat, Kyaukhpayar, Chaung Sauk and Mei Yone Gyi, killing six people and injuring at least 10.



A collapsed hospital following the Mandalay quake. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR'S COLLAPSING HEALTH SYSTEM PUTS THE REGION AT RISK

Myanmar's devastating civil war is creating a public health emergency that threatens not only millions of people inside the country but also neighbouring Bangladesh, India and Thailand. The destruction of medical facilities, the flight of healthcare workers and deep cuts in international aid have left the country increasingly vulnerable to dangerous infectious diseases, according to a report published by Think Global Health.

Since the military seized power in February 2021, Myanmar's healthcare system has deteriorated dramatically. Once making progress in improving public health, the country is now struggling to contain diseases including cholera, malaria and tuberculosis, while millions of children have missed essential vaccinations.

The consequences are becoming increasingly difficult to contain within Myanmar's borders.

The report estimates that the number of doctors and other healthcare providers has fallen from approximately 18 per 10,000 people before the coup to just three today. Medical professionals have fled abroad or been displaced internally, while hospitals and clinics have been damaged or destroyed during the fighting.

A devastating earthquake in March 2025, which killed nearly 5,000 people and affected more than 600 healthcare facilities, accelerated the crisis. Almost a year later, around 300,000 people still lacked access to healthcare, compounded by restrictions on aid

deliveries, attacks on medical facilities and the withdrawal of international funding.

Cholera has re-emerged, with a new outbreak reported since August 2026 following outbreaks in 2024 and 2025. The World Health Organization has warned that the earlier outbreak may have spread into India.

Malaria is another growing concern. Cases have at least tripled since the war began, and as much as 70 per cent of Myanmar's population is now at risk. More worryingly, drug-resistant malaria parasites are becoming dominant in parts of the country and are spreading across borders into India and Thailand. Regular malaria is also crossing into Bangladesh.

Thailand recorded 16,675 malaria cases in 2023, compared with just 2,000 in 2021. More than 40 per cent of the 2023 cases were imported, primarily from Myanmar, illustrating how the collapse of public health in one country can quickly become a regional problem.

Other diseases are also resurging. Tuberculosis has increased by nearly 50 per cent during the conflict, reaching an estimated 260,000 cases annually. Myanmar has also recorded a vaccine-derived polio case, while diphtheria and dengue fever are rising. An estimated 1.5 million children under five have missed basic immunisations in recent years.

Poverty is making matters worse. The report estimates that up to half the population now lives in poverty, while a third experiences hunger. Families are increasingly forced to choose between buying food and purchasing essential medicines.

International assistance has fallen sharply despite the worsening emergency. In 2025, US funding for Myanmar was reduced from 30 per cent of total aid funding in 2024 to just 3 per cent. The United Nations requested US\$1.4 billion for humanitarian assistance in 2025 but received only a quarter of that amount. For 2026, donors have contributed less than half of the reduced US\$890 million appeal.

The report warns that Myanmar's health emergency is being neglected at a dangerous cost. Although the military's restrictions and the insecurity of the conflict make aid delivery difficult, withdrawing assistance risks allowing preventable diseases to spread further.

Without renewed international support, cross-border healthcare cooperation and access to essential medicines, Myanmar's humanitarian catastrophe could develop into a prolonged regional public health crisis.

WUNZIN ONLINE UNIVERSITY CELEBRATES THIRD GRADUATION AMIDST CHALLENGES IN MYANMAR'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Wunzin Online University, one of 16 universities set up by Myanmar's exiled National Unity Government (NUG) to replace the state system, conferred degrees on 111 students on October 10 in its third graduation ceremony, held entirely online, the university said.

The event offered a rare glimpse of an education system that has grown up in the shadows since the February 2021 military coup built by teachers who walked out of government schools, delivered over patchy internet connections, and unrecognised by the authorities who control most of the country.

After the coup, tens of thousands of teachers joined the Civil Disobedience Movement and refused to work under military rule. The NUG, formed by ousted lawmakers and activists, built a parallel system in their place.

Running those schools has carried a heavy cost. Teachers have been arrested and campuses bombed, and millions of young people have been left without reliable schooling.

For students, enrolling is itself a risk. The military government declared the NUG a terrorist organisation

in 2021, which means association with its institutions can bring arrest for those living in areas the military controls.

The university said the October 10 ceremony brought its total number of graduates to 175 across three rounds since late 2024, spanning diplomas, bachelor's and a small number of master's degrees. Students observed a moment of silence for those killed in the uprising before receiving their certificates, it said. The university said senior NUG figures, including Prime Minister Mahn Win Khaing Than and Ja Htoi Pan, joined the online ceremony, along with the chair of Mandalay's interim administration. Mizzima could not independently verify who attended.

That the system's education minister is Ja Htoi Pan, a Kachin activist from one of Myanmar's ethnic minorities, reflects the NUG's stated aim of a federal state in which power is shared beyond the Bamar majority. Whether the degrees it issues will one day be honoured at home or abroad remains an open question.

More than 3.5 million people remain displaced by the conflict, according to the United Nations. The university said it intends to keep enrolling students.





TEN SUSPECTED MYANMAR-BOUND VEHICLES SEIZED IN MIZORAM MAY BE RETURNED TO DEALERS

Ten pickup trucks seized in Lawngtlai, Mizoram State, India, on suspicion that they were bound for Myanmar may be sent back to the dealers who sold them, according to the Lawngtlai Post.

On 13 October, the Young Lai Association (YLA) intercepted ten Tata Yodha pickup trucks arriving from Aizawl in the AOC Veng area of Lawngtlai and handed them to the authorities.

After a meeting between district officials and YLA leaders, the Lawngtlai Post reported on 15 October that the vehicles had entered in violation of the District Magistrate's order and could be sent back to where they came from if the dealers sign a formal undertaking that they will comply.

A Myanmar trader in Lawngtlai told Mizzima that security and trade rules in the district have tightened sharply in recent months, with more checks on house rentals and goods transport.

The trader said this follows a prohibitory order meant to stop illegal transport of goods and vehicles and related crime in Lawngtlai District. Under the order, buying stolen vehicles and using them in trade is banned, and buyers' and sellers' ownership documents and identification must be verified before any sale. It also bars Indian citizens from letting foreigners use

their documents and bans the cross-border sale of Indian-made vehicles into Myanmar.

District Magistrate Donny Lalruatsanga said he had received reports of unauthorized collections of money on vehicles transported through the district without officials' knowledge, and said those involved would be identified and dealt with under the law, PTI reported. Illegal vehicle exports are still being detected despite the ban, Zonet Lunglei TV reported, citing the magistrate.

At the meeting, the magistrate said economic and employment opportunities for displaced people are being regulated, and thanked social organizations for their support.

Nearly 30,000 people from Myanmar are sheltering in Mizoram, many of them in Lawngtlai district, officials told PTI.

The Tata Yodha is a commercial pickup with a payload of 1,000 to 2,000 kilograms. Each of the seized vehicles is valued at about 700,000 to 800,000 Indian rupees (about US\$7,400 to \$8,400).

Food, fuel and consumer goods are currently imported into Rakhine State through Lawngtlai and Siaha in Mizoram, passing through Paletwa Township in Chin State.



TWO LOCALS KILLED IN MYANMAR JUNTA GYROCOPTER ATTACK IN SAGAING'S BUDALIN

A man and a woman were killed at about 12:00 p.m. on 12 October when a junta aircraft bombed the jetty at Hnon Tan village on the Chindwin River in Budalin Township, Sagaing Region, according to the Budalin Township Humanitarian Team.

The team said the attack was carried out with a gyrocopter, a small helicopter-like aircraft, that came from the Northwestern Regional Military Command in Monywa. It identified the victims as Ma Hnin Hnin Oo, 28, and Ko Aung Naing Tun, 35.

Ko Zin Min Than, head of the team, told Mizzima on 13 October that there were no military columns in the area or fighting in the village at the time, and that the attack was without cause. He said there are currently no junta ground offensives in Budalin Township but that attacks with suicide drones and gyrocopters have been frequent.

He said the 12 October attack was the fifth in October and that none of the five involved active clashes or targeted resistance camps or positions. He called it a pattern of directly targeting civilians. Three residents have been killed across the five attacks, he said.

Separately, the junta bombed four villages in Wetlet Township, Sagaing Region, on 12 October with a Y-12 aircraft, killing four civilians and injuring 13, according to a statement from the Wetlet Information Network. DVB reported at least three civilians killed and 15 injured in the same attacks.

Fortify Rights said in January that paramotor and gyrocopter attacks are mainly carried out in opposition-held areas where armed opposition groups are not present or lack effective air defenses, because the low-flying, slow aircraft are vulnerable to ground fire.



MYANMAR PARAMOTOR BOMBINGS KILL THREE RESIDENTS IN MAGWAY'S MINDON IN FIVE DAYS

Three residents of Mindon Township, Magway Region, including a child, were killed between 8 and 12 October in two junta bombings carried out with motorized paragliders, known as paramotors, according to People's Defense Force (PDF) Thayet District Battalion 4.

The battalion said the paramotors took off from the No. 12 Defence Equipment Factory (Ka Pa Sa 12) near Thayet.

On 8 October at about 5:25 p.m., three paramotors dropped nine bombs on Chin Nit village, killing Maung Wai Yan Oo, 12, and an 83-year-old man, the battalion said. Three others were injured, seven cows were killed, and a clinic and many houses were damaged, according to a statement released with photographs.

On 12 October, two paramotors from the same factory dropped eight bombs on Mezali village, killing Ko Sit Thu, 40, and destroying two houses, according to the battalion.

Ko Myat, the battalion's information officer, told Mizzima that paramotor attacks in Mindon have increased in 2026. He said Mezali was being bombed for the second time and that Zun Gya and Chin Nit

villages had also been hit. He said the aircraft take off from and land at the factory, and that the villages bombed lie within about 15 miles of it, which gives the junta an advantage.

He said there was no fighting or ground column near the villages hit and that civilians were being targeted. He said directly attacking non-military villages and clinics violates the Geneva Conventions and amounts to a war crime, and that the PDF will intensify its armed resistance.

The PDF warned residents to be vigilant, saying it considers the junta to be deliberately attacking civilian areas in Mindon by air and with heavy artillery. Ko Myat urged residents to take cover when they hear a paramotor's engine, which he said can be heard from a distance, and to dig bomb shelters near their homes.

The UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) said in an August report that in incidents in upper Sagaing, paramotor pilots allegedly cut their engines as they approached targets and glided silently, leaving civilians little or no warning, according to Taipei Times.



Screenshot, CCTV

CHINA SENTENCES TO DEATH MYANMAR SCAM CLAN MEMBERS

A Chinese court sentenced three members of a criminal gang to death on 13 October for operating a network of brutal scam centres in Myanmar's Kokang region on the border with China, while jailing dozens more.

China has stepped up cooperation with Southeast Asian nations to crack down on a vast industry that has flourished in the region in recent years to fleece people out of billions of dollars.

Those conducting the online scams are sometimes willing con artists, and other times trafficked foreign nationals -- many Chinese -- tricked themselves into work and held in prison-like compounds.

Quanzhou Intermediate People's Court said in a statement on Tuesday that it had sentenced Wei Huairan, Chen Dawei, and Liao Jingfang to death for their involvement in the "Wei family criminal gang".

The gang was involved in crimes including drug trafficking, organising prostitution, operating illegal casinos, telecommunications fraud, and the murder of at least two Chinese citizens, the court said.

Wei Huairan was identified as one of the group's leaders and found guilty of several crimes including murder, the court said.

The gang's operations netted more than 12.2 billion yuan (\$1.8 billion).

Another three gang members were handed life sentences, while 55 more were given prison terms ranging from 24 years to three years and three months, the court said.

Analysts describe the Wei clan as one of the "four families" running crime syndicates in Kokang.

China's state broadcaster CCTV on Tuesday called them the "most violent criminal force in northern Myanmar", having created an "iron triangle of political, military, and business criminal activities".

It described the gang as operating 14 "large-scale" scam compounds and luring "large numbers" of Chinese to Myanmar through fake promises of high wages.

Police had also discovered remains of victims bound with iron chains and with bullet holes in their skulls, CCTV said.

Members of the Wei family were first indicted in October 2025.

In January, China executed 11 people, including members of the "Ming family criminal gang".

The following month, four members of the notorious Bai clan were executed for crimes including "fraud, intentional homicide, intentional injury, kidnapping, extortion".

AFP



IPU ASSEMBLY APPROVES CONTINUED RECOGNITION OF CRPH AS KEY PARTNER

The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) announced on October 12 that the 153rd General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), held in Arusha, Tanzania, approved a resolution to maintain recognition of the CRPH as a key dialogue partner, alongside a resolution regarding unlawfully detained elected parliamentarians from Myanmar.

A Myanmar parliamentary delegation led by Union Parliament Representative Zin Mar Aung attended the assembly, which took place from October 5 to 9.

The Myanmar delegation participated in the Governing Council meetings, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, and discussions on climate issues. On the fourth day of the assembly, Zin Mar Aung delivered a speech during the general debate under the theme "Promoting Good Governance through Inclusion, Trust, and Opportunity for All, and Empowering Communities."

Additionally, Zin Mar Aung took part in a discussion focused on "Climate Disasters, Good Governance, and Climate Investment." The Myanmar delegation also

held bilateral meetings with parliamentary delegations from various participating countries to brief them on the situation in Myanmar.

According to the CRPH statement, during the Governing Council meeting on the fifth day of the assembly, the IPU reaffirmed its decision to maintain the CRPH as a key dialogue partner. Furthermore, a decision concerning the situation of unlawfully detained elected Myanmar parliamentarians was officially approved.

During the event, Zin Mar Aung also expressed her congratulations to Mr. Milton Dick, Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, on his election as the new President of the IPU.

Throughout the assembly, the Myanmar delegation presented the public service delivery efforts of the National Unity Government (NUG) and the legislative work being carried out by the CRPH and elected members of parliament. They placed primary emphasis on ensuring that the international parliamentary community continues to recognize the CRPH and the parliamentarians elected in the 2020 general election.

The CRPH also stated that measures were taken to widely inform the international community about the political positions, objectives, and activities of the Steering Committee for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF), which comprises elected Myanmar parliamentarians.

Furthermore, key efforts focused on preventing international recognition of any parliament or governmental body that the military junta attempts to form through its planned elections, calling for an immediate end to violence including airstrikes and ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches the people of Myanmar in urgent need.



FOUR CIVILIANS KILLED, 13 INJURED IN MYANMAR JUNTA AIRSTRIKES ON FOUR VILLAGES IN WETLET TOWNSHIP

Four civilians were killed and 13 others injured on 12 October when a junta aircraft bombed four villages in western Wetlet Township, Sagaing Region, according to preliminary reports from the Wetlet Information Network.

The network said a Y-12 military transport aircraft from the junta's Tada-U Air Base carried out 13 airstrikes on May Kone, U Yin Ma, Yay Htwet and Kyi Kan (North) villages between 3:05 a.m. and 4:39 a.m.

Initial reports confirm that four civilians died and seven were wounded in May Kone, four were injured in Yay Htwet, and one each was injured in U Yin Ma and Kyi Kan (North), the network said. Several residential houses were also destroyed, it added.



WE MUST END THE VIOLENCE SO ROHINGYA CAN SAFELY RETURN TO RAKHINE STATE, SAYS IIMM

The targeting of civilians in the brutal ongoing conflict in Rakhine State, Myanmar, prevents Rohingya in Bangladesh from safely returning home, said Nicholas Koumjian, Head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM or Mechanism), at the conclusion of his six-day official visit to Bangladesh, according to a press release 12 October.

During his visit, Koumjian met with senior Government officials and more than 200 people from Rohingya and other communities living in camps in Cox's Bazar, including many who fled from Myanmar in the past two years.

"The Mechanism is investigating allegations of very serious international crimes that are currently being committed in Rakhine State by perpetrators from different ethnicities, religions and political affiliations. Many Rohingya shared with me their recent and traumatic experiences that drove them to seek refuge in Bangladesh, and these testimonies are crucial to furthering our investigations," said Koumjian.

More than 154,000 Rohingya have arrived in Cox's Bazar since early 2024 to escape the violence committed against them during the ongoing conflict between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar military.

The number of displaced Rohingya in Bangladesh now exceeds 1.2 million.

During his visit, Koumjian met with senior officials, including His Excellency Mr. Salahuddin Ahmed, Minister of Home Affairs; His Excellency Mr. Asadul Habib Dulu, Minister for Disaster Management and Relief; His Excellency Mr. Humayun Kabir, State Minister for Foreign Affairs; His Excellency Mr. Asad Alam Siam, Foreign Secretary; and Major General Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui, Director General of Border Guard Bangladesh.

Koumjian expressed his profound gratitude to the Government of Bangladesh for its continued cooperation with the Mechanism and for facilitating its investigations into serious international crimes committed in Myanmar. He also expressed appreciation for the cooperation and support provided by the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) and the Camp-in-Charge (CiC) offices in Cox's Bazar.

"The current situation in Rakhine State is a major concern for everyone I spoke to," said Koumjian. "Ending the violence against civilians and pursuing justice for these crimes are critical steps to ensure that Rohingya communities can return home safely and sustainably. Only then can the process of rebuilding begin for all communities in Rakhine."

Koumjian's visit comes as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) considers the case concerning Myanmar's obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The Court is deliberating on whether Myanmar failed to comply with its obligations to prevent and punish genocide against the Rohingya in 2016 and 2017, with a decision expected in the coming months.

The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM or Mechanism) was created by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2018 to collect and analyse evidence of the most serious international crimes and other violations of international law committed in Myanmar since 2011. It aims to facilitate justice and accountability by preserving and organizing this evidence and preparing analysis that can be used by authorities to prosecute individuals in national, regional and international courts.



PRESS GROUPS CONDEMN MYANMAR JUNTA BID TO PURSUE FIVE EXILE MEDIA OUTLETS THROUGH INTERPOL

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and its affiliate, the Exiled Myanmar Journalists Network (Exiled-MJN), condemned on 14 October the junta's attempt to pursue five exiled media outlets through INTERPOL. Mizzima is one of the five, along with Myanmar Now, Khit Thit, The Irrawaddy and DVB.

On 6 October, junta Deputy Home Affairs Minister Min Thu said the junta was seeking INTERPOL Red Notices against the outlets. The two groups said this misuses international cross-border policing to silence the media and widen repression.

State media reported that the junta charged the journalists under counter-terrorism laws, revoked passports and sought to begin extradition processes, according to the IFJ. Exiled-MJN said exiled journalists in border areas and neighbouring countries often live without legal documents or rely on migrant worker papers, which leaves them more exposed.

INTERPOL's constitution strictly forbids the organization from intervening in matters of a political, military, religious or racial character, according to

INTERPOL's website. INTERPOL says a Red Notice is a request to police worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person, not an arrest warrant, and that it cannot compel any country to make an arrest.

The IFJ said the outlets went into exile after the junta revoked their licenses following the 2021 coup. Exiled-MJN says at least seven journalists have been killed since 2021. The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) recorded at least 227 journalists detained as of September 2026, with 100 sentenced to a combined 549 years in prison, and 20 still in prison as of August 2026, the IFJ said.

The groups urged the international community to act so independent media and journalists can work safely.

According to Min Thu, the outlets have been charged at junta police stations and courts under sections 124A, 505(b) and 505A of the Penal Code, section 17(1) of the Unlawful Associations Act, section 33(a) of the Electronic Transactions Law, and sections 50(a) and 50(j) of the Counter-Terrorism Law.



MIN AUNG HLAING OPEN DIALOGUE

with the Myanmar media
and journalists is far
preferable to
their “**elimination.**”

By Alan Clements

An intimate appeal to conscience, to the Dhamma, and to the courage to end the war on your own people

Min Aung Hlaing, before another order is given, before another journalist is made to wonder whether the next knock on the door will be the last sound of an ordinary life, I ask you to pause. Somewhere in your country, someone is sitting down to write what they have witnessed. Somewhere else, a mother is waiting for news of a child in prison. You have the power to deepen their fear. You also have the power to begin relieving it. I am writing to the human being in you who can still choose.

I write as a former Buddhist monk in your country, a friend of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and a man whose life has been immeasurably enlarged by the people of Burma. I have received no greater gift than their generosity, their teachings, their astonishing capacity to remain human under circumstances that would break so many of us. My affection has survived expulsion, separation, and decades of grief. It is from within that affection that I appeal to you, sir, and to the military leaders, present and former, who might still help you change the direction of this history.

The words now appearing in your regime's media deserve to be read slowly. According to The Irrawaddy, Kyemon called for the “elimination of any destructive element inside or outside the country.” It declared that anyone who “disrupts peace, stability, and development, undermines national sovereignty, prestige, and unity, or obstructs the administrative mechanism must be eliminated.”

Must be eliminated.

Please sit with those words before asking anyone else to live beneath them. Imagine them spoken about someone you love. Imagine your family waiting while men with authority decide what they mean.

The International Federation of Journalists has condemned your administration's efforts to pursue five independent outlets through Interpol: The Irrawaddy, Mizzima, DVB, Myanmar Now, and Khit Thit. Interpol's rules prohibit political intervention; your government's announced requests do not establish its approval. But even before any international process, the threat enters the lives of reporters, editors, and those of us who contribute to their work. It enters the room where we write. It sits beside the telephone. It asks whether telling the truth will cost someone their freedom, their family, their life.

What an opportunity to bring a radical, beautiful radiance into this darkness. To let the elevation of human dignity become the purpose of power. To discover what your country might offer you freely when it no longer has to fear you. There are forms of respect that cannot be commanded, and an affection no army can secure. You could begin creating the conditions in which such a relationship becomes possible.

And yet, what an opportunity lies before you. What an extraordinary moment to interrupt the machinery of intimidation with a question no one can answer on your behalf: how could I achieve peace? How could I bring people together? How could I make it possible

for those who fear me to speak to me, and for those who oppose me to recognize that I have finally begun to listen? You could ask these questions today. Nothing in the past can prevent you from asking them. This, too, belongs to your freedom.

You know the words moha, lobha, and dosa. Moha: delusion, the obscuring of clear seeing. Lobha: greed, the grasping that makes possession feel indispensable. Dosa: hatred, aversion, the hostility that wants what disturbs it removed. The Buddha identified these as roots of unwholesome action. In the Mūla Sutta, he speaks directly of the suffering they generate through imprisonment, confiscation, and banishment in the pursuit of power. Here is a teaching waiting to be consulted before a decree is issued, before a prison door closes.

I learned in your country how intimately these forces must be known. We meet them in ourselves, in the smallest defensiveness, the refusal to listen, the delicious certainty that we are right. But give them an army, give them a bureaucracy, give them permission to decide who belongs, and their consequences enter generations. How many children must inherit the consequences of an adult's unwillingness to examine his own mind? What would happen if the next order arose from that examination, from a moment of honest inward recognition?

Why not mettā? Why not karuṇā? Loving-kindness, the wish that others be well; compassion, the willingness to let their suffering matter enough to change our conduct. You have heard these words in monasteries. You have seen them embodied in people with almost nothing to give who nevertheless give. Bring that spirit into the places where decisions are made. Let compassion have consequences as tangible as an arrest order: a release, a reunion, medicine delivered, a village allowed to remain a village, a journalist returning home.

And why not hiri and ottappa, those guardians of the world? Hiri is the conscience that feels the shame of wrongdoing and draws back through self-respect. Ottappa recognizes the danger and consequences of harmful action. What a beautiful strength it would be to allow them to rise within you, to feel their discomfort without silencing it, to let conscience become stronger than the fear of losing face. There is dignity in the moment a human being can say: I have caused suffering, and I must stop.

Why not ask your people? Ask the political prisoners you have jailed, and give them the freedom necessary to answer you. Ask your wife, your family, what they

want your name to mean when you are gone. Ask the mothers whose children have disappeared from their lives. Ask the young people who should be falling in love, studying, making music, imagining futures. Ask the monks. Ask the thilashin, the women in religious life whose wisdom is so often invited to bless a room and so rarely invited to determine what happens inside it.

Ask Julie Bishop, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Myanmar. Ask António Guterres. Ask the ambassadors, the diplomats, the leaders of the world. Ask His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Ask Pope Leo XIV. Put before them the question you have the opportunity to place before history: how do we begin again after so much harm? How do we build a peace spacious enough for people who have wounded one another, without requiring the wounded to surrender their truth?

Why not invite such a dialogue to Naypyidaw? Men and women from across your country: ethnic leaders, democratic representatives, resistance voices, former prisoners, artists, philosophers, teachers, young people, Rohingya representatives, those whose lives have been decided in rooms they were never allowed to enter. Invite monks and nuns from different traditions, Christian and Muslim and Hindu leaders. Ask Thai ministers, President Trump, and others with influence to support the work. Seek the counsel of the Dalai Lama and Pope Leo. Let the world contribute, while the people of Myanmar shape their future.

Make the invitation worthy of trust. Guarantee that people may disagree and leave unharmed. Allow independent reporting. Open humanitarian access. Give women authority in the process, not simply seats in the photograph. The Dayton Peace negotiations helped end the Bosnian war in 1995; they remind us that even entrenched enemies can enter a room and produce an agreement that stops a war. Your country needs its own process, its own imagination, its own language of coexistence. Begin by making the room possible, and by relinquishing the right to dictate every answer.

You know the story of Aṅgulimāla. The killer calls to the Buddha to stop, and the Buddha answers: "I have stopped, Angulimala. You stop." He has stopped violence toward living beings; Aṅgulimāla has not. Across the centuries, that exchange still reaches us with its astonishing intimacy. Someone steeped in killing is addressed as someone capable of ceasing. The next act remains open. The weapon can be put down. A life can turn, even though the suffering already caused cannot be recalled.

And consider Ashoka, whose thirteenth major rock edict records remorse for the slaughter, deportation, and suffering of Kalinga, and commends conquest through Dhamma. Consider a ruler allowing the grief of those he conquered to enter the account of his own reign. What might enter yours if you let yourself hear it fully? What might become possible if you could look at the suffering and say, without an explanation prepared by an adviser, that this must end, and that you will take responsibility for beginning its end?

I am asking you to stop the continuation of akusala kamma, unwholesome action, where you have the power to stop it. No ceremony can substitute for the person released, the threatened life protected, the order withdrawn. A turn of conscience must become a turn in conduct. It must enter the chain of command, reach the prison governor, reach the soldier, reach the family who will otherwise have no reason to believe that anything has changed. Let Dhamma become something your people can experience in what happens to them tomorrow.

Imagine such a transformation eventually being spoken of in the language of a Nobel Peace Prize: a sustained commitment to ending this suffering that commands the world's attention and opens a path toward lasting peace. Let the honor come from the work, and let the work survive without applause. The bereaved owe you no forgiveness. They deserve truth, justice, and the freedom to decide what reconciliation could mean. Give them changes substantial enough to consider, and give history a different direction to follow.

Begin with Daw Suu. Go on national television and say that you have had a change of heart, and make that announcement inseparable from her unconditional release. Imagine saying: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, you are free. Your country needs to hear you. Then listen to what she chooses to say. Restore what should never depend on your permission: her freedom to speak, to meet others, to choose her own next step. Let the encounter begin with that dignity.

Then open the doors for the others imprisoned for peaceful political expression. Retract the threats against journalists. Let the first evidence of your change arrive in ordinary homes, in the impossible sweetness of a familiar voice heard again without a prison wall between you. Imagine the news traveling through the very outlets you have threatened. Imagine their reporters verifying releases, recording reunions, asking difficult questions about how these freedoms will endure. Let them ask. Let the answers become stronger because the questions remain free.

For my part, I would welcome an openhearted conversation with you in Naypyidaw, a real encounter in which we could listen without surrendering the truth. My book, *Conversation with a Dictator*, imagined such a dialogue; it was fiction, written out of a conviction that conscience deserves to be addressed. I would welcome a genuine exchange, recorded and shared unedited, with the freedom and protection necessary for everyone involved. I want to understand your thinking, your feelings, what you believe you are defending, and what might allow you to let go.

Sir, I would rejoice to write about a Burma in which your decisions were helping people return to life. I would rejoice to see the media report courage in the relinquishment of cruelty, dignity in accountability, and leadership willing to be questioned. That possibility is why I continue to appeal to you. After everything, I still believe it is worth speaking to the conscience of another human being, and worth leaving him a way to answer through what he does.

End this war on your people. Look into the war within your own mind, and let that looking reach the lives held in your power. I appeal to you with love for Burma, with respect for the human capacity to change, and with mettā that does not require silence about suffering. Retract the threat. Release those unjustly held. Invite the conversation. Somewhere tonight, a family is waiting for someone who could come home if you chose differently. Let your next decision reach them as mercy. Let them hear footsteps at the door and discover, at last, someone they love.

About Alan Clements

Alan Clements is an author, spoken-word artist, and former Buddhist monk who trained in Burma under Mahāsi Sayadaw and Sayadaw U Pandita. His decades of engagement with the country encompass meditation, human rights advocacy, and conversations with people struggling for democratic freedom. He is the co-author of *The Voice of Hope* with Aung San Suu Kyi and, with Fergus Harlow, the four-volume *Burma's Voices of Freedom*.

His books include *Politics of the Heart*, *Instinct for Freedom*, *Wisdom for the World*, *A Future to Believe In* and *Conversation with a Dictator*, a fictional dialogue addressing authoritarian power through an appeal to conscience. His work explores the relationship between inner freedom, ethical responsibility, and the courage to remain human in a fractured world. More information: AlanClements.com



WHY CENTRAL ASIA SHOULD RELY ON INDIA OVER CHINA

SUN LEE

The world is entering a post-unipolar era, where sturdy bilateral trade and diplomatic ties are becoming increasingly indispensable amid growing geopolitical uncertainties. Nations are actively making choices to forge, resuscitate, or strengthen ties with the major emerging centres of power. The decision to forge or strengthen ties with the emerging powers is determined by various factors, including but not limited to geographical proximity, historical ties, current diplomatic requirements, and trade opportunities.

A similar situation has arisen in Central Asia. With the weakening dominance of Russia in the region, it has become an important arena for forging strategic ties for other regional powers, namely India and China. In the post-Moscow era, marked by the reduced influence of Russia in the region due to its weakening involvement in meeting regional investment, infrastructure, and security needs, the Central Asian nations are diversifying their strategic ties by building closer relations with China and India.

China has been a seasoned regional player as an infrastructure supplier, leveraging infrastructural initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for

strategic ties, along with investments in transport, regional energy reserves, and digital infrastructure. On the other hand, India's engagement has been driven by an issue-based development approach, often envisaged via the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Chabahar Port, which are crucial to its Connect Central Asia policy, along with promoting thematic partnerships on rare earth metals and digital partnerships.

Given the involvement of the two emerging powers in the region, while adopting a multi-vector diplomacy, there are several compelling reasons for why Central Asian Republics (CARs) should tilt towards New Delhi on the trade and commerce front. First, the geostrategic and security concerns with respect to China's BRI have made the region especially fertile for Indian engagement. Post 2015, India has viewed CAR as a single geographical unit for facilitating cooperation. Since then, multiple deals have been signed between India and CARs on a variety of issues, including security, energy, trade, and culture. As mentioned earlier, this rejuvenation of ties is also determined by the historicity of traditional and socioeconomic ties between the two.

Second, there exists anti-China sentiment and deep scepticism amongst the CARs for a variety of reasons. Central Asians are sceptical of Chinese investments, as these investments are considered risky and a threat to sovereignty. Besides, the Chinese treatment of ethnic minorities like the Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz has fuelled public angst. Chinese tendencies are often seen as expansionist, based on historical experiences. This is where the narrative of deep, friendly historical ties with India, and its influence as a soft cultural power, pitches in. India's trade model with CARs focuses on sustainable infrastructure, low-interest lines of credit, and transparent frameworks. This eliminates the fears of debt-trap diplomacy. As a result, the CARs should build economic capabilities with India, as such engagement doesn't risk their national sovereignty and ensures growth based on mutual respect.

Third, India is in the process of finalising the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Once signed, India will have direct access to the region's huge hydrocarbon resources as well as open doors to the Eurasian markets. India also acts as a strong trade partner for Central Asia as it operates through a cooperative, non-exploitative model focused on affordable goods, digital growth, and strategic balance rather than overwhelming debt or economic dominance. Given that CARs heavily depend on Beijing for energy exports, this creates asymmetric leverage. Here, New Delhi acts as a critical diversification outlet through projects like the Chabahar Port and the INSTC; the CARs gain direct maritime access to the Indian Ocean and global markets, bypassing restrictive land routes.

India, with its booming pharmaceutical sector, also provides high-quality, affordable generic medicines and healthcare infrastructure, directly lowering public health expenditures across CARs. Moreover, going beyond the focus on resource extraction, India has been partnering with Central Asia through the Digital Partnership Forum, IT training, higher education scholarships, and healthcare cooperation.

Given the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and participation in the SCO Summit, the Connect Central Asia policy is being complemented by closer government-to-government

ties and purposeful actions to translate policies into practice.

India and Central Asian nations have also been collaborating on safe, secure, and trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems, building on frameworks established during events like the India AI Impact Summit. Though the trade between the two is around \$2 billion, it leaves a vast room for growth through improved connectivity and sector diversification. There exists immense scope for trade between the two in trade in mineral fuels like oil, natural gas, and key minerals like aluminium and uranium (like long-term uranium supplies from Uzbekistan), along with cooperation extending to renewable electricity and hydropower production. This is accompanied by the possibility to expand trade in traditional sectors like agricultural trade, agribusiness, and food production. New Delhi has already signed the Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPA) with three of the five CARs (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), to stimulate defence cooperation and strengthen the trade ties.

Central Asia's growing collaboration with India is bound to bring a collaborative growth framework, bolstered by historical ties and respect for sovereignty. On the trade front, India offers CARs a high-value partnership focused on sustainable economic development, tech transfer, and vital trade diversification. This is in contrast to China's resource-extractive model, where the region is treated as a source for raw materials and a market for cheap manufactured goods. India stands to fill a crucial developmental gap through the supply of world-class pharmaceuticals, technical expertise, and digital infrastructure like digital payment systems, along with trade infrastructure via the INSTC and Chabahar Port, to provide the economies access to global markets. In the post-Russia CARs, West Asia should strengthen its ties with India as it is a reliable trade partner; Strong ties with New Delhi prevent CARs excessive economic dependency on Beijing while ensuring that commerce with India builds local capacities and safeguards CARs' economic sovereignty.

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



AN UNEXPLODED PAST

Aki Ra spent his childhood learning how to plant landmines and much of his adult life trying to remove what war left behind. Forced into the Khmer Rouge as a boy of about ten, he later fought alongside Vietnamese forces, continuing to lay mines even after changing sides. After the fighting receded, the same knowledge that had made him useful as a soldier became the basis of another vocation: clearing farmland, teaching villagers how to recognize explosives, and building a museum around the weapons he recovered. "I want to change from bad to be good," he says. The reversal is simple in his telling, but the work has lasted more than three decades.

As a child soldier in 1980, Aki Ra had little framework for judging what was happening around him. "I didn't understand what's wrong, what's right, what happened," he recalls. The Khmer Rouge trained boys and girls to handle weapons, lay and defuse mines, construct booby traps, survive alone in the jungle, and find food and water. Military life also offered things civilian life often did not: food, authority, and a measure of security. After Vietnamese troops captured him during fighting near Siem Reap, tied his hands and feet, and held him for about a week, he told them what they needed to hear in order to survive. He joined their forces, hunted for food, and resumed mine warfare. "At that time, I liked landmine."

Mines served a practical military purpose. Camps could be surrounded with explosives that would detonate if enemy soldiers approached at night, turning the blast itself into an alarm. Vast numbers were also placed along the Thai border as Vietnamese forces tried to contain the Khmer Rouge and Thai forces feared further Vietnamese movement. Aki Ra estimates that millions of mines were laid during Cambodia's decades of war. The soldiers planting them were solving immediate battlefield problems; farmers and children would inherit the consequences long after the armies moved on.

PLEASE NOTE: This interview, which is part of *Insight Myanmar's Navigating A Minefield* series, is intended solely as a record of Aki Ra's personal experiences and historical demining work in Cambodia. His descriptions of past methods reflect what he personally did under very different circumstances and should not be understood as instructions, training, or advice for handling landmines, unexploded ordnance, or other explosives. Such devices are extremely dangerous and should only be approached, identified, or removed by properly trained and authorized professionals following current safety procedures.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here: <https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/10/7/episode-621-an-unexploded-past>



AMBASSADOR KYAW MOE TUN TELLS UN THAT MYANMAR JUNTA IS RESPONSIBLE FOR WORSENING POVERTY AND HUNGER IN MYANMAR

Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, said the Myanmar junta's illegal seizure of power has sharply worsened poverty and food insecurity in Myanmar and that the junta alone is directly responsible.

He spoke on 14 October at a meeting of the Second Committee of the 81st UN General Assembly on the eradication of poverty and on food security.

He said the junta's brutal acts, its blocking of humanitarian access and its airstrikes have destroyed farmland and crops and increased the number of displaced people.

Citing a UNDP report published on 8 October, he said 17.9 million people in Myanmar, about 32.6 percent of the population, are multidimensionally poor and another 19.5 million are vulnerable to falling into multidimensional poverty. Together that is about

68 percent of the population, according to UNDP, whose estimate is based on a phone survey of 7,463 households.

Citing FAO and WFP warnings, he said about 12.4 million people in Myanmar may face acute food insecurity, and about 360,000 children are expected to face malnutrition this year.

Despite the challenges, he said, the National Unity Government (NUG) and allied democratic forces are providing education, health and life-saving assistance to people through the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF).

He urged the international community to support effectively the SCEF and the people of Myanmar, who are working to end military dictatorship and build a federal democratic union.



FALSE CLAIM OF TWO-YEAR STUDY BREAK FOR ARMY SERVICE SPREADS ON MYANMAR FACEBOOK

A Facebook post claiming that Myanmar's university students must pause their studies for two years to join the army drew shares and comments this week, before fact-checkers labelled it false.

The post appeared on 10 October on a page styled as a Yangon news outlet. It said the rule would begin with the 29th intake of conscripts and that students would serve to defend Min Aung Hlaing. The military, which seized power in February 2021, began enforcing its conscription law in February 2024 and trains about 5,000 recruits in each intake.

The sharing figures show how quickly conscription rumours can spread. According to the fact-checkers, the same page also runs a TikTok account and mixes real news with invented stories to attract followers.

On 14 October, the Myanmar Fact-checking Network said the claim had no solid evidence and went against the law itself. Section 15(a)(3) of the People's Military Service Law lists people in education among those whose service can be temporarily postponed. The military also issued a statement rejecting the claim, the network said.

The network said the post caused public anxiety during an active recruitment drive. In Yangon, the Rangoon Scout Network, a local monitoring group, has recorded repeated street arrests linked to conscription, which it says often rise just before a new intake begins.

The postponement rule exists on paper. How it is applied during street recruitment is a separate question the fact-check did not examine.

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.