ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY
Analysis & Insight



THE RUSSIA-MYANMAR WAR MACHINE

The tightening relationship between sanctioned Moscow and Naypyidaw

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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.

MYANMAR'S WOMEN PAY HEAVY PRICE FOR WAR

Women in Myanmar are enduring a deepening crisis as the country's civil war continues to devastate communities, destroy livelihoods and place millions of people at risk. Since the military coup of February 2021, women have faced a combination of armed violence, displacement, economic hardship and systematic restrictions on their rights. In the country's war zones, these pressures are particularly severe, leaving many women struggling to protect their families while confronting dangers that few should have to endure.

The conflict has forced countless women and children from their homes. In areas affected by airstrikes, artillery attacks and ground offensives, families have fled with little more than the clothes they were wearing. Women often bear the primary responsibility for finding food, water and shelter, caring for children and elderly relatives, and keeping families together in overcrowded displacement camps or makeshift shelters. With livelihoods destroyed and prices rising, even securing daily meals has become a desperate challenge for many.

The dangers extend far beyond physical displacement. Women and girls face heightened risks of sexual violence, exploitation, trafficking and abuse, particularly when they are isolated from their communities or forced to travel through insecure areas. Survivors may have little access to medical treatment, psychological support or legal protection. The stigma surrounding sexual violence can also prevent victims from reporting crimes or seeking assistance, allowing perpetrators to escape accountability.

Healthcare is another critical concern. Conflict and restrictions on humanitarian access have made essential services increasingly difficult to obtain in many areas. Pregnant women may be unable to reach hospitals or skilled birth attendants, while shortages of medicines and reproductive healthcare put mothers and newborns at greater risk. For women living in remote conflict zones, a medical emergency can become a matter of life and death.

Women are not merely victims of Myanmar's crisis. They have played important roles in pro-democracy movements, community organisations, humanitarian networks and resistance efforts. Many continue to provide assistance to displaced families, document abuses and support vulnerable communities despite the dangers they face. Their courage and leadership are essential to Myanmar's future, yet women activists and human rights defenders themselves can face intimidation, arrest and violence.

The international response must recognise that protecting women is not a secondary concern to resolving the conflict. Humanitarian aid must reach communities through locally trusted organisations, including women-led groups, without being obstructed or diverted by the military authorities. Survivors of gender-based violence need confidential support, healthcare and access to justice, while women must have a meaningful voice in political negotiations and any future peace process.

Myanmar cannot build a just and lasting peace while half its population bears such a disproportionate burden of war. Protecting women's lives, rights and dignity must be central to international policy and the country's eventual recovery. Anything less would abandon those who are already paying one of the conflict's heaviest prices.

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Cover photo of Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing shaking hands with Russian leader Vladimir Putin by AFP



THE RUSSIA-MYANMAR WAR MACHINE

THE TIGHTENING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SANCTIONED MOSCOW AND NAYPYIDAW

Europe would be wise to keep an eye on Russia's relationship with Myanmar's illegal military junta and be aware of the individual sanctions architecture of the EU regarding Russia and Myanmar.

A sanctions policy designed to starve Russia's war machine - implemented due to Russia's war on Ukraine - cannot afford to overlook Moscow's most loyal client in Southeast Asia.

This was a subject discussed by journalists, policy experts, human rights defenders and civil society representatives from Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Ukraine who gathered in Kyiv on 19 October for the Crimea Global 2026 conference, discussing security cooperation, authoritarianism, Russia's recruitment of foreigners, transitional justice, artificial intelligence, the future of democracy and Russia-Myanmar relations.

Given the themes discussed in the Crimea Global conference, it is interesting that subsequently a new report has just been released that examines the Russia-Myanmar nexus in detail.

The report "Militocracies in Arms: Russia–Myanmar Relations" by Andreas Heinemann-Grüder and BA Polina Lebedeva, commissioned by the Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2026 examines the expanding political, military, intelligence and economic relationship between Russia and Myanmar's military regime following the coup of February 1, 2021.

It argues that the partnership serves the interests of two authoritarian governments seeking to preserve their power while confronting international sanctions, economic difficulties and armed opposition – both are outlaws on the international stage with Russia at war with Ukraine and Myanmar at war with its own people.

For Myanmar's military junta, Russian support provides essential weapons, technology and diplomatic backing. For Moscow, Myanmar offers an opportunity to extend its influence in Southeast Asia, cultivate an anti-Western partner and demonstrate that Russia can maintain relationships with governments isolated by Western countries.

The authors describe this relationship as an unequal but mutually beneficial partnership. Myanmar depends heavily on Russian military assistance, while Russia seeks to exploit the junta's vulnerability to expand its strategic influence. However, the report cautions that declarations of friendship and ambitious economic agreements should not be confused with practical achievements. Military cooperation has produced tangible results, whereas many proposed investment projects remain unrealised.

Political interests and strategic objectives

Russia's engagement with Myanmar forms part of a broader foreign policy strategy of supporting authoritarian governments in the Global South. Moscow seeks to capitalise on anti-Western, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist sentiments, presenting itself as an alternative to Western political influence. The report identifies similarities between the Russian and Myanmar regimes: both suppress political opposition, independent media and civil society, and both prioritise the survival of their ruling elites.

Relations have historical foundations, although Soviet–Myanmar cooperation was relatively limited for much of the period following Myanmar's independence in 1948. Since the coup, however, ties have strengthened considerably. Russia has provided military equipment and political support, while Myanmar's junta has

endorsed Russia's invasion of Ukraine and reportedly supplied ammunition, mines and other military materials to Russian forces.

Myanmar's military leadership also seeks to reduce its dependence on China, which remains its most important neighbour and a major source of political and economic support. Russia offers an additional source of military technology and diplomatic protection. Moscow, meanwhile, hopes that a continuing relationship with Myanmar will help establish a stronger Russian presence in Southeast Asia.

The partnership is nevertheless constrained by Russia's war against Ukraine, Western sanctions, limited resources and China's much greater regional influence.

Arms supplies and military technology

The report identifies arms transfers as the most consequential element of the relationship. Russia has become one of Myanmar's principal military suppliers, providing fighter aircraft, helicopters, artillery systems, radar, communications equipment, missiles and spare parts.

Drawing on United Nations investigations, the authors report that Russian enterprises supplied at least US$406 million in arms, raw materials and related equipment to Myanmar's military or arms dealers during the first two years following the coup. Twenty-eight Russian suppliers were identified, and 16 had been sanctioned by Western countries in response to Russia's war against Ukraine.

Russian equipment includes Su-30 fighter aircraft, MiG-29 components, Yak-130 combat-training aircraft and Mi-35 attack helicopters. These systems have supported the military's air campaign against resistance forces and communities perceived to support the opposition.

Drones have become an increasingly important component of the partnership. The report discusses Russian Orlan reconnaissance drones, Albatross unmanned aircraft and other surveillance and electronic-warfare systems. These technologies can improve battlefield reconnaissance, targeting, communications and the disruption of opposition drone operations.

The authors argue that Russian equipment, technical support and counterinsurgency expertise contributed significantly to the Myanmar military's advances against insurgents in 2024 and 2025. They also describe reported Russian assistance with drone training, maintenance and operational planning.

Western components remain important to Russian drone production, including electronic chips and other dual-use technology. The report identifies potential sanctions-evasion networks and intermediaries through which restricted equipment may reach Russian manufacturers. It argues that more effective enforcement is needed to prevent Western-origin components from supporting military operations in Myanmar and Russia.

Military training and cooperation with Belarus

Military education and training reinforce the relationship. According to the report, Myanmar sends more than 300 military officers to Russia annually, where they receive instruction and familiarisation with advanced military equipment. Myanmar personnel also participate in Russian military competitions and exercises.

The relationship extends into naval cooperation. Joint maritime exercises have included training in submarine detection, torpedo operations and responses to maritime security threats. Although these activities demonstrate closer military ties, the report notes that regular joint air-force or infantry exercises have not been reported.

Belarus has emerged as another important partner. With Russia's military resources increasingly committed to Ukraine, Belarus has helped fill gaps in equipment supplies, maintenance, training and military technology. Its cooperation with Myanmar includes air-defence systems, radar-related technology, weapons production and the training of Myanmar personnel at Belarusian universities.

These arrangements could strengthen Myanmar's domestic capacity to manufacture and maintain military equipment, reducing some dependence on imported finished weapons. The authors therefore regard Belarusian involvement as an extension of the wider Russia-aligned military support network.

The use of Russian weapons and human rights

A central argument of the report is that Russian military assistance has serious consequences for Myanmar's civilian population. The authors cite United Nations findings that the Myanmar military has committed killings, torture, sexual violence and the destruction and looting of villages since the coup. These actions have been assessed by UN investigators as potentially amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Russian fighter aircraft, helicopters, missiles and drones contribute to the junta's capacity to conduct airstrikes and other military operations. The report argues that Russia continues supplying weapons despite extensive evidence of abuses and repeated international calls to halt arms transfers to Myanmar.

It also raises questions about Russia's international obligations. Although Russia has not ratified the Arms Trade Treaty, the authors contend that its continued arms transfers conflict with relevant international legal principles and undermine efforts to prevent serious violations of international humanitarian law.

The report therefore presents the relationship as more than a conventional arms-trading partnership: it argues that continued Russian assistance helps sustain the military regime and its capacity to wage war against resistance forces and civilians.

Intelligence sharing and propaganda

Military cooperation is increasingly complemented by intelligence and information-sharing arrangements. The report describes a joint satellite-imagery analysis centre announced in 2025, alongside an offer by Russia to share reconnaissance satellite information with Myanmar's military. Such assistance could improve the junta's ability to monitor opposition movements and plan operations.

Myanmar officers reportedly receive intelligence training in Russia, including instruction in operating surveillance equipment and influencing online information environments. The authors nevertheless note that China appears to remain the more important intelligence partner for Myanmar.

The report also examines political messaging and propaganda. Russia and Myanmar support each other diplomatically, presenting their relationship as evidence of opposition to Western dominance. Russia has de-

fended the Myanmar military in international forums, while Myanmar's leadership has endorsed Russian positions on Ukraine.

The two governments have also supported each other's contested electoral processes. Russia has assisted the junta's preparations for its post-coup elections and participated in election-observation activities. The authors argue that such engagement can help the military leadership present itself as a legitimate government despite continuing conflict and repression.

Tourism and economic cooperation

Beyond military affairs, both countries are seeking closer economic ties. A visa-exemption agreement signed in October 2025 allows Russian and Myanmar citizens to visit each other for tourism or business for up to 30 days. However, the report warns that travel and recruitment arrangements can create opportunities for human trafficking. It describes cases in which Russians recruited for apparently legitimate jobs have been deceived and transported into scam compounds in Myanmar.

Energy is another important area. Myanmar seeks Russian oil supplies and cooperation in exploiting domestic hydrocarbon reserves, developing renewable energy and potentially introducing nuclear power through small modular reactors. These proposals are intended to address Myanmar's energy shortages while creating longer-term commercial ties with Russia.

The most ambitious proposed investment concerns the Dawei Special Economic Zone in southern Myanmar. In early 2025, the countries signed a memorandum covering a proposed industrial development centred on a deep-sea port and oil refinery. Plans also include a coal-fired power station, petrochemical and fertiliser facilities, industrial infrastructure and transport links towards Thailand.

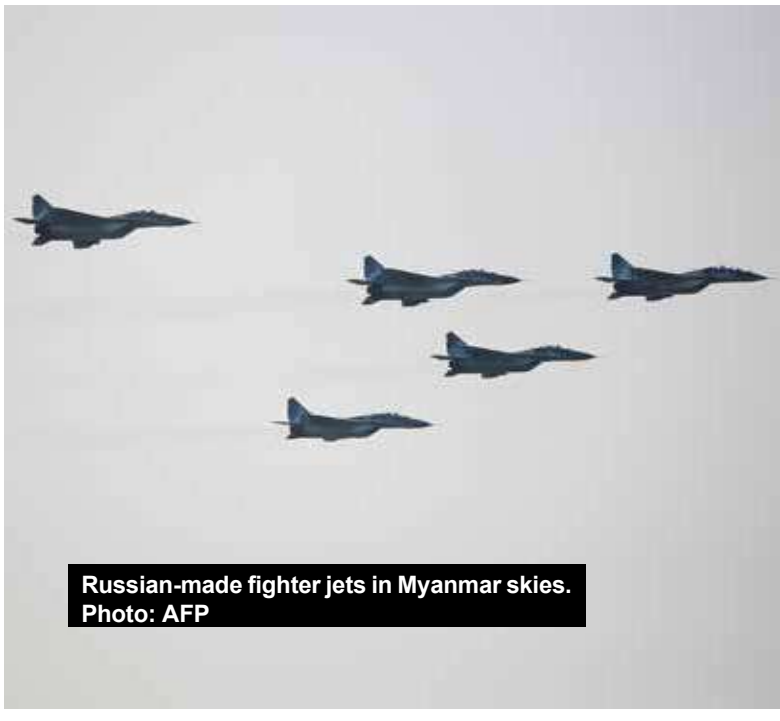
For Russia, Dawei could offer strategic access to the Indian Ocean and a stronger position in Southeast Asia. For Myanmar's military leadership, it could attract investment, reduce dependence on China and provide a degree of international recognition.

Nevertheless, the authors emphasise the gap between announcements and implementation. At the time of writing, no Russian company or consortium had joined the Dawei project. Myanmar's financial instability, continuing conflict, environmental risks and potential displacement of local communities all raise questions about its feasibility.

Financial cooperation and sanctions

Russia and Myanmar are also developing financial mechanisms designed to reduce their reliance on Western banking systems. These include direct payments in Myanmar kyat and Russian rubles, connections to Russia's financial messaging infrastructure and the introduction of Russia's Mir payment cards in Myanmar.

Such arrangements can facilitate bilateral trade despite restrictions affecting conventional financial channels. They may also make it harder for Western



Russian-made fighter jets in Myanmar skies. Photo: AFP

governments to monitor transactions if businesses and intermediaries exploit opaque structures.

However, the report makes an important distinction: it identifies risks associated with financial opacity and sanctions circumvention but states that there is no evidence that Russia is using Myanmar specifically to evade financial sanctions or launder money.

The broader concern is that alternative payment systems, together with informal financial networks and intermediaries, could weaken the effectiveness of sanctions intended to constrain the military regime and Russia's war economy.

Policy recommendations and overall conclusions

The report concludes with nine recommendations, primarily directed at Germany, the European Union and their international partners.

First, it calls for expanded sanctions targeting Russian arms, oil and gas trade connected to Myanmar, including Russia's shadow fleet. It recommends coordinated sanctions against Russian and Belarusian arms companies, intermediaries, vessels and banks involved in military supplies to the junta.

Second, it urges stronger monitoring of suspicious cargo movements, closer scrutiny of transit hubs and stricter enforcement of restrictions on dual-use components manufactured in Europe. It also advocates systematic mapping of Russian and Belarusian companies supplying Myanmar's military.

Third, the authors call for improved documentation of alleged war crimes, cooperation between Myanmar opposition forces and international partners, and efforts to pursue international arrest warrants against individuals implicated in such crimes.

Other recommendations include closer cooperation with ASEAN countries, particularly Singapore, Thailand and India; better intelligence-sharing among Western governments on Russia–Myanmar transactions; a common European refugee and asylum policy for people fleeing political persecution; and a clear policy against support for cyber-scam centres.

Finally, the report recommends making any future resumption of European development cooperation and investment in Myanmar conditional on ending lethal weapons imports from Russia.

Overall, "Militocracies in Arms" argues that Russia–Myanmar relations constitute a strategic partnership in which military cooperation is far more developed than economic investment. Russian weapons, technical assistance and diplomatic support help sustain Myanmar's military regime, while Myanmar provides Moscow with a partner in its wider campaign to resist Western pressure and extend its international influence.

The relationship has limits: Russia's war against Ukraine constrains its resources, China remains the dominant external power in Myanmar, and many promised economic projects have yet to materialise. Nevertheless, the authors warn that the partnership should not be underestimated. They argue that coordinated sanctions, tighter controls on military supply chains and sustained international cooperation are necessary to reduce the flow of resources supporting both the Myanmar junta and Russia's war effort.

Please find the full report here:

https://southeastasia.hss.de/publications/militocracies-in-arms-pub2782/



Photo: AFP

HOW CAN ASEAN BE SURE AID GETS TO THOSE IN NEED?

ASEAN Special Envoy to Myanmar Maria Theresa Lazaro visited two internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Taunggyi, southern Shan State, accompanied by representatives of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre), ASEAN diplomats based in Myanmar and a representative from Japan. The visit focused on delivering humanitarian assistance to displaced communities from Karen State and northern and southern Shan State, rather than engaging in political discussions with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing or detained State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

The humanitarian initiative aims to provide basic necessities and food assistance to more than 11,000 households over one month. The AHA Centre is preparing the assistance in cooperation with the Myanmar Red Cross Society. However, while the visit represents an effort by ASEAN to address immediate humanitarian needs, the situation of displaced communities elsewhere in Myanmar remains increasingly difficult.

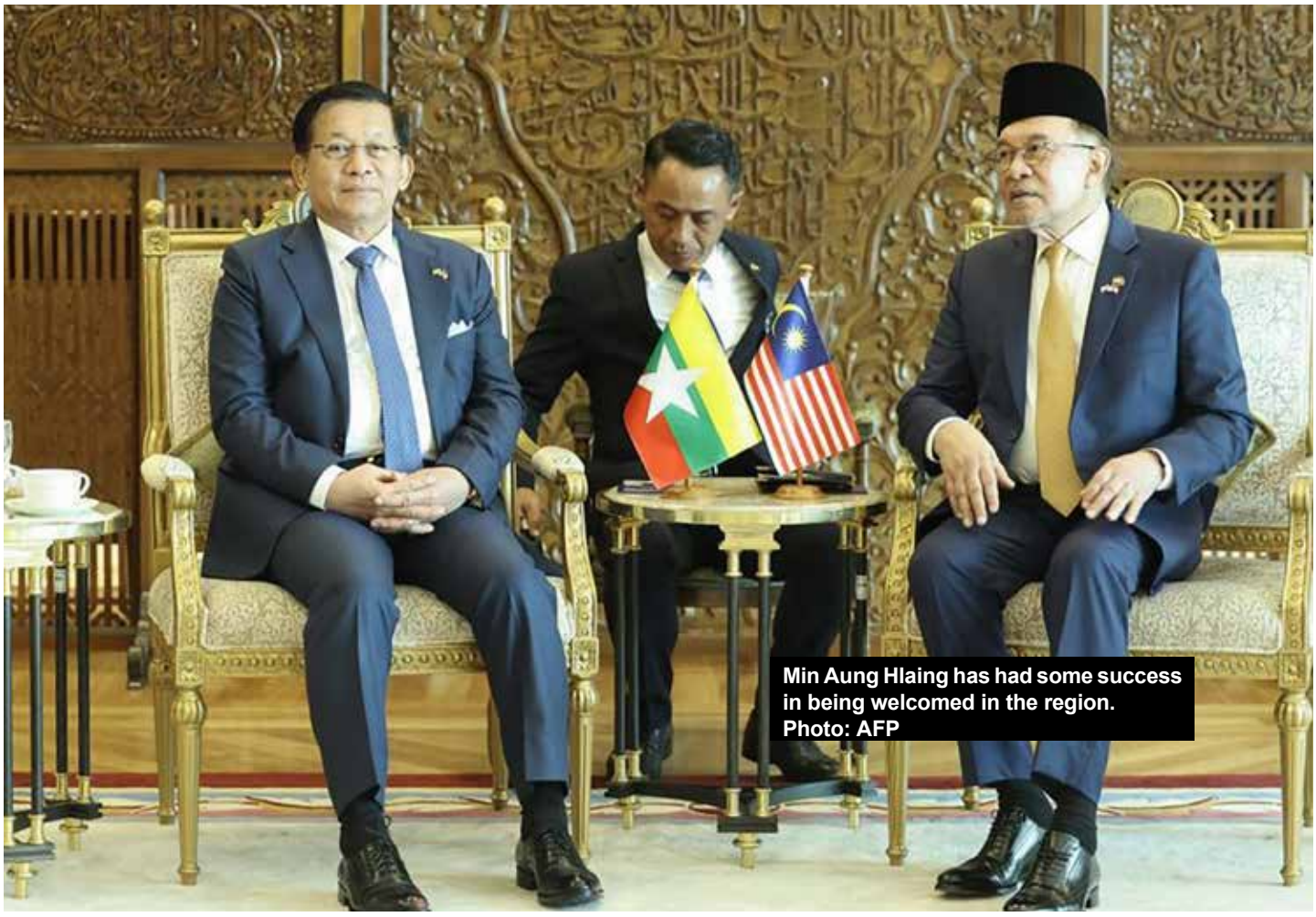
Across the country, IDPs continue to face shortages of food, shelter and medicine amid restrictions imposed by the military on humanitarian operations. The junta's checkpoints and limitations on transporting essential supplies have made it increasingly difficult for humanitarian organizations and individual volunteers to reach displaced communities.

Education has also been affected by these restrictions. Schools operating in IDP camps reportedly have to pay more than twice the prices charged in urban areas for exercise books because of transportation difficulties and military inspections. Even basic teaching materials, including whiteboards, are reportedly restricted at checkpoints, further undermining educational opportunities for displaced children.

In central Myanmar, displaced communities around Shwebo are facing additional health challenges. Changing weather conditions have contributed to flu and fever outbreaks, while shortages of medicine have made treatment difficult. A local volunteer organization, C&S, has been attempting to provide assistance despite military restrictions on transporting medicines and other essential supplies. The combination of inadequate healthcare, food shortages and malnutrition has increased the vulnerability of displaced families.

The military's restrictions also affect villagers who remain in their communities. In some areas, residents are reportedly prohibited from purchasing sufficient food in urban markets because the junta suspects that supplies could reach PDFs and other resistance forces. Under these restrictions, individuals may purchase only two kilograms of rice and one litre of cooking oil per month. Any quantities exceeding the permitted limits risk confiscation by military personnel.

These conditions illustrate the limitations of humanitarian assistance that focuses on individual relief operations without addressing the obstacles preventing aid from reaching vulnerable communities. Although ASEAN's initiative in Taunggyi provides much-needed assistance to displaced families, millions of people affected by Myanmar's conflict continue to face restrictions on basic necessities. Without greater humanitarian access and pressure to remove military-imposed barriers, assistance will remain insufficient to address the country's expanding humanitarian crisis.



Min Aung Hlaing has had some success in being welcomed in the region. Photo: AFP

How is the Myanmar junta's push for legitimacy going?

Myanmar's junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has intensified efforts to gain international recognition since assuming the self-appointed presidency in April 2026, making nine overseas visits to India, China, Russia, Belarus, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia within approximately five months, from late May to early October. The diplomatic campaign has allowed the junta to expand bilateral engagement, but it has yet to demonstrate broad international acceptance of his presidency.

Some political analysts and junta supporters have interpreted the visits as evidence that the military-backed administration is gradually regaining international legitimacy. However, diplomatic engagement does not necessarily indicate political recognition. Malaysia's response following Min Aung Hlaing's visit illustrates this distinction. Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan explained to the Malaysian Parliament that receiving the junta leader was intended to address the Myanmar migrant worker issue, particularly the repatriation of Myanmar nationals, and should not be interpreted as recognition of his presidency.

Although democratic governments have shown some changes in their approaches to engaging with Myanmar, their relationships with the National Unity Government (NUG) and resistance groups remain important. Meanwhile, several countries hosting Min Aung Hlaing maintain political systems that differ significantly from those of democratic states, making their diplomatic engagement insufficient evidence of broader international acceptance.

Institutional rejection has also continued. On October 2, the Southeast Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum (SEANF) terminated the membership of the junta-controlled Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC). The commission had previously lost its membership in the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions



Thailand's foreign minister. Thailand appears to find benefit in engaging with the Myanmar junta on a bilateral level. Photo: AFP

(GANHRI) and the Asia Pacific Forum (APF) in 2025, further demonstrating the junta's difficulties in restoring its international standing.

The diplomatic campaign has also failed to produce the expected economic benefits. During a recent parliamentary session, a junta minister reportedly acknowledged that promised foreign direct investment from China, Russia and India had not yet materialized. The administration is consequently facing budgetary pressure and has requested a loan of 2,100 billion kyats to address its financial shortfall.

A further challenge emerged when Germany's Chargé d'Affaires to Myanmar, Mathias Licharz, published a video filmed outside former president Win Myint's residence. He stated that Win Myint remained registered as Myanmar's president at the United Nations and questioned his freedom following his release from prison in April, noting that he remained unable to meet people of his choice. In response, Deputy Foreign Minister Ko Ko Kyaw summoned the German diplomat and reportedly warned him that recognizing Win Myint as Myanmar's president could result in his expulsion.

These developments expose the gap between the junta's diplomatic ambitions and its actual international standing. While Min Aung Hlaing has gained access to foreign governments, continued institutional exclusion, economic difficulties and diplomatic disagreements indicate that international engagement has not translated into widespread recognition of his presidency.

Some ASEAN countries are engaging with the Myanmar junta

The 49th ASEAN Summit, scheduled for November 15–17 in Manila, is expected to maintain the bloc's policy of excluding Myanmar's junta from high-level political meetings. According to a Philippine foreign ministry statement, the junta will send the director-general of its ASEAN Affairs Department rather than a political representative. The restriction, imposed after the 2021 coup, remains in place five years later, despite the junta leadership's efforts to strengthen bilateral relations with ASEAN member states.

The junta leader, Min Aung Hlaing, has received visits from and travelled to several ASEAN countries in recent months. Laos' foreign minister and deputy prime minister visited Myanmar on June 11–13 and met with Min Aung Hlaing. During the meeting, discussions reportedly included the junta's planned election and recognition of his self-appointed presidency.

Thailand's Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow is also scheduled to make a one-day visit to Naypyidaw ahead of the summit to meet with Min Aung Hlaing. Their discussions are expected to cover four issues: developments in Myanmar, conflict along the Thai-Myanmar border, disruptions to border trade and transportation, and transboundary river pollution. Sihasak also visited Naypyidaw in April, when discussions included border security, energy, drug trafficking, online scam centres, transboundary haze and river contamination.

Meanwhile, junta army chief Ye Win Oo, who succeeded Min Aung Hlaing in March, visited Laos on November 3. It was reportedly his second overseas trip, following a visit to Thailand in August.

These exchanges indicate that the junta is pursuing bilateral engagement with ASEAN governments to overcome its diplomatic isolation and regain access to the regional bloc. However, such visits do not necessarily signal ASEAN-wide recognition of the junta or its political authority. The continued exclusion of its political representatives from the summit highlights the gap between growing bilateral contacts and the bloc's collective position on Myanmar.



ASEAN Special Envoy Maria Teresa Lazaro on a visit to Shan State. Photo: AFP

HOW ASEAN HELPS LEGITIMIZE THE MYANMAR JUNTA THROUGH AID DISCRIMINATION: PROGRESSIVE VOICE

ASEAN Special Envoy Maria Teresa Lazaro is actively betraying her mandate by helping legitimize war criminals under the guise of humanitarian diplomacy, according to a report by Progressive Voice.

During the final week of October 2026, the Special Envoy's visit to Myanmar, coupled with ASEAN's broader defense engagements, deepened the bloc's complicity in the country's human rights catastrophe. This coordinated approach sanitizes ongoing atrocities and deliberately weaponizes life-saving assistance, discriminating against affected populations on the ground. To prevent further civilian suffering, ASEAN and its member states must immediately halt these legitimizing engagements.

They must hold the Special Envoy accountable for violating ASEAN's own mandates and ensure the October 2025 ASEAN Summit decision on humanitarian aid delivery is fully implemented. This requires bypassing the military entirely by channelling all humanitarian aid through borders in direct collaboration with the National Unity Government (NUG), Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs), and civil society organizations (CSOs), and locally led frontline responders.

The profound danger of ASEAN's current humanitarian approach was fully exposed during Special Envoy's visit to Myanmar on 28 and 29 October 2026. Lazaro directly engaged the junta's Foreign Minister, U Tin Maung Swe, under the guise of expanding assistance. The highly publicized itinerary delivered a massive propaganda victory for the military junta, featuring a symbolic handover of a reconstructed monastery in Pyinmana Township and distributed school kits in Tha Pyay Pin Village, creating a deceptive veneer of normalcy. While Lazaro publicly claimed her mission aimed to break through barriers and open up possibilities in hard-to-reach areas, her actions instead provided a polished photo opportunity for the very military currently launching relentless airstrikes against civilians. As Khin Ohmar, Founder and Acting Executive Director of Progressive Voice publicly

questioned in response to the visit, the Special Envoy's praises wilfully ignored how many bombs the illegal military junta dropped on civilian populations during the exact time of her mission.

More alarmingly, the Special Envoy's mission institutionalizes the junta's control over life-saving humanitarian aid. Lazaro chose to route regional assistance strictly through the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) and its implementing partner, the military-loyalist Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS). As the mission initiates a monthlong operation to distribute rice and hygiene kits to 11,000 households across Karen State, Southern Shan State, and Northern Shan State, directly through the MRCS, it effectively guarantees that the illegal military junta controls the distribution. This allows the military to intercept supplies, deny access to populations in democratic resistance-controlled areas, and weaponize basic needs as tools of subjugation.

This sanitization of atrocities was severely compounded by concurrent regional defense engagements. While the Special Envoy shook hands in Naypyidaw, her home country of the Philippines was simultaneously hosting the military junta's defense attaché, Brigadier General Tun Tun San, at the 20th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) in Cebu. Allowing a high-ranking official from a military that is actively committing mass atrocity crimes to sit at a regional security summit alongside international dialogue partners severely undermines global security norms. Lazaro's actions lay bare the catastrophic failure of ASEAN's diplomatic strategy and the utter bankruptcy of the Five-Point Consensus. As the Special Envoy prepares to report on her mission ahead of the ASEAN Summit in Manila this November, this dual track of defence and humanitarian engagement amounts to coordinated regional complicity in the junta's atrocity crimes, legitimizing the perpetrators as partners in the very crises they created.Treating war criminals as legitimate stakeholders in aid distribution endangers millions of displaced civilians and hands the junta diplomatic cover to continue its scorched-earth campaigns with total impunity.

ASEAN and its member states must urgently abandon this failed trajectory. The October 2025 mandate strictly dictates that humanitarian aid must reach internally displaced persons without discrimination, engaging exclusively with legitimate stakeholders operating completely outside of the junta's control. It is dangerously absurd to expect the illegal military junta, the main perpetrator of human rights violations, atrocities, and forced displacement, to deliver life-saving assistance to the very communities it actively bombs, persecutes, and deliberately deprives of aid. Perpetrators of mass atrocities can never be entrusted as humanitarian distributors.

By choosing to engage exclusively with the junta and its security apparatus, the Special Envoy deliberately sidelined the democratic actors with established territorial control, functioning administrations and service delivery, and the civil society networks with genuine access to conflict-affected communities to deliver aid on the ground. The total exclusion of these groups from the official readouts signals the Special Envoy's calculated decision to collaborate exclusively with war criminals. To end this complicity, ASEAN leaders and the broader international community must hold the Special Envoy accountable for this blatant violation of her mandate, and ensure that all humanitarian assistance bypasses the military junta completely, channelled instead through border-based mechanisms in direct collaboration with the NUG, EROs, local and regional interim governance actors, and CSOs and local frontline responders operating outside junta-controlled areas across the country.



NUG RELEASES STATEMENT: MYANMAR PUBLIC HEALTHCARE SERVICES WILL CONTINUE DESPITE HOSPITALS AND CLINICS BEING TARGETED FOR ATTACKS

The Ministry of Health of the National United Government (NUG) has issued a statement declaring that public health services will continue to be provided, despite the junta forces' intentional targeting and attacks on hospitals and clinics where civilians receive medical treatment.

Since the coup in 2021 through the end of late 2024, the junta forces have intensified their destruction of hospitals and clinics through airstrikes, heavy artillery fire, and arson by ground columns.

On the night of November 4, an airstrike targeted a public hospital in Hlyaw Phyu Kone Village, on the eastern side of Kawlin Township, Sagaing Region. The incident resulted in the deaths of 38-year-old Dr. Zarni Tun (also known as Sayar Pwgyi), the NUG Ministry of Health's health officer for Kawlin Township, and 19-year-old healthcare worker Maung Htet Thu Aung, who was in the process of applying to medical university. Five other healthcare workers were also injured.

According to the NUG's statement, from February 1, 2021, to September 2024, 176 healthcare workers have been killed and 995 have been arrested due to the junta's targeted attacks on healthcare service sites. Additionally, 521 hospital and clinic buildings have been destroyed in the attacks.

The statement noted that despite these difficulties and challenges, the Ministry of Health will continue its public healthcare activities in collaboration with heroic healthcare workers, ethnic organizations, local organizations, and the people.

The NUG stated that the junta's targeted attacks on the health sector are blatant violations of the Geneva Conventions, United Nations Security Council resolutions, and international humanitarian and human rights laws.

The NUG condemned such attacks by the junta and stated that justice will be pursued, with severe legal action taken against the terrorist junta and its accomplices. They also expressed deep condolences to the families of the heroic healthcare workers, patients, civilians, and revolutionary comrades who have fallen due to these attacks.

The statement also urged the international community to stand in sympathy with the suffering people and not to ignore the junta's attacks, war crimes, and crimes against humanity targeting innocent civilians and the health sector in Myanmar. It called for the use of all possible means to effectively and swiftly prevent and take action against these crimes.



Bangladesh border force. Photo: AFP

BANGLADESH RESCUES ROHINGYA REFUGEES IN BORDER GUN BATTLE

Bangladesh security forces rescued at least 57 people, including Rohingya refugees, during a gun battle with suspected human traffickers near the Myanmar border, the military said 6 November.

One soldier was killed in the clash on Thursday night, the military's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said.

ISPR said that security forces launched an operation in the hills of Rongikhali in Teknaf, close to the border with Myanmar, after receiving a tip-off that an armed gang of 15 to 16 suspected traffickers had abducted around 120 Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshis.

"During the exchange of fire, an army soldier, Md Titash Sheikh, was shot. The bullet struck his left shoulder. He was bleeding profusely," the statement said.

Sheikh, 27, later died of his injuries.

Bangladesh hosts more than 1.2 million Rohingya refugees, most of whom fled a brutal military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar in 2017.

Many live in sprawling camps around Cox's Bazar, near the border, where trafficking gangs prey on refugees seeking work or passage abroad.

The 2017 Myanmar crackdown, which saw Rohingya villages burned and civilians killed, is the subject of a genocide case at the UN's top court in The Hague.

The court will deliver its ruling on November 19.

AFP



MYANMAR JUNTA SETS APRIL BY-ELECTIONS FOR 55 CONSTITUENCIES, A THIRD OF THOSE IT PLEDGED TO FILL

Myanmar's military-appointed Union Election Commission (UEC) will hold by-elections on 4 April 2027 in 55 constituencies, around a third of the 172 that junta leader Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, who declared himself "president", said in July would get a vote.

According to UEC issued on 5 November and signed by commission chairman Than Soe, the vote will cover 34 constituencies for the Pyithu Hluttaw, or lower house, five for the Amyotha Hluttaw, or upper house, and 16 for state and regional legislatures. All seats will be contested under the first-past-the-post system, state-run Myanmar International Television reported. The commission said full constituency lists would be published in state newspapers and on its website.

The announcement falls well short of the plan Min Aung Hlaing set out in a 31 July speech to Parliament marking his first 100 days in office. He said by-elections in 2027 would cover 172 constituencies across 102 townships where voting could not be held during the regime's three-phase general election. These comprised 89 lower house seats, 15 upper house seats and 68 seats in state and regional legislatures.

The April list therefore leaves at least 117 of those constituencies without a vote. State media reports of the announcement gave no reason for the smaller number and set no date for the remaining constituencies.

The regime held its general election in three phases between 28 December 2025 and 25 January 2026, after annulling the results of the 2020 vote and dissolving the National League for Democracy (NLD). Pro-military parties led by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won, and Min Aung Hlaing took office as "president" in April.



Photo: Supplied

THAI BORDER VILLAGERS SOUGHT BOMB SHELTERS TWO DAYS BEFORE MYANMAR FIGHTING STRUCK THEIR HOMES

More than 200 residents of Mae Sot district in Thailand's Tak province gathered on 27 October to demand protection from cross-border fire. Two days later, shells and gunfire from fighting in Myanmar's Karen State hit houses in their community and wounded Thai civilians.

According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) project, the 29 October rounds came from a junta operation against the Karen National Union (KNU) and its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The operation targeted Min Let Pan, a resistance-held village directly across the Moei River from Thailand. The junta has instead blamed the KNU/KNLA and allied People's Defence Force (PDF) units, accusing them of firing into Thailand to stoke tensions, ACLED said.

ACLED described Thailand's reaction as its strongest response to date. Thai troops fired warning shots into Myanmar, more soldiers were sent to the border, and F-16 fighter jets patrolled Thai airspace. The Ratchamanu Task Force said it was prepared to respond with live ammunition under its rules of engagement if further rounds crossed into Thailand, according to Khaosod English. Thai authorities also suspended trade through informal crossings south of the First Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge in Mae Sot and parts of Phop Phra district from 30 October to 5 November.

Min Let Pan has been fought over for about a year. The junta launched a counteroffensive to retake the village after the KNLA seized it from the regime-aligned Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) in November 2025. ACLED said the village is key to the military's effort to secure southern Myawaddy, a major trade town opposite Thailand, and to protect supply routes to its strategic Waw Lay base.

ACLED has recorded more than 50 spillover incidents from Myanmar into four neighbouring countries since fighting intensified after the military's February 2021 coup. Thirteen of them were on the Thai border, and at least a dozen people were injured and 19 houses destroyed.

Jesua Lynn, ACLED's Myanmar analyst, said Thai diplomatic protests and military moves may deter incidents for now. Lynn also warned that "further spillover remains likely as long as the fight for southern Myawaddy goes on." Lynn added that Bangkok is likely to send more troops to the border to pressure both sides, a build-up that could lead to tense standoffs.



RSN SAYS ABOUT 50 PEOPLE DETAINED FOR FORCED MILITARY RECRUITMENT IN YANGON IN OCTOBER

About 50 people were forcibly detained for military service by junta authorities and their local aides in Yangon in October, according to the Rangoon Scout Network (RSN), a Yangon monitoring group. Arrests were reported most often in Kyauktada, Hlaing, Insein and North Dagon townships. RSN said arrests happened in other townships too, but those are unconfirmed.

"Some of those arrested have been sent into military service. For the majority, their subsequent status remains unknown," an RSN official said, adding that RSN knows of cases in which about five people were arrested at their homes and forced into service. In September, RSN said 131 people were detained in Yangon for recruitment.

Social media reports in October said women were also being forcibly recruited. "We are not yet aware of any cases involving the military recruitment of women," the RSN official said, but there have been cases of women pulled into cars and held for ransom. RSN advised women who go out to stay in constant contact with home, memorize phone numbers, keep phone GPS on and avoid secluded areas.

The People's Military Service Law, enacted in 2010, was activated on 10 February 2024 as the junta suffered battlefield losses. It requires men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 to serve. The junta and Pyu Saw Htee, junta-aligned militias, have carried out forced recruitment in cities including Yangon through arrests and other forced means, according to RSN. The junta recruits about 5,000 people per training batch, according to its stated policy.

RSN estimates the junta plans to start its 30th training batch around 16 November. It urged the public to travel with extra care because arrests tend to rise ahead of a new batch to meet quotas.



Photo: AFP

AMBASSADOR KYAW MOE TUN SAYS MORE THAN 4 MILLION ARE DISPLACED AND 16.2 MILLION NEED AID IN MYANMAR

Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, told an interactive dialogue between UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) member states and UN Resident Coordinators at UN Headquarters in New York on 4 November that more than four million people in Myanmar are displaced and over 16.2 million need humanitarian assistance.

The UN's latest estimate is nearly 3.8 million displaced as of June, and 16.2 million in need under the 2026 humanitarian plan.

He said development gains made before the 2021 coup have reversed, and that people's suffering has deepened because of military airstrikes, atrocities against civilians and economic collapse. He said it is hard to get aid to people because the junta imposes restrictions and deliberate blockades on delivery to conflict-hit areas.

He urged the UN Resident Coordinator and agencies to keep working to ensure aid reaches all areas in need without discrimination, and called for better coordination among the National Unity Government (NUG), the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) and democratic forces. He also asked donors to give more to the Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, for which the UN seeks US$890 million.

He said humanitarian aid alone cannot meet people's needs and that humanitarian, development and peace efforts must be linked. He urged the international community to support the people of Myanmar who are working to end military dictatorship and build a federal democratic union to achieve lasting peace, stability and development.



NORWAY CONTINUES TO SUPPORT MYANMAR — BUT WHO IS ACTUALLY RECEIVING THE AID?

BY MA WUT HMON WIN

Norway has been providing assistance to Myanmar for many years. As Myanmar's political situation has changed, Norway's aid policies have also evolved over time. Nevertheless, Norway has continued to provide assistance to the people of Myanmar.

In 2025 alone, Norwegian aid to Myanmar amounted to more than NOK 312 million.

This raises an important question.

While we know how much money has been provided, who actually receives these funds, and who manages them?

Since the 2021 military coup in particular, territorial control, security conditions, administrative systems, and aid delivery routes in Myanmar have changed significantly.

Under these circumstances, are the aid delivery systems used in the past still effective today? This question highlights the need to examine not only Norway's assistance to Myanmar but also the international aid system as a whole.

Norway's Long-standing Support for Myanmar

Norway and Myanmar established diplomatic relations in 1956. During successive periods of military rule, Norway provided support for refugees, human rights initiatives, and pro-democracy movements.

Following Myanmar's political transition in 2011, Norway expanded its cooperation with the country. Its support covered the peace process, democratic development, good governance, human rights, strengthening civil society organizations, and development initiatives.

In 2013, Norway opened its embassy in Yangon, further expanding bilateral relations.

However, the 2021 military coup marked a significant shift in Norway's policy. Norway suspended direct government-to-government aid cooperation with Myanmar.

Nevertheless, it did not stop providing assistance to the Myanmar people.

Norway continued its support through United Nations agencies, Norwegian and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society organizations. This shows how Norway's aid policy has changed in response to Myanmar's political situation.

However, the extent to which these policy changes have affected how aid reaches people on the ground requires further examination.

Norwegian Aid from 2020 to 2025 — Has Funding Increased?

According to Norad's Bistand i tall aid statistics, Norway's annual recorded assistance to Myanmar was as follows:

Year	Norwegian Aid
2020	NOK 287 million
2021	NOK 274.9 million
2022	NOK 278.1 million
2023	NOK 344.7 million
2024	NOK 252.7 million
2025	NOK 312.4 million

These figures show that Norwegian aid did not increase steadily every year following the 2021 coup.

Aid rose to more than NOK 344 million in 2023 before declining in 2024. In 2025, it increased again to NOK 312.4 million.

Compared with 2024, Norwegian assistance increased by nearly NOK 60 million in 2025.

These figures represent the total aid recorded in relation to Myanmar, not humanitarian assistance alone.

In early 2025, Norway also announced an allocation of NOK 120 million in humanitarian assistance for Myanmar.

However, an increase in total aid funding does not necessarily mean that the number of people receiving assistance or the impact of that assistance on the ground has also increased.

Therefore, beyond the amount of money provided, it is important to examine the channels through which aid is delivered.

Where Does the Aid Money Go?

Of the NOK 312.4 million recorded as Norwegian assistance to Myanmar in 2025, the largest share fell under the category of Norwegian non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

A comparison of 2024 and 2025 shows the following:

Norwegian Aid to Myanmar by Partner Organization Category

Comparison between 2024 and 2025

Organization Category	2024	2025
Norwegian NGOs	NOK 111.4 million	NOK 163 million
UN and multilateral organizations	NOK 97.2 million	NOK 91.7 million
Unspecified category	NOK 33 million	NOK 36.8 million
Other NGOs	NOK 7.3 million	NOK 12.8 million

All figures are in Norwegian kroner. Only the main categories are presented.

The most significant change was in the Norwegian NGO category.

Funding recorded under this category increased from NOK 111.4 million in 2024 to NOK 163 million in 2025.

This means that more than half of Norway's total recorded assistance was classified under Norwegian NGOs.

However, this does not mean that Norwegian NGOs themselves spent the entire amount.

These organizations may have passed on funding to local partners and other implementing organizations operating in Myanmar.

The important distinction here is that the organization receiving the funding and the organization carrying out the work on the ground may not be the same.

It is therefore necessary to know how much of the NOK 163 million local organizations were able to manage independently, and how much was spent on the administration and operational costs of international organizations.

To answer these questions, we need to examine the funding allocations and reports of individual organizations.

How Does Norad Select Its Partner Organizations?

Norad (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) is a Norwegian government agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responsible for international development cooperation.

It manages a large share of Norway's international aid funding, allocates funds to partner organizations, and monitors how the money is used and what results are achieved.

Rather than implementing aid projects directly on the ground, Norad works through United Nations agencies, NGOs, and other partner organizations.

Since Norway provides much of its assistance to Myanmar through UN agencies and NGOs, the question of how these organizations are selected is important.

The Norwegian Embassy's official website lists Norwegian organizations involved in humanitarian assistance and development activities in Myanmar. These include Flyktninghjelpen (NRC), Norsk Folkehjelp (NPA), Redd Barna, Kirkens Nødhjelp, CARE Norge, DIGNI, ADRA Norge, Strømmestiftelsen, and Norges Røde Kors.

However, this does not mean that all these organizations shared the NOK 163 million recorded under the Norwegian NGO category in 2025. Their individual funding records need to be examined separately.

Under Norad's grant programmes, organizations are assessed based on their experience, knowledge of the relevant region, financial management capacity, and previous results. Anti-corruption measures and risk management systems are also taken into consideration.

Some grant programmes require at least five years of experience in the relevant field and region. However, this requirement does not apply to all Norad programmes.

These assessments are intended to identify organizations capable of managing Norwegian public funds responsibly.

But in a conflict-affected country like Myanmar, how these criteria are applied raises important questions.

A local organization may have spent years delivering assistance on the ground but may face difficulties obtaining formal registration because of security concerns. It may also lack the accounting systems and funding records typically maintained by international organizations.

How, then, should the capacity of such organizations be assessed? Beyond documentation, to what extent are their ability to operate effectively on the ground, the trust they have earned from local communities, and their actual results taken into account?

This is an important question when it comes to building trust in local organizations.

Can Aid Be Delivered Without Going Through the Military Junta?

One of the issues debated in international aid efforts in Myanmar is whether assistance can reach people without passing through the military junta's control.

Following the 2021 military coup, Norway and the European Union (EU) suspended direct development cooperation with the military authorities. However, they continued supporting the Myanmar people through UN agencies, NGOs, and civil society organizations.

There is an important distinction to be made here.

Not providing money directly to the military junta is not the same as being able to completely bypass its control.

Delivering aid within Myanmar may require travel permits, authorization to transport goods, and administrative approvals. In areas controlled by the military junta, these restrictions can delay humanitarian operations or prevent assistance from reaching certain communities.

I have discussed this issue directly with people involved in international aid delivery.

When the question was raised of whether providing assistance in junta-controlled areas could indirectly benefit the military junta, the response was a request to present evidence if aid was reaching the junta.

Another explanation was that displaced people and others in need have the right to receive assistance regardless of who controls the territory where they live. They are not necessarily in a position to choose where they live.

This explanation reflects a fundamental humanitarian principle. However, the responsibility to assist people in need and the question of whether the junta can control or indirectly benefit from that assistance are two separate issues.

Without evidence, we cannot claim that all aid delivered through formally recognized partner organizations is controlled by the military junta. At the same time, it is necessary to ask how these organizations verify that their assistance is free from such control.

What matters is knowing which routes the aid takes, what obstacles it encounters, and how much actually reaches the people.

What About the EU's Approach to Aid?

Norway is not the only donor. The European Union has also provided assistance to Myanmar for many years.

Following the 2021 military coup, the EU suspended formal development cooperation with the military authorities and adopted an approach known as Back to Basics.

Under this approach, the EU continued providing assistance through NGOs, civil society organizations, and international organizations, focusing on those most in need.

Although Norway and the EU have similar approaches, their methods of selecting partner organizations, funding local groups, and monitoring projects may differ.

The EU has also acknowledged that security conditions, restrictions on movement, and administrative barriers have made aid operations in Myanmar difficult.

Therefore, when comparing Norway's and the EU's assistance, it is important to look beyond how much funding they provide and examine which delivery channels they use and how effectively assistance reaches people in need.

How Does Norway Monitor and Control Its Aid Funding?

In Norway, the management of international aid funding has been subject to scrutiny and criticism.

In May 2026, the Office of the Auditor General of Norway (Riksrevisjonen), which audits the use of public funds, identified weaknesses in Norad's monitoring of assistance provided to Ukraine.

In particular, the documentation was insufficient to verify retrospectively how Norad had assessed reports submitted by aid recipients.

These findings concerned assistance to Ukraine and do not mean that the same problems exist in aid to Myanmar.

Nevertheless, they highlight an important lesson for international aid.

Trusting partner organizations and providing funding is not enough. It must also be possible to verify how the money was used and whether the planned activities were actually carried out.

This is particularly important in conflict-affected countries like Myanmar, where conducting on-the-ground monitoring is difficult.

Is Norway Taking Steps to Provide More Support to Local Organizations?

In January 2026, Norad announced a new locally led humanitarian assistance programme for Myanmar, Sudan, and Syria.

A total of NOK 180 million was allocated to the three countries over three years.

The aim is to provide local organizations with greater access to funding, support their long-term operations, and allow them more flexibility in using funds according to their needs.

Norad has also recognized that local organizations often understand the needs of their communities better and are among the first to respond during emergencies, particularly in areas that international organizations struggle to access.

This approach, which gives local organizations a greater leadership role in aid delivery, is known as localisation.

However, simply using local organizations to implement projects is not enough. They also need the authority to manage funding independently, make decisions about project design, and receive the support necessary for their long-term sustainability.

This raises another question.

How will local organizations operating outside the military junta's control, including those unable to obtain formal registration because of security concerns, be selected and supported?

Whether Norway's new policy will genuinely give Myanmar's local organizations greater access to funding and decision-making power remains to be seen.

How Should the Success of Aid Be Measured?

Norway has continued providing assistance to the Myanmar people despite the country's political upheavals.

However, as conditions in Myanmar change, the methods used to deliver aid must also be reviewed.

Donors need to ensure that funds are properly monitored and accounted for. At the same time, they must consider whether overly strict requirements could prevent local organizations working in conflict-affected areas from accessing funding.

Both financial oversight and the ability to reach people on the ground deserve equal attention. Official records can show how much money Norway provides to Myanmar each year.

But we also need to know how much of that funding reaches local Myanmar organizations, to what extent the junta's restrictions have been overcome, and what impact the assistance has had on people's lives.

The question is not only how much aid has been provided, but also who manages it and who ultimately receives it.

Raising these questions is not an argument against Norway's assistance. It is about ensuring that Norwegian taxpayers' money is used more effectively and that aid genuinely reaches the people of Myanmar who need it.

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19 DELEGATES FROM EIGHT COUNTRIES VISIT TO STUDY LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS FOR REFUGEES IN MALAYSIA

Delegates from eight member countries of the Priority Situations Core Group (PSCG) visited Malaysia to study priority conditions for resettlement to third countries and the development of other long-term solutions for refugees in Malaysia, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and refugee aid organizations.

The study mission included representatives from eight countries: New Zealand, which currently holds the PSCG chair, Australia, Canada, Finland, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the Philippines. A total of 19 delegates participated, including representatives from the European Union (EU), UNHCR, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The visit was hosted by UNHCR Malaysia from October 20 to 22. During the trip, the delegation met with refugee communities, civil society organizations, and the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM).

However, Salai Bawi Thang Bik, chairman of the Malaysia-based Alliance of Chin Refugees (ACR), said their organization did not have the opportunity to meet with the delegation.

"We didn't get to meet them, but seeing these activities by the UNHCR and international organizations makes us feel a little bit of hope," Salai Bawi Thang Bik told Mizzima.

He noted that resettlement to third countries is not a sustainable solution to the refugee problem; rather, the lasting solution for refugees is the achievement of peace in their home countries. He therefore urged the international community to focus efforts on achieving internal political stability in the relevant countries.

According to a UNHCR statement, the visit aimed to gain a deeper understanding of refugee protection conditions in Malaysia, the Malaysian government's Tracking Refugees Information System (TRIS) registration program (referred to locally as DPP), the experiences of refugees, and the role of third-country resettlement.

Since 2005, Malaysia has seen more than 130,000 refugees depart for resettlement in third countries, and more than 162,000 additional refugees have been processed and referred for resettlement.

Furthermore, the UNHCR statement noted that Malaysia is one of the most effective countries in the Asia-Pacific region in facilitating long-term solutions that allow refugees to depart for other countries through family reunification, humanitarian visas, education, and employment opportunities.

The delegation also observed programs related to refugees' livelihoods, education, and healthcare.

However, the ACR chairman said that refugees on the ground face various hardships and have yet to receive practical assistance from such programs.

"Those programs are only being talked about in the news as having started. On the ground, we haven't seen practical implementation or support yet. Amidst discrimination from locals and daily arrests by the government, people are always living in fear, wondering 'When will it be my turn?'" he said.

Refugees in Malaysia are also reportedly facing job shortages, insecurity, and severe depression and stress.

Amidst these conditions, the ACR chairman urged Myanmar refugees abroad to live disciplined lives and avoid behaviour that could incite hatred in the eyes of the host country's citizens. He added that living without discipline amounts to blocking one's own future opportunities.

On the other hand, Malaysia is implementing a program to deport Myanmar nationals, with plans to repatriate a total of approximately 5,000 people in stages. In late September, the first batch of nearly 1,500 Myanmar nationals was sent back to their homeland via naval vessels.

The PSCG was established in 2019 with the support of UNHCR to coordinate the improvement of refugee resettlement and other long-term solutions. The group has reportedly focused primarily on refugee issues regarding Syria and the Central Mediterranean region.



Photo: Supplied

THAI OPPOSITION MOVES TO CURB JUNTA-LINKED MIGRANT ID CENTRES AFTER PROTEST LEADER IS BEATEN IN BANGKOK

Thailand's opposition People's Party has urged the Labour Ministry to place Myanmar's Certificate of Identity (CI) centres under Thai supervision or close them altogether. The call comes as workers and employers say the documents now come tied to payments that benefit Myanmar's military regime.

According to Thai media, the party's shadow cabinet proposed five measures. These include challenging Myanmar's 2 per cent income tax under international law and the 2002 bilateral double taxation agreement, temporarily easing identity-document requirements, and reviewing Thailand's diplomatic approach.

The demands follow an assault on 1 November on Veera Saengthong, leader of the Bright Future migrant workers' group, outside the United Nations office on Ratchadamnoen Nok Avenue in Bangkok. He was attacked during a protest calling for the CI centres to be abolished. Men from two royalist groups punched and kicked him before police stepped in, according to Thai media reports. The People's Party condemned the attack and called on police to collect evidence and pursue legal action against those responsible.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military seized power in February 2021, and Thailand hosts the largest share of Myanmar's migrant workforce. Under the regime's rules, workers applying for or renewing a CI must show proof that they remitted 2,000 baht a month through official channels, or 6,000 baht (about $180) over three months. They must also show proof of paying around 1,800 baht ($54) in annual income tax. Thai government announcements list four CI centres operating from 14 October 2026 to 14 January 2027, in Samut Sakhon, Samut Prakan, Surat Thani and Chiang Mai, plus a mobile unit in Chonburi. Workers pay a 2,660-baht ($80) processing fee at 7-Eleven stores.

Nilubon, representing the White Employers group, alleged that brokers at the centres demanded unofficial payments of 1,350 to 1,500 baht ($40–45). She said around 700,000 workers still needed to complete CI registration.

Veera told DVB he would file complaints with Thai police and the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand. Migrant campaigners want Thailand to accept its own "pink card" as the only document workers need. They say the CI system lets Myanmar authorities collect taxes, fees and workers' personal data, and identify people eligible for military service under the regime's conscription law.

Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow is due to visit Myanmar on 12 November, ahead of the ASEAN Summit scheduled for 15–17 November.



KNU URGES THAILAND AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO PROTECT CIVILIANS AND KEEP BORDER TRADE OPEN AFTER JUNTA STRIKES NEAR MAE HONG SON

The Karen National Union (KNU) called in a statement on 3 November for the Thai government and the international community to protect civilians and keep border trade open for essential food, after junta airstrikes near the Thai border. The KNU said the strikes and shelling have destroyed homes and public buildings on both sides of the border, and that people face life-threatening risk and psychological trauma.

On 31 October, a junta Yak-130 dropped two bombs on the KNU's Thaw Le Hta checkpoint across the Salween River from Mae Sam Laep village in Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province. About 17 buildings in the Thai village, including a health center, a school and places of worship, were damaged and nobody was reported hurt, according to Thai media reports. The KNU said the strikes on 25, 27 and 31 October hit the river crossings Mae Nu Tha, Hra Tha and Thaw Le Tha and caused significant damage in Mae Sam Laep.

The KNU said the junta bombed Mutraw District on at least 13 of October's 31 days and that the crossings are the main lifeline for more than 120,000 people in Mutraw and nearby areas. It said it set up a Mutraw District Border Trade and Security Office to enable legal trade and stop illegal activity, and worked with local Thai authorities on 23 August to intercept illegal timber transport on the Salween.

The KNU said on 1 November that the junta sent a formal letter through the Myawaddy border committee on 31 August warning Thai officials and traders not to supply the KNU and threatening to attack its base, according to Khaosod English and DVB. The letter says trade with the KNU breaks Myanmar law. The KNU also accuses the junta of using trade as a weapon by tightening inspections on the Myawaddy, Hpa-an and Mawlamyine routes and raiding warehouses and trucks holding Thai goods, causing food shortages and high prices.

It said junta operations have forced more than 2,500 households, 10,658 people, from over 10 villages in Myawaddy Township, Dooplaya District, to flee, destroyed more than 170 houses and killed seven civilians.

The KNU urged Thailand, ASEAN and the UN to restrict the junta's access to aviation fuel and weapons and to press it to stop airstrikes on civilians. It asked Thailand to keep giving refuge to people fleeing, provide humanitarian aid and keep border crossings open for essential goods, and said it will keep working with Thai authorities on security and livelihoods along the border.



MIZORAM AND ULA-AA AGREE TO SOLVE INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER TRADE DIFFICULTIES; TWO GATES TO OPEN UNTIL 8 PM

The Mizoram Commercial Vehicle Owners Association (MCVOA) in Saiha District, Mizoram, and the United League of Arakan/ Arakan Army (ULA/AA) met to discuss and jointly resolve difficulties encountered in India-Myanmar border trade operations, agreeing to keep border gates in Rali and Laki villages open daily until 8 PM.

The meeting was held on 29 October at the Journalists' Association hall in Saiha. Led by the Chairman of MCVOA Saiha District, officials from both organizations attended, as reported by The Times of India and the government-owned All India Radio Aizawl.

"The discussion aimed at facilitating the smooth purchase of goods for the people of Arakan. They also agreed on their side. Since there is constant interaction with Mizoram drivers, the discussion focused on working with mutual respect and understanding," a person familiar with the meeting told Mizzima.

At the meeting, they discussed matters regarding freight rates and border gate issues, agreeing to cooperate with mutual understanding, the source added.

News reports stated that the meeting was intended to jointly resolve, through mutual agreement,

the difficulties frequently encountered in the informal cross-border trade operations currently taking place along the India-Myanmar border.

Both organizations exchanged views and agreed to set reasonable and fair rates for boat and vehicle charges used in transporting goods.

Furthermore, it was learned that both sides agreed to keep the border gates in Rali and Laki villages open daily until 8 PM.

During the meeting, MCVOA leaders informed ULA/AA representatives that if people within Saiha District contacted them, they would assist as much as possible in securing necessary goods and supplies, as well as handling security matters.

In Khaikhy village, Saiha District, a dispute had occurred between Rakhine boatmen and the Mara Thyutlia Py (MTP) regarding the rotation of goods transportation, which included physical altercations. Subsequently, the MTP closed the border trade gate on September 16.

Following discussions between MTP leaders and ULA/AA representatives, the border trade ban was reportedly lifted on September 24.

Since the 2021 military coup, basic food items, fuel, and consumer goods have been imported from southern Mizoram for locals in southern Chin State and Rakhine State, who are cut off from other regions of Myanmar.

The Arakan Army controls most of the areas involved in the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project agreed upon by India and Myanmar.

Regarding this project, the Chief Minister of Mizoram revealed after meeting with railway project officials on 27 October that a railway line would be constructed from Sairang, Mizoram, to Hmawngbuchhuah village in Lawngtlai District, which borders Paletwa, Myanmar.

ULA/AA spokesperson U Khaing Thukha told Mizzima that if the railway reaches the border, it will benefit people on both sides. He added that they are assisting as much as possible to ensure the Kaladan project is completed quickly and that necessary coordination with the Indian central government regarding border stability is ongoing.



NLD, STATE AND FEDERAL-UNIT PARLIAMENTS AND INTERIM GOVERNMENTS URGE ASEAN NOT TO IGNORE THE MYANMAR PEOPLE'S WILL

The National League for Democracy (NLD), committees representing state parliaments, federal unit parliaments and interim governments sent an open letter to ASEAN leaders on 3 November urging them to make sure engagement with what the signatories call the "military coup leader" does not disregard the people's will and produces practical political results. Min Aung Hlaing became president in April under a government installed after a junta-run election that many considered a "sham".

The letter says lasting peace and stability can come only from the people's will on the country's future. It says engagement with the military should not be an end in itself and must not give the junta political legitimacy without measurable progress. It asks that engagement be judged by whether it helps end violence, free Aung San Suu Kyi and political prisoners, restore democracy and produce an inclusive political process, which the signatories say matches ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and UN Security Council Resolution 2669.

Citing the 28 September airstrike near a market in Kyauktaw Township, Rakhine State, the letter calls on ASEAN to act more decisively to protect civilians and uphold international humanitarian law. At least 49 people were killed and 58 wounded in that attack, the Arakan Army and a rescue official told the AP. The letter warns that a perception of impunity for the junta could damage ASEAN's credibility and dignity.

The signatories include the NLD; the committees representing state parliaments of Kayah, Kayin, Mon and Shan; the Chinland Council and Government; the federal unit parliaments of Sagaing, Bago, Magway, Yangon and Ayeyarwady; the interim governments of Sagaing and Magway; the Tanintharyi Region Parliament; and the Mandalay Regional Parliament and Interim Administrative Council.



CHIPWI RESIDENTS FEAR TOWN MAY HAVE TO RELOCATE AS GOLD MINING ERODES RIVERBANK, LOCAL MAN SAYS

A resident of Chipwi, also spelled Chibwe, in Kachin State told Mizzima he fears the whole town may one day have to move because gold mining where Chipwi Creek meets the N'Mai River is eroding the riverbank.

Mizzima has not independently confirmed the details, and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) has not responded to this report.

The man said large machinery has dug at the site day and night since September, to a depth of about 60 to 70 feet. The pit is next to a riverside field that hosts school sports competitions and ceremonies, he said, and close to a high school compound and other buildings. In a town surrounded by mountains where flat land is scarce, he said, this field is the only large open space. "We don't want gold mining to happen right in the middle of our town," he said.

He said Chipwi has more than 310 households, or about 400 counting families who fled to Myitkyina because of the conflict, with about 2,000 to 2,300 people who live from casual labour, orchard farming, cultivation and small livestock, and including civil servant families. Dams and school buildings have been lost to the river before, he said, and residents fear continued erosion will reach the field, the school and homes.

He said he believes the work is run jointly by local authorities under the KIO and Chinese businessmen, and that Chinese technical workers and machinery are involved. The stated aim is to take stone from the sandbank to pave the Chipwi–Pangwa and Chipwi–Sawlaw roads, but he said it is gold mining because high-pressure water jets are used. He does not know the company's name, and permits and any official involvement are unconfirmed.

He said residents can't enter the site because it is guarded by members of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), and that local authorities told them not to submit complaint letters. "No one dares to speak out; everyone is living in fear," he said, adding that the opposition reflects the collective view of local sub-ethnic groups and religious communities.

The KIA and allied forces captured Chipwi in late September 2024. BNI reported that residents have called on the KIO to halt a Chinese-backed gold mine at the same confluence, and BBC Burmese reported that KIA spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu said anyone with objections can file complaints with the KIA, according to m.CDM. Naw Bu said in 2025 that gold mining in KIO territory is allowed only with local consent, that mining in residential areas, farmland and public spaces is prohibited, and that mined land must be refilled and leveled, Kachin News Group reported.



UNICEF SAYS CHILDREN ARE BEING KILLED IN SCHOOLS AND CLINICS AS AIRSTRIKES HIT KARENNI AND RAKHINE STATES

Three children were killed and five others injured when an airstrike hit a school for displaced children and families in Loikaw Township, Karenni (Kayah) State, on 31 October, as the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) warned on 3 November that Myanmar's children are being killed in the places meant to protect them.

According to UNICEF, further airstrikes struck Rakhine State over the weekend, including one on a temporary health clinic that reportedly killed a newborn baby and several health workers. The agency did not give the number of health workers killed or the clinic's location, and it did not name who carried out the strikes.

In its statement, UNICEF said children are "bearing the brunt" of Myanmar's conflict, and that schools and health facilities, where they should be safe, are now among the places where they are being killed and injured.

Myanmar's military seized power in a coup in February 2021, and fighting between the regime and resistance forces has since spread across much of the country, with displaced families often sheltering and studying in areas outside military control.

Beyond the latest attacks, UNICEF has raised similar alarms throughout the year. In a statement on 25 February, the agency said at least five children were killed and three injured in airstrikes in Ponnagyun Township, Rakhine State, and Myinmu Township, Sagaing Region. By September 2024, UNICEF said, at least 600 children had been killed or injured in Myanmar that year alone.

UNICEF called on all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and to protect children, adding that schools, health facilities and other civilian infrastructure must be spared. The agency said it is working with partners to assess needs and support affected children and families.



WORLD COURT SET TO RULE IN MYANMAR GENOCIDE CASE ON 19 NOVEMBER

The top United Nations court will on November 19 deliver a landmark ruling on whether Myanmar's crackdown against its mostly Muslim Rohingya minority constituted a genocide, officials said on 3 November.

Judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have for seven years been weighing accusations by The Gambia that Myanmar's brutal repression of the Rohingya breached the 1948 UN Genocide Convention.

While the ICJ has no means of enforcing its decisions, a ruling that Myanmar committed genocide would heap more international pressure on its military junta and be seen as justice for hundreds of thousands of Rohingya.

Legal experts are closely watching the decision from the ICJ, which rules in disputes between countries, for clues as to how the court might sway in the seminal genocide case brought by South Africa against Israel over its campaign in Gaza.

Myanmar has always denied carrying out a genocide against the Rohingya, arguing its actions targeted a military uprising from insurgents after a series of attacks left a dozen security personnel dead.

The crackdown by the Myanmar army and Buddhist militias forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh, bringing with them harrowing accounts of gang rape and mass executions.

More than one million Rohingya still live across the border in Bangladesh, in the world's largest refugee settlement.

'Collective conscience'

During hearings on the case in January, Gambian Justice Minister Dawda Jallow told the court the

Rohingya had suffered "the most horrific violence and destruction one could imagine".

"It is not about esoteric issues of international law. It is about real people, real stories and a real group of human beings," said Jallow.

"The Rohingya of Myanmar. They have been targeted for destruction," added the minister.

The Gambia has brought the case to the ICJ under the terms of the UN Genocide Convention, which allows any state to sound the alarm if it suspects genocide is being committed.

The alleged violations of the convention "are a stain on our collective conscience and it would be irresponsible to pretend that it is not our business," Jallow said.

Myanmar retorted at the hearing that the allegations were "unsubstantiated".

"Emotional language and blurry factual pictures are not a substitute for a rigorous presentation of facts," said Ko Ko Hlaing, a minister in the president's office.

In a previous hearing in 2019, de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi herself addressed the court, housed in the iconic Peace Palace in The Hague.

The Nobel peace laureate said the case risked reigniting the crisis that led to the Rohingyas' expulsion and said there was no "genocidal intent" behind the crackdown.

Suu Kyi, 81, will not be attending the verdict, however. She has been under house arrest in the capital Naypyidaw since being unseated in a 2021 military coup.

The ICJ has already made one ruling in this case, ordering Myanmar in 2020 to "take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts" described by the Genocide Convention.

These acts included "killing members of the group" and "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part".

ICJ judges also threw out a challenge to its jurisdiction by Myanmar, ruling that it did have the power to decide on the genocide question.

The ICJ is not the only court looking into possible crimes against the Rohingya.

In 2024, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, also based in The Hague, asked judges for an arrest warrant for Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing over alleged crimes against humanity.

A case is also underway in Argentina, under the principle of universal jurisdiction, the idea that some crimes are so heinous they can be heard in any court.

AFP



Mr Munimul Islam with his family.

BANGLADESHI TECH ENTREPRENEUR RELEASED FROM SPANISH DETENTION AFTER MYANMAR ADMITS 'NO CASE'

A Bangladeshi technology entrepreneur was detained in Spain under an INTERPOL Red Notice requested by Myanmar, only for the requesting country to subsequently close its investigation and abandon extradition proceedings, reports AmCham Myanmar.

As reported before, Mr Munimul Islam, CEO of international technology company Misfit Technologies and co-founder of Bangladesh's agricultural technology platform iFarmer, was detained at Barcelona–El Prat Airport on 29 September 2026 while arriving from London for a short holiday with his wife. He spent 14 nights in Spanish detention before being released on 13 October. His passport was retained and he remained subject to judicial restrictions while Spain awaited Myanmar's response.

On 29 October, El País reported that Myanmar had informed Spain's Audiencia Nacional that its case against Islam was closed and that it no longer sought his extradition. The Spanish court subsequently archived the proceedings and ordered the restrictions lifted.

The outcome has raised questions about how an internal commercial dispute involving an American business organization became the basis for an international police alert.

From a Chamber of Commerce Dispute to Criminal Proceedings

The allegations originated within the American Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar (AMCHAM Myanmar) and concerned a US$300,000 lobbying engagement with Washington-based Mercury Public Affairs. Former AMCHAM president Mr Adam Michael Castillo signed the lobbying agreement, while Mr Islam's company financed the engagement through direct payments to Mercury.

An Associated Press investigation reported that payment records and U.S. lobbying disclosures contradicted significant elements of the allegations. The news agency also confirmed that Mercury had organized meetings in Washington. The approximately US$300,000 was paid directly to Mercury by Misfit Technologies' U.S. operations, rather than being

transferred through AMCHAM Myanmar's accounts. The payments were disclosed under U.S. lobbying reporting requirements.

AMCHAM's subsequent leadership maintained that the arrangement lacked proper authorization and raised governance concerns.

Before the criminal proceedings,Mr Castillo and Mr Islam had engaged legal counsel and prepared a defamation action against the chamber's leadership. Reporting by The Wall Street Journal described how AMCHAM president Khin Maung Win acknowledged that the threatened legal action influenced the chamber's decision to approach Myanmar police.

The dispute ultimately resulted in criminal proceedings against Mr Castillo, former executive director Mr Danny Kyaw and Mr Islam.

Bangladesh Embassy Findings Challenge the Allegations

On 12 October 2026, El País reported reviewing a confidential assessment prepared by the Bangladesh Embassy concerning the AMCHAM Myanmar dispute. According to the newspaper, the diplomatic assessment concluded that AMCHAM's governing body had approved the lobbying initiative and Misfit Technologies' role as an external sponsor responsible for making payments directly to Mercury in the United States. The report also identified an apparent contradiction involving board members who had supported the arrangement and subsequently participated in pursuing criminal proceedings. These findings challenged central elements of the allegations and added to questions raised by the Associated Press investigation. The embassy's assessment was a diplomatic examination of the available documentation, rather than a judicial ruling.

U.S. Government Secures American Businessman's Release

Mr Castillo, an American citizen and former U.S. Marine, was detained in Myanmar on 11 June 2026 and spent approximately 97 days in custody. His release on 16 September followed intervention by the administration of President Donald Trump. According to reporting by The Wall Street Journal, Vice President JD Vance became involved in efforts to secure Castillo's freedom, with President Trump's support helping facilitate a U.S. diplomatic mission to Myanmar. Reuters subsequently confirmed that senior U.S. officials travelled to Myanmar and met with its military-backed leadership to secure Mr Castillo's release. Mr Castillo's sister publicly thanked President Trump and Vice President Vance for their involvement.

Myanmar's Pabedan Township Court formally closed Mr Castillo's criminal case on 18 September, citing his departure in the context of bilateral relations with the United States. Mr Castillo later called for mr Islam's release and urged Spanish authorities and INTERPOL to scrutinize the allegations.

Australian former AMCHAM executive director Danny Kyaw was also detained in June. He was released on 21 September after entering a guilty plea that he subsequently stated had been made under pressure to secure his freedom. Both men provided witness statements supporting Mr Islam's defence in Spain, raising concerns about the conduct of Myanmar's criminal proceedings.

Questions Over Myanmar's Use of INTERPOL

INTERPOL Red Notices are designed to help law-enforcement agencies locate individuals wanted for prosecution or to serve criminal sentences. They are not international arrest warrants. INTERPOL's Constitution expressly prohibits activities of a political, military, religious or racial character. Nevertheless, international human rights organizations have documented concerns about governments using INTERPOL mechanisms to pursue political opponents, activists and other individuals abroad. Cases involving Russian requests against businessman Mr Bill Browder, Belarusian requests targeting activist mr Andrei Hniot and China's former Red Notice against Uyghur activist Dolkun Isa have contributed to longstanding scrutiny

of the system. Mr Islam's case adds another example warranting examination.

The original allegations concerned the authorization and financing of a lobbying contract. Yet the resulting Red Notice caused a businessman resident in the United Kingdom to be detained in a European country and exposed him to possible extradition to Myanmar's military-controlled judicial system. Myanmar ultimately informed Spain that its investigation had not established a criminal case against Mr Islam. The sequence raises questions about the evidentiary screening of Red Notice requests, the handling of requests from countries with serious human rights concerns and the protections available to individuals before international police cooperation results in detention. There is no public finding establishing that INTERPOL knowingly facilitated an abusive request. The issue is whether its safeguards were sufficient to prevent the consequences in this case.

Mr Islam has subsequently reported receiving confirmation that the Red Notice was deleted, although independent written confirmation has not been reviewed for this briefing.

An Established International Entrepreneur Islam is a Bangladeshi entrepreneur with business interests across Asia, the United States and the United Kingdom. He is CEO and co-founder of Misfit Technologies, an international technology company established in 2017 that develops enterprise software, digital identity verification and financial technology solutions. Misfit has operated in six countries, providing technology to telecommunications operators, banks, financial institutions and other organizations. Its electronic Know Your Customer technology has supported major telecommunications operations in Myanmar, while its Bangladesh solutions incorporate national identity document recognition and facial verification.

Misfit's U.S. operations form part of its international business activities and financed the Mercury Public Affairs engagement directly, with the payments reported under U.S. lobbying disclosure requirements.

The Human Cost of an International Police Alert

Mr Islam's detention disrupted what was intended to be a short holiday and separated him from his two young daughters, who remained in the United Kingdom during his imprisonment. His British wife subsequently travelled to Spain with their children as the family attempted to secure his release. The Bangladesh Consulate in Barcelona provided assistance, including temporary accommodation arrangements. Beyond the loss of liberty, the proceedings created substantial legal and living expenses, interrupted his business activities and exposed him to international allegations of financial misconduct.

Although the Spanish case has now been closed, the consequences for Mr Islam and his family extended well beyond the period of imprisonment.

A Case With Wider International Implications

The case brings together several issues of international significance: a disputed U.S.-linked lobbying contract, findings reported from a Bangladesh Embassy assessment, criminal proceedings initiated in Myanmar, the detention of an American and an Australian businessman, diplomatic intervention by the Trump administration, and the detention of a Bangladeshi entrepreneur in Spain under an INTERPOL Red Notice.

What safeguards should prevent a government from using an international police alert to pursue allegations that it later acknowledges do not support a criminal case? For Mr Islam, the Spanish proceedings have ended. For INTERPOL and its member countries, the questions surrounding the original Red Notice, its timing and the consequences of its circulation remain relevant to the wider debate over accountability in international police cooperation.



Carrying oil. Photo: AFP

MIDDLE EAST CRISIS FUELS CRUDE CONFLICT IN MYANMAR CIVIL WAR

Myanmar's small-scale oil prospectors are under fire from all sides as rebels and the military battle to capture a cottage industry increasingly lucrative amidst the Middle East energy shock.

"As long as we work here, bad luck can kill us," said Htun Aung, a worker on an artisanal oil well in Myanmar's arid heartlands.

"But if the reality of death is hard to face, then making a living is even harder," said the 52-year-old, speaking under a pseudonym for security reasons.

Myanmar imports 90 percent of its fuel oil, official figures show, making it particularly vulnerable to supply issues caused by the US-Israeli war on Iran.

But the central region of Magway hosts a hardscrabble industry of domestic prospectors manning grimy derricks that squelch up crude oil in humble quantities.

The area is dubbed "Anyar Dubai", associating the Anyar landscape with the oil boom Emirate, despite the pitiable $50 per week earned by workers like Htun Aung who spend their days drenched in foul crude run-off.

With prices at Myanmar's petrol pumps nearly double what they were in late February, the underground "black gold" is an increasingly coveted prize of war.

"We just want to live in peace," said Htun Aung. "But now they strike from one side and the others strike from the other -- they keep attacking each other."

"We've had to flee three, four, five times already," he added. "We run here, we run there. We fill up our motorbikes with fuel and run again."

Digging in

Allied pro-democracy rebels claim to have controlled oil fields in Magway's Myaing township since 2023, the third year of a nationwide civil war triggered by a coup.

They patrol the dusty territory in a westward crook of the Irrawaddy river in ragtag columns and outfitted with rocket-propelled grenades, flak jackets, tote bags and flip-flops.

Air and drone strikes in Myaing so far this year have already exceeded 2025's total, according to ACLED, a monitor that estimates more than 100,000 people have died since the putsch.

Rebels shelter in foxholes, camouflaged among thousands of oil wells dug in an unregulated practice dating back centuries.

Engine winches chug day and night, plunging plumbing tubes dozens of metres down boreholes before dragging them up filled with crude oil slurry.

Prospectors pay landowners up to $3,500 to lease a spot to drill , one veteran said, with no guarantee they will hit oil.

Some wells yield dribbles while others gush profit, filling tarpaulin-lined pits and barrels with oil hauled off to improvised refineries for processing into petrol and diesel.

"Anyar Dubai" has been "going viral" for its plentiful supply, said rebel spokesman Pyae Phyo Kyaw, at a time when Myanmar military-held areas have been rationing petrol.

He touted recent offensives fending off military advances, but admitted being battered by counter-attacks.

"We see it primarily as an attempt to destroy what has been a strong supply route and source of revenue for us," said the 35-year-old, speaking under his real name.

Myanmar's military could not be reached for comment.

But in September, a month-long military operation claimed to have captured over 130 wells in Myaing and 735 more in neighbouring Pakokku township.

Black market

Scores of pro-democracy factions and ethnic minority armed groups are fighting the military over the 2021 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

As the war grinds on, all sides battle to fill war chests with the tax or trade of natural resources: gem mines, rare earth mineral deposits, gold or teak.

Oil projects are not generally contested.

The major ones are under staunch military guard, and on-the-books output is tiny by international standards -- around 6,000 barrels a day last year, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

But artisanal fields are coveted by rebels precisely because of their modest size, according to Thomas Kean, senior Myanmar consultant for the International Crisis Group.

"Part of the reason why they're significant is because they're not globally significant," he said, explaining that they are small enough to thrive under the radar, yet big enough to fund guerrillas.

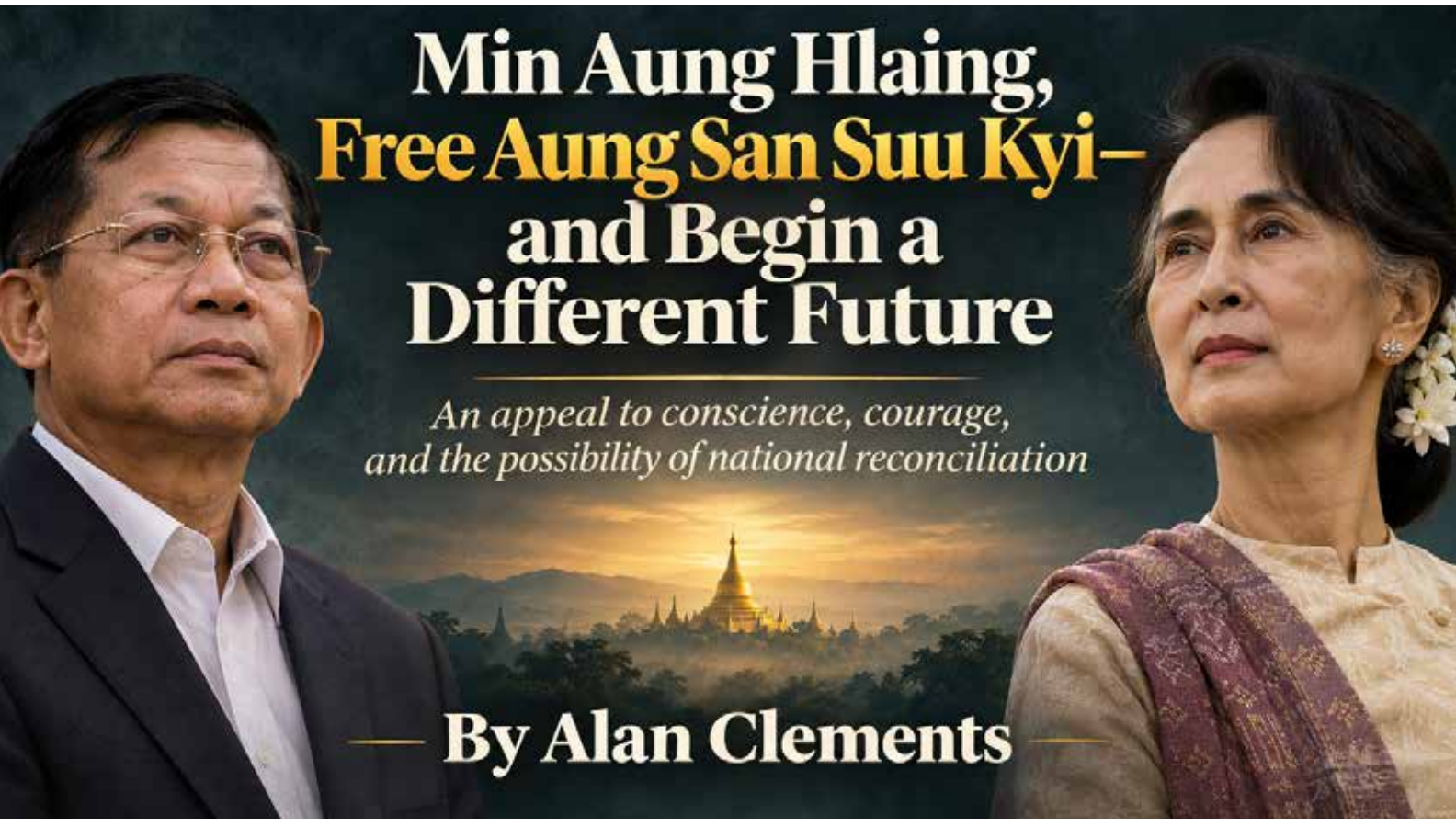
Spiking oil prices may not directly drive conflict, said Kean, highlighting a broader military campaign to evict rebels from heartland footholds by squeezing revenue sources.

But as the spoils of war become more profitable, the stakes get higher.

"We're talking about millions of barrels a year coming out of these oil fields," he added.

"With global prices what they are, that's a significant amount of money."

AFP



Min Aung Hlaing, Free Aung San Suu Kyi– and Begin a Different Future

An appeal to conscience, courage, and the possibility of national reconciliation

By Alan Clements

Min Aung Hlaing, I am asking you to consider a possibility that neither military power nor political calculation can fully measure: that releasing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi immediately and unconditionally could become the most consequential act of your remaining life. It could open a path toward reconciliation in a country devastated by war, begin restoring respect where there is profound distrust, and reveal a capacity for conscience that the world has had little reason to associate with your leadership. You cannot change what has happened. You can decide whether the next chapter begins with another locked door or with the courage to open it.

I make this appeal as someone who has loved Burma for nearly half a century, lived there as a Buddhist monk, and spent months in conversation with Aung San Suu Kyi about freedom, responsibility, fear, and the moral foundations of political life. I have witnessed something of the extraordinary humanity of your country and the suffering inflicted upon its people. I do not approach you believing that any human being is beyond the possibility of awakening to the consequences of his actions. If I believed that, there would be no reason to write.

The question before you is whether her continued confinement serves any purpose worthy of the suffering it causes. Has silencing her reconciled the nation? Has separating her from her family brought the country closer to peace? Has denying her a public voice created the trust upon which a functioning society depends? Whatever justification you offer for her detention, these questions remain. The possession of power does not answer them. They must be answered through the lives of the people over whom that power is exercised.

You may regard her freedom as a threat because she possesses something that cannot be commanded into existence: the freely given affection and political loyalty of millions. Yet imprisoning a person does not transfer that allegiance to the person who holds the key. It can deepen the distance between authority and legitimacy. Her release would acknowledge that Burma's political differences must eventually be addressed through the participation of its people, including those who disagree most profoundly with you.

There is a practical reason to act immediately, and it is inseparable from a human one. Aung San

Suu Kyi is eighty-one. Every remaining year of her life is irreplaceable. If she dies while deprived of freedom, the opportunity to release her alive disappears forever. Whatever the circumstances, your decision to keep her confined would remain part of the historical record. No subsequent explanation could restore the conversations that never happened, the family embrace that was denied, or the contribution she might still have made to her country.

You still have the power to prevent that outcome. You can allow her to receive independent medical care, be with her family, speak in her own voice, and decide how she wishes to live. These are fundamental human freedoms. Restoring them would also relieve your leadership of an enduring moral burden and a foreseeable political crisis. There are moments when humanity and enlightened self-interest point in the same direction. This is one of them.

Her release could also help create conditions for a national conversation that confinement makes impossible. Burma's future cannot be negotiated by one person, one party, or one institution. Ethnic communities, democratic representatives, younger generations, and people who have endured unimaginable losses must have meaningful voices. Aung San Suu Kyi cannot speak for all of them, and no honest appeal should pretend otherwise. But she could participate as a significant civilian leader whose presence would give many people a reason to consider whether a political opening deserved their attention.

You would have to accept that her participation would be independent. Freedom cannot mean an obligation to endorse your leadership, excuse the military, or persuade others to abandon their convictions. A person released only on condition of political obedience remains captive in another form. The credibility of your decision would depend on your willingness to let her disagree with you. That willingness could demonstrate a confidence that the suppression of dissent never can.

Internationally, her unconditional release would give governments, diplomats, and ordinary people a concrete reason to reconsider what might be possible. It would address a longstanding demand from ASEAN and create an opening for more substantive engagement. No responsible observer could promise that one decision would resolve sanctions, diplomatic isolation, or the country's economic distress. But a meaningful act can change the terms of a conversation. It can make room for a response that another speech, photograph, or carefully managed gesture cannot produce.

More personally, it could begin to heighten respect for you as a man capable of conscience, dignity, and compassion. Such respect would have to be earned through the freedom you actually restored and the conduct that followed. The world would not be obliged to forget the past. It could nevertheless recognize that you had chosen to stop perpetuating a particular injustice. To acknowledge a humane decision is not to surrender moral judgment; it is to encourage the possibility that humane decisions can continue.

As a former Buddhist monk, I ask you to consider what compassion requires when it becomes inconvenient to power. Giving has spiritual meaning when we relinquish something to which we are attached. In your position, that attachment may include control over another person's movements, speech, and future. Releasing her would make compassion tangible. It would bring a woman out of confinement and return decisions about her life to her own hands. Whatever ceremonies or declarations accompany leadership, this is an act whose human meaning would be unmistakable.

There is dignity, too, in recognizing that a course of action has brought suffering and choosing to change it. Leaders often surround themselves with people who make reconsideration appear humiliating. Yet refusing to reconsider can become its own form of captivity. A man may command armies while remaining unable to

depart from a decision he feels compelled to defend. You have the opportunity to demonstrate that your judgment is still alive, that your future choices need not remain imprisoned within your previous ones.

In the deepest human sense, you have everything to gain and nothing worth preserving to lose by freeing her. That does not mean the decision carries no political uncertainty. Genuine freedom always introduces possibilities that control attempts to eliminate. It means that keeping an elderly woman captive offers no honorable foundation for your future. Releasing her could gain you something far more durable than the satisfaction of preventing an opponent from speaking: the beginning of a credible contribution to your country's healing.

That beginning should extend beyond one woman. Burma's other political prisoners also have families, histories, and futures that cannot be reduced to the calculations of those who detain them. Her release would acquire greater meaning if it opened the way to theirs and accompanied genuine efforts to reduce violence and enable inclusive dialogue. The generosity of the act would be measured by how far its consequences reached into the lives of people without international recognition.

Nothing in this appeal asks the people of Burma to abandon justice or offers forgiveness on behalf of those who have suffered. Their experiences belong to them, and their demands deserve to be heard. Your opportunity is to make a decision that creates less suffering and more possibility. Accountability and the prevention of further harm can belong to the same moral undertaking.

I cannot know what passes through your mind when you are alone, beyond the officials, the security arrangements, and the language through which power explains itself. But I address the human being who exists there, as surely as I address the person who can authorize her freedom. Aung San Suu Kyi has a finite life, as you do, as I do. The question is what we choose to do with the time that remains, and whether we use our power to diminish another person's life or restore its possibilities.

Free her now, unconditionally, while she can still embrace her family, speak to her people, and help explore a future beyond this catastrophe. Let the decision become an expression of conscience that requires no captive person to validate it. You cannot determine how history will judge everything you have done. You can still give history a different act to record, and give Burma a reason to believe that another future remains possible.

About the Author

Alan Clements is an American author, former Buddhist monk, human-rights journalist, and spoken-word artist whose relationship with Burma spans nearly five decades. He trained in the country under the meditation masters Mahāsi Sayadaw and Sayadaw U Pandita. His months of conversations with Aung San Suu Kyi formed the basis of The Voice of Hope, exploring the relationship between consciousness, human dignity, nonviolence, and the struggle for democratic freedom.

Clements is the founder of the World Dharma Institute and the author of books including Instinct for Freedom, Conversation with a Dictator, and Politics of the Heart. His writing and public work examine authoritarianism, spiritual freedom, and the moral responsibilities of being human. Through books, conversations, and live performance, he continues to advocate for Burma's political prisoners and for a future grounded in freedom, compassion, and the participation of its people.



AN UPDATE TO MIZZIMA READERS AND FRIENDS

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

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

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

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

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

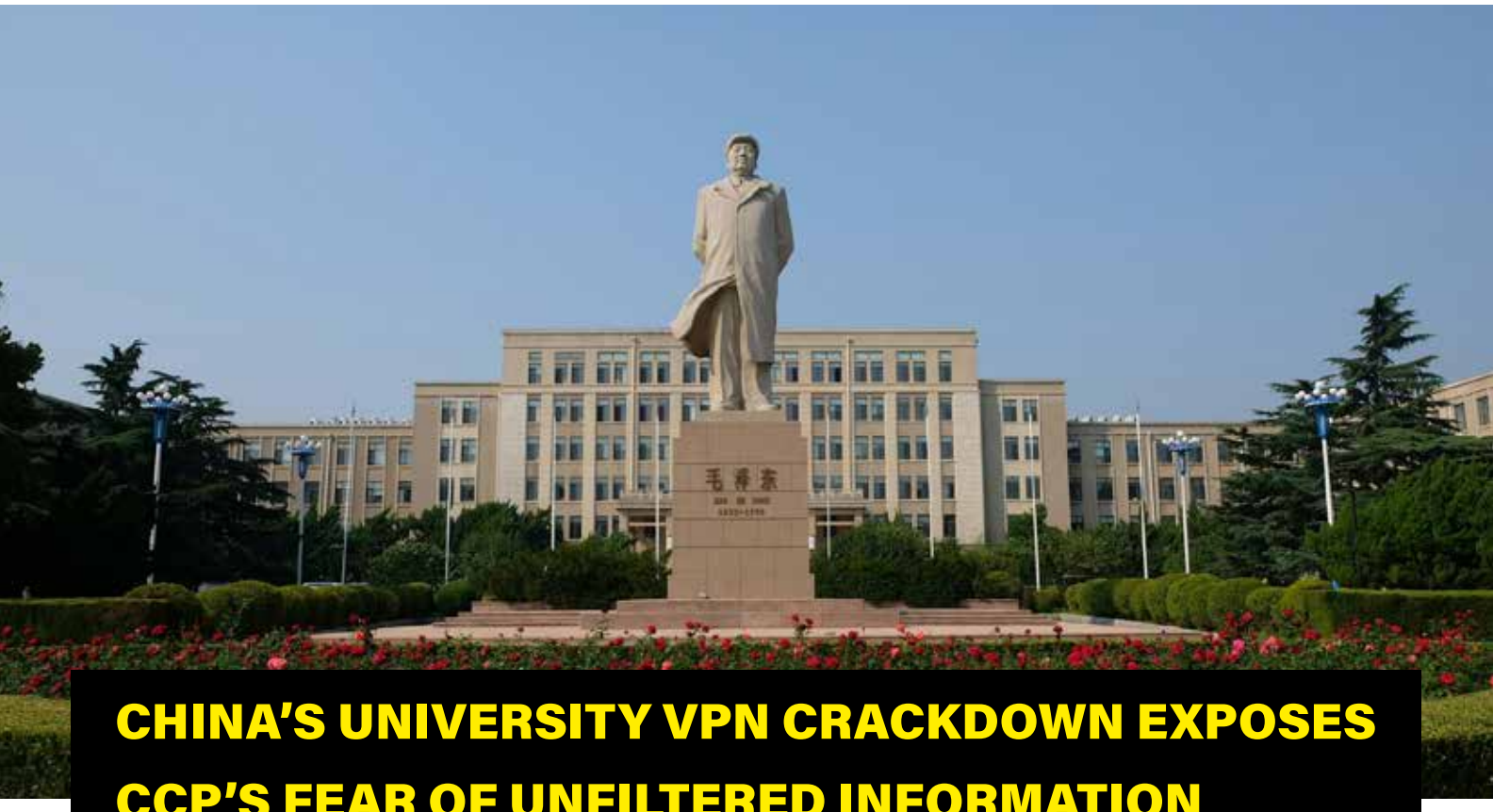
AI does not replace our journalists. It helps us work faster and smarter, while human editors remain responsible for accuracy, verification, ethics and editorial judgment.

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

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

Truth. Voice. Future.

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



CHINA'S UNIVERSITY VPN CRACKDOWN EXPOSES CCP'S FEAR OF UNFILTERED INFORMATION

SUN LEE

For students entering a university library, the internet is meant to open doors to research, debate and ideas beyond the classroom.

In China, however, access to information outside the country's tightly controlled digital sphere can carry consequences extending from formal warnings to threats against scholarships and academic prospects.

As the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) prepared for a major leadership meeting in October, universities across several provinces reportedly intensified efforts to stop students from using virtual private networks (VPNs) to reach blocked foreign websites.

The measures included mandatory security meetings, written pledges, warnings about academic penalties and instructions to report suspected violations. Their timing has fuelled concerns that universities were being mobilised to reinforce political control during a sensitive period for the ruling party.

The reports, published by The Epoch Times on 28 October, do not establish that every university followed the same instructions or that a single publicly available national directive ordered all the measures.

They do, however, document a series of notices and disciplinary actions that point to growing institutional pressure on students who seek access to the wider internet.

Universities turn VPN use into a security issue

Central South University in Hunan province reportedly instructed undergraduate and postgraduate students on 23 October to attend meetings addressing the alleged illegality of bypassing internet restrictions.

Students were required to sign a notice, while the university encouraged them to report violations to counsellors, student affairs officials, cybersecurity authorities or police.

Wanbei Health Vocational College in Anhui province issued a notice on 19 October warning that circumventing internet controls could threaten political security and expose users to recruitment by what it described as hostile forces.

The notice warned of possible administrative penalties, university discipline or criminal prosecution.

Other institutions issued similar messages. Northwest University in Shaanxi province said on 13 October that it would detect and restrict connections that bypassed the national firewall.

On 9 October, the School of Insurance at the Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing

warned that VPN use could jeopardise scholarships, recommendations for postgraduate study and political background checks.

The reported enforcement had already produced disciplinary consequences.

On 20 September, Harbin Engineering University announced warnings against 20 students — seven undergraduates and 13 postgraduates — for using VPNs to access blocked websites, according to screenshots circulated by the Chinese-language citizen journalist account @whyyoutouzhele.

The potential consequences reach beyond internet access itself. For students whose scholarships, postgraduate opportunities and future careers depend on university assessments, a disciplinary warning can carry weight well beyond the immediate offence.

A political meeting and the demand for stability

The campaign coincided with the Chinese Communist Party's fifth plenary session of the 20th Central Committee, held in Beijing from 26 to 29 October 2026.

The official communiqué confirms that the session concluded on 29 October after adopting a resolution on strengthening Party self-governance. The meeting also discussed the work of the Political Bureau under Xi Jinping's leadership.

The timing matters, although it does not by itself establish that the university notices were directly ordered by the central leadership. Political meetings of this significance bring heightened attention to stability, security and the management of public discourse.

Analysts cited by The Epoch Times argued that the restrictions reflected official concern about students accessing uncensored information and communicating with people outside China.

Yuan Hongbing, a former Peking University law professor now living in Australia, told the publication that the measures followed guidance issued to universities after 20 September by the CCP Central Secretariat, led by Politburo Standing Committee member Cai Qi.

Yuan linked the alleged instructions to concerns about political security during the plenum.

The publication explicitly said it could not independently verify Yuan's claims. No publicly available directive establishing that the reported university campaign was centrally ordered was identified in the reporting.

That distinction is important. The evidence supports the existence of multiple university notices and reported disciplinary measures; the precise extent of central coordination remains less clear.

The great firewall and the limits of access

China's internet controls restrict access to numerous foreign websites, news organisations and social media platforms.

The system commonly known as the Great Firewall combines technical blocking with legal requirements imposed on domestic platforms and internet service providers.

The British government's country guidance on opposition to the Chinese state, updated in September 2026, describes extensive restrictions on online expression and notes that authorities monitor online activity, remove content and scrutinise criticism of the government.

VPNs can create encrypted connections to servers outside a user's local network. Depending on the service and configuration, they may help users reach websites that would otherwise be inaccessible from China.

Authorities have sought to restrict unauthorised circumvention, while enforcement can vary according to the technology, the network and the circumstances.

The university notices described in October add another layer to this system: institutions themselves may monitor campus connections, demand declarations from students and threaten academic consequences.

The result is that access to information can become not merely a technical issue but a matter of institutional discipline.

Monitoring students and encouraging reports

The reported instructions also place students in a system of mutual scrutiny. Central South University encouraged students to report suspected VPN violations to university officials and security authorities.

Such arrangements can shift part of the burden of enforcement onto the campus community itself.

Shen Ming-shih, a research fellow at Taiwan's Institute for National Defence and Security Research, told The Epoch Times that universities may be able to identify users more easily when they require real-name authentication on campus networks.

Monitoring could become more extensive when institutions work with public security agencies or government internet regulators, or require software to be installed on students' devices.

The actual capacity to detect VPN activity varies, however. Yuan acknowledged that authorities can identify some forms of circumvention but disputed the idea that they can detect every connection.

The published accounts do not independently establish that all the universities involved were monitoring every student's internet traffic.

Shen also warned that universities may imitate one another to demonstrate compliance.

If one institution issues restrictions, others may follow to avoid appearing lax on political security. That process could spread controls even without a single publicly announced nationwide order.

The white paper protests still cast a shadow

The concern about students using digital tools for collective action has a recent precedent. In November 2022, demonstrations erupted in several Chinese cities during public anger over stringent COVID-19 restrictions.

Some protesters held up blank sheets of paper — a symbol of censorship — while others openly criticised the government and Xi Jinping.

The protests drew attention to how grievances that began around public-health restrictions could acquire a wider political dimension.

Digital communications helped people share images, information and accounts of events that state-controlled media did not always present in the same way.

Shen argued that officials remain alert to the possibility that economic pressure and dissatisfaction among young people could develop into broader protest movements.

Access to foreign websites, he said, can expose students to information challenging official narratives, while encrypted communications can facilitate contact beyond platforms that authorities more readily monitor.

These are analysts' interpretations of the campaign's motivation, not proof that the recent university restrictions were specifically triggered by a planned protest.

Nonetheless, the memory of the 2022 demonstrations helps explain why uncensored information and student communication can be treated as political security concerns.

From temporary warnings to permanent control?

One unresolved question is whether the reported restrictions will ease now that the October plenum has ended.

The available notices do not establish a uniform end date, and the evidence is insufficient to conclude that every institution will maintain the same measures indefinitely.

Shen warned that controls introduced during a politically sensitive period could become permanent if universities continue to reproduce one another's policies.

Such a pattern would make the restrictions less dependent on a particular meeting and more embedded in routine campus administration.

Freedom House's 2026 assessment of China describes severe restrictions on internet freedom and extensive state control over online speech, universities and civil society. It gives China a score of 9 out of 100 for internet freedom.

The reported VPN campaign fits within that wider environment, although the university-specific claims should be assessed individually.

The evidence shows that some institutions threatened disciplinary consequences for bypassing internet controls; it does not prove that every VPN user is being tracked or that all universities have adopted identical policies.

For students, the immediate concern is the prospect of academic consequences for accessing blocked information.

For the authorities, the campaign reflects the continuing effort to treat digital access as a question of political security.

The October notices have brought that tension into university life, where the boundary between network management and control over what students can read, discuss, and share is becoming increasingly difficult to separate.

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



CUT TO ACTION

"When nobody helps you, what you have to do is go. You know what? I'm just gonna do it myself!" Adrian Zaw, a Burmese-American actor, producer, and founder of Zaw Studios, has built his working life around that refusal to wait for permission, according to the Insight Myanmar Podcast.

The principle began as a response to absence: no Burmese community in his childhood schools, no Burmese-American model in Hollywood, and no established path connecting his creative ambitions to the people and culture from which his family had been displaced. It later became a business method built on speed and self-reliance, but also a means of creating the access he had once lacked for younger Burmese entering film and media.

His family left Myanmar after the 1988 uprising, in which his father had participated. Both parents had worked as doctors in rural areas, but their qualifications did not transfer when the family arrived in the United States in 1989. The family depended on relatives, moved from couch surfing into a small apartment, and survived on cafeteria and laboratory wages. In Southern California schools, Zaw had no Burmese classmates and learned English partly by imitating television cartoons and commercials.

His parents favored the familiar promise of strong grades, a respectable profession, and security. Acting entered Zaw's imagination through a less elevated offer: at a school career day, an actor said film sets had free food, and so the hungry twelve-year-old applied for a scholarship to acting classes. Drama and speech competitions gave him a route through a rough adolescence. He later entered the University of Southern California with a full scholarship, then left after a year and a half because he had come to see higher education as expensive, impractical, and too closely tied to family prestige.

Acting exposed another limit. Zaw felt alone as a Burmese-American in Hollywood and concluded that waiting for someone else to write a suitable role would leave him dependent on an industry that barely recognized his community. Producing offered a way to control the work around him, and learning photography, editing, and construction raised what he calls his personal value. In 2012, he opened a roughly 1,000-square-foot studio, charging about one-third of nearby rates so young filmmakers could use it while he learned from their projects.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here: https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/10/12/episode-625-cut-to-action



German chargé d'affaires Mathias Licharz. Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA SUMMONS GERMAN ENVOY OVER BIRTHDAY VIDEO FOR OUSTED PRESIDENT WIN MYINT

The Myanmar junta's Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned German chargé d'affaires Mathias Licharz on 10 November, two days after he marked ousted President Win Myint's 75th birthday with a video filmed outside the family home in Yangon, and demanded to know whether Berlin had authorised it.

In the video, posted on the German embassy's social media on 8 November, Licharz said "U Win Myint is not a free man,". He repeated calls by the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council and his own government for the unconditional release of all those arbitrarily detained, including Win Myint and Aung San Suu Kyi, and urged the junta to open a genuine dialogue.

Deputy Foreign Minister Ko Ko Kyaw handed Licharz an aide-memoire, according to a ministry statement, and asked for a formal explanation of whether Germany's Federal Foreign Office had authorised the video or he had acted on his own. The ministry called the video interference in Myanmar's internal affairs and an insult to the head of state, citing Article 41(1) of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

The ministry also said it would not stop Licharz from leaving Myanmar if he regarded Win Myint as president and did not want to work with the current government, and warned of action under international law and diplomatic practice if he repeats the conduct.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing declared himself "president" in April, following a military-run election that critics called a sham. Win Myint, removed in the February 2021 coup, was freed on 17 April in a New Year amnesty after more than five years in detention.



BANGKOK ASSAULT TURNS MYANMAR WORKERS' ID PROTEST INTO ONLINE RIGHTS DEBATE

An assault on a Myanmar migrant labour leader outside the United Nations office in Bangkok on 1 November has sparked a heated online debate in Thailand this week over whether migrant workers have the right to protest.

Veera Saengthong, leader of the Bright Future migrant worker group, was punched and kicked by members of two Thai royalist groups while calling on Thailand to close its Certificate of Identity (CI) centres. Workers say the military regime, in power since the 2021 coup, uses the CI process to collect a 2 per cent income tax, control their remittances and gather personal data.

Thailand's opposition People's Party condemned the attack, saying migrants deserve the same legal protection as Thais. On 3 November, Arnond Sakworawich, an associate professor at the National Institute of Development Administration, wrote on Facebook that Veera was a threat to national security and urged the Interior Minister to deport him. Many comments under his post agreed, with some asking who employs and funds Veera. Others warned that deportation could create diplomatic problems for Thailand.

On 5 November, Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said he had not yet received a report on the matter. Thailand's human rights commission has accepted Veera's complaint.

Meanwhile, a Myanmar migrant workers' committee says it has collected more than 1.2 million signatures asking the National Unity Government to issue identity documents instead of the CI. The figure has not been independently verified.

Thailand hosts an estimated four million Myanmar workers, the largest Myanmar migrant community abroad.

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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.