ON THE GROUND IN MYANMAR

mizzima WEEKLY

Analysis & Insight



IGNORING THE HORROR?

ASEAN expands contact with Myanmar junta

- 50 civilians killed in Kyauktaw market

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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.

CRIMINAL EMPIRES THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO DISMANTLE

Cracking down on the sprawling cyber fraud centres operating in Myanmar has become one of the region's most challenging law-enforcement problems. Despite repeated raids, arrests and promises of cooperation from neighbouring countries, the criminal networks behind these operations remain deeply entrenched. The problem is not simply one of policing organised crime. It is also a consequence of Myanmar's political collapse, civil war, corruption and the military's inability or unwillingness to exercise effective control over large parts of the country.

Since the 2021 military coup, border regions have become increasingly attractive to criminal syndicates exploiting weak governance and armed conflict. Vast compounds, often disguised as casinos, hotels or business developments, have become centres for online investment fraud, romance scams, cryptocurrency deception and other forms of cybercrime. Thousands of people, many recruited from overseas with false promises of legitimate employment, have been trafficked into these compounds and forced to participate in criminal activities under threats, violence and intimidation.

The difficulty in dismantling these operations begins with their location. Many are situated in territories controlled by ethnic armed organisations, militia groups or other armed factions rather than the central government. Some groups have developed financial relationships with the criminal businesses, while others exercise varying degrees of influence over the territory in which they operate. This creates a complicated environment in which conventional law-enforcement operations are often impossible.

A second obstacle is the financial interests involved. Scam centres generate enormous revenues, supporting criminal syndicates, local businesses and armed organisations. Some military-linked militias have been accused of providing protection to the compounds in return for financial benefits. This raises an uncomfortable question: why would powerful actors dismantle an industry from which they benefit? The military authorities have repeatedly announced crackdowns, but there has been little evidence of sustained action against senior figures suspected of facilitating the business. The US State Department's 2026 trafficking assessment continued to identify corruption and official complicity as major obstacles to enforcement.

Recent raids have demonstrated another weakness in the strategy. Closing a large compound does not necessarily eliminate the criminal organisation operating it. Businesses can relocate, establish smaller facilities in remote areas or transfer their operations to neighbouring countries. Investigators have reported that scam operations are increasingly moving away from easily identifiable industrial compounds and into more concealed locations. A crackdown can therefore create the appearance of progress while the underlying criminal networks survive.

There is also a serious humanitarian dimension. Those found inside the compounds cannot automatically be treated as criminals. Many are victims of human trafficking who have been forced to commit fraud through threats, beatings and imprisonment. Rescuing them requires proper identification, protection, medical assistance and safe repatriation. Simply releasing people without adequate support risks leaving them vulnerable to further exploitation.

Thailand, China and other neighbouring countries have an important role to play through intelligence sharing, financial investigations, border controls and coordinated prosecutions. Cutting electricity or internet access may disrupt operations, but these measures cannot substitute for dismantling the financial networks and protecting the people being exploited.

Ultimately, Myanmar's cyber fraud industry cannot be defeated through occasional raids and publicity campaigns. It requires sustained international pressure, action against the individuals financing and protecting the compounds, and accountability for officials involved.

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Cover photo of the bombed market of Kyauktaw supplied



IGNORING THE HORROR?

ASEAN EXPANDS CONTACT WITH THE MYANMAR JUNTA

Myanmar faces a pivotal week as neighbouring nations weigh the future of post-coup relations, while the United Nations' top court threatens a verdict of genocide over its dark past.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is scheduled on Thursday – after this magazine goes to print - to rule whether Myanmar committed genocide against its marginalised Muslim Rohingya minority.

The case loomed over a three-day meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that debated its policy freezing Myanmar out of summits since a 2021 putsch.

Rohingya activists say the pending judgement should haunt the minds of ASEAN leaders.

"We are waiting to see what the outcome will be on that day, the judgement for everything we have been experiencing for generations," said a 25-year-old Yangon-based Rohingya activist who requested anonymity for security reasons, speaking before the court decision.

"If they welcome people who lack basic humanity and destroyed our lives, our futures and our possessions, we will be very let down," he added.

Man in question

The UN court case and ASEAN's diplomatic dilemma are separate issues on paper. But both converge on one man: Min Aung Hlaing.

The 11-nation ASEAN bloc has shunned Myanmar leaders from summits since his military coup turfed out the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and sparked civil war.

The Hague case dates back to 2017, when Myanmar is accused of breaching the United Nations Genocide Convention by brutalising the Rohingya.

The judgement will weigh state culpability, not individual guilt.

But Min Aung Hlaing led the military as it spearheaded the mass killings, rape and arson targeting the Rohingya and driving nearly 750,000 into Bangladesh as refugees.

This April, he was installed as president after elections rejected by democracy watchdogs, and is waging a charm offensive seeking acceptance in the diplomatic fold.

"If the ICJ finds that Myanmar committed genocide, it would seriously weaken Min Aung Hlaing's efforts," said Wai Yan Phyo Naing, visiting scholar at Taiwan's Academia Sinica, speaking just before the decision.

"Any public association with him could create political and reputational risks, especially for governments that claim to support human rights and international law."

Signs of support

But Myanmar has already secured signals of support to return to ASEAN.

As civilian president, Min Aung Hlaing has had red-carpet welcomes in bloc members Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

Even Muslim-majority Malaysia hosted him last month, albeit to expedite the return of thousands of Myanmar migrants as a wave of prejudice towards Rohingya refugees swept the nation.

Rights groups expressed alarm about the fate of those returned, but that did not prevent Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim promising "Malaysia will do whatever is possible" to smooth Myanmar's normalisation in ASEAN.

Richard Horsey, senior Asia adviser at the International Crisis Group, said the ICJ ruling may have little impact on Min Aung Hlaing's momentum.

"Governments willing to host him are unlikely to change course over a ruling addressed to the Myanmar state, which places no legal restriction on him personally," he said.

"It may make some members more cautious about being seen to move quickly, but I doubt it will stop the drift towards normalisation."

Diplomatic drift

Some analysts argue that a finding Myanmar committed genocide may actually embolden Min Aung Hlaing, confirming he can rub shoulders with world leaders regardless.

It may also stoke division between ASEAN nations arguing he should be ostracised and those favouring engagement to coax Myanmar towards a different future.

Post-coup Myanmar has been represented by senior civil servants at ASEAN summits, an arrangement which will remain in place for the Manila meeting.

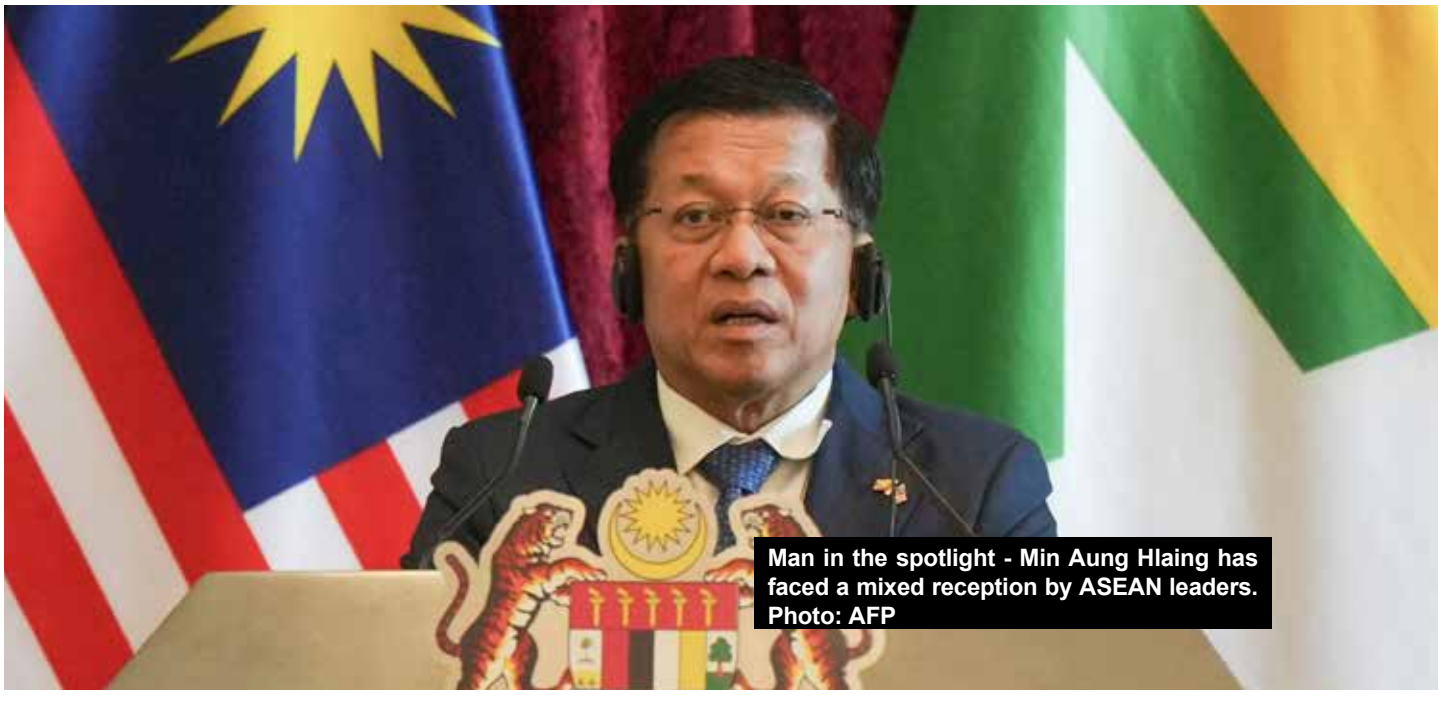
The bloc's rotating chair will at the end of this year pass from the Philippines to Singapore, a city-state analysts say opposes normalising Myanmar ties.

But in 2028, it will be the turn of Thailand, which shares a long border with Myanmar and is leading the charge for closer relations.

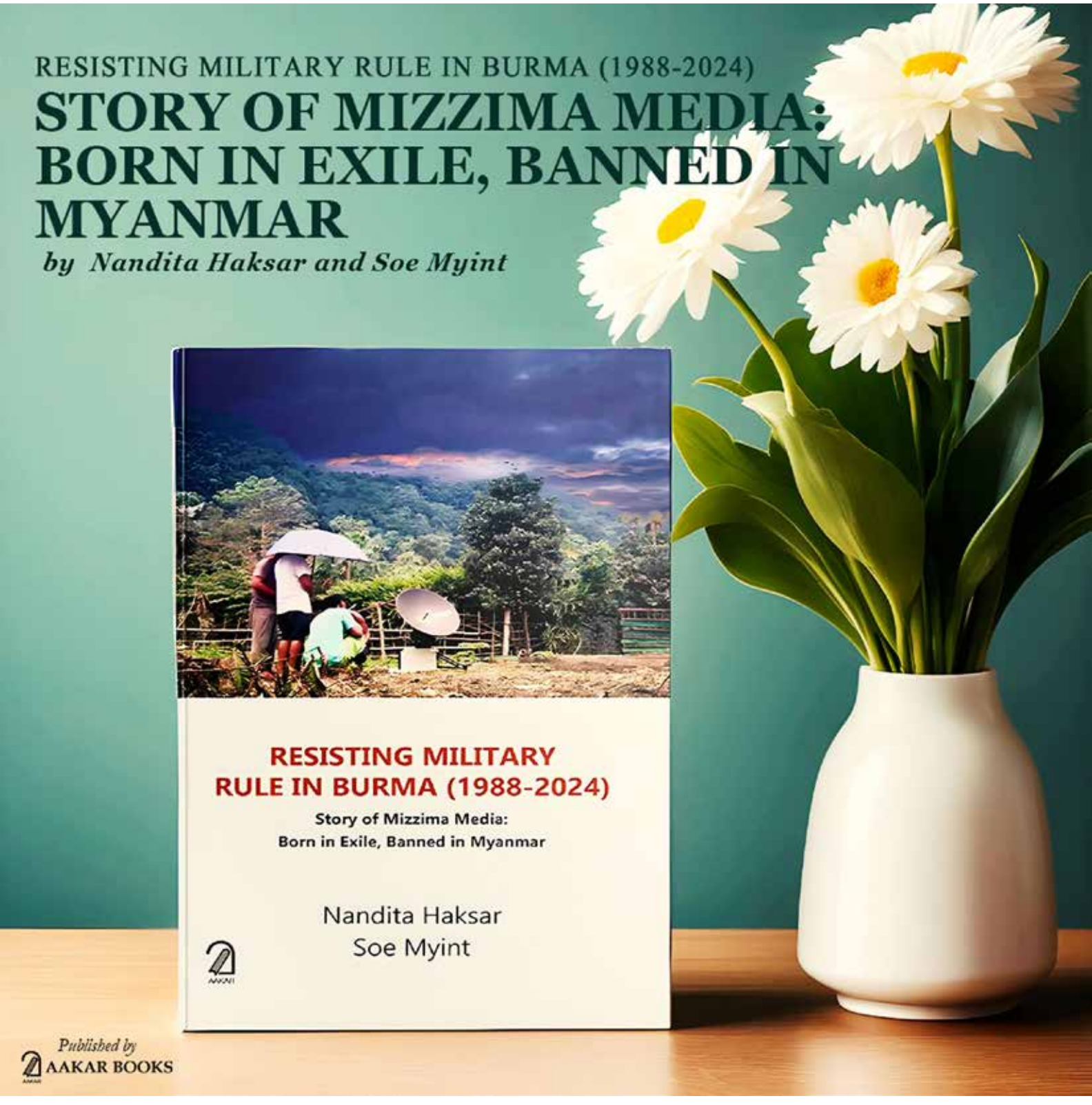
Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said Thursday he did not forsee the ICJ ruling would disrupt the process of "calibrated re-engagement".

"ASEAN is unlikely to fully embrace Min Aung Hlaing at a summit level soon," independent Myanmar analyst David Mathieson told AFP. "But it's only a matter of time."

Sources: Mizzima, AFP



Man in the spotlight - Min Aung Hlaing has faced a mixed reception by ASEAN leaders. Photo: AFP



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Internally displaced people living in a forest. Photo: Supplied

HOW BIG IS MYANMAR'S HUMANITARIAN CRISIS?

Myanmar is facing a deepening humanitarian crisis, with millions of people displaced by conflict and millions more in urgent need of assistance. Myanmar's Ambassador to the United Nations, Kyaw Moe Tun, recently said that more than four million people had fled their homes and approximately 16.2 million people needed humanitarian assistance. UN agencies have separately estimated that at least 3.8 million people have been internally displaced since the 2021 military coup.

The crisis is particularly severe in Rakhine State, where around 600,000 people are reportedly displaced, according to the Center for Arakan Studies. Their living conditions have deteriorated amid shortages of humanitarian assistance and limited opportunities to earn a living. Many families struggle to obtain adequate food, safe drinking water, medicine and shelter. Children are also losing access to education as high stationery costs make schooling unaffordable, while repeated junta airstrikes have made schools and other public facilities unsafe.

The expansion of the Arakan Army's (AA) territorial control has coincided with continued junta airstrikes, including attacks on civilian areas and IDP camps. According to the Myanmar Defense and Security Institute (MDSI), the junta air force carried out 34

airstrike incidents involving 73 attacks in October, killing 29 civilians and injuring 80.

The violence continued on November 13, when two 500-pound bombs struck Byar La IDP camp in Ponnagyun Township, an area targeted by the junta under its Operation 4926. The attack killed 12 displaced people, including three children aged between five and 14, and injured another 18. The death toll subsequently rose to 13 after one injured person died the following day. The camp accommodates approximately 1,600 displaced people from 439 households. It had also been hit in October, when six IDPs were reportedly killed and another 10 seriously injured.

Local volunteer and writer Wai Hin Aung told the media that the junta continued to carry out attacks against civilians, particularly when it was losing ground militarily. He suggested that the military might believe such attacks could pressure communities and create conditions for peace talks or a ceasefire.

In Karenni State, displacement and food insecurity are being compounded by unseasonal heavy rainfall and military attacks. Flooding in Demoso Township damaged IDP farming plots and destroyed crops intended to sustain families during the coming dry season. Although the paddy harvesting period has begun, farmers and displaced people face serious risks when working in their fields because junta forces have reportedly attacked them with suicide drones and artillery.

Rice harvesting in Karenni areas still depends heavily on manual labour, while the high cost of machinery makes mechanised harvesting unaffordable for many farmers. At least three farmers have reportedly been killed and several others injured during this harvesting season.

The situations in Rakhine and Karenni illustrate the multiple pressures facing displaced communities across Myanmar. Beyond the immediate need for food,



It is clear the Myanmar junta has targeted health care facilities. Photo: Antonio Graceffo

shelter and medicine, continued attacks, restricted livelihoods, damaged crops and disrupted education are making recovery increasingly difficult. Without sustained humanitarian access and protection for civilians, displacement is likely to become a prolonged crisis rather than a temporary consequence of conflict.

Myanmar junta targets health care facilities

Medical facilities in resistance-held areas of Myanmar are facing growing threats from junta airstrikes, disrupting essential healthcare services and putting civilians, medical workers and patients at risk. Recent attacks on clinics and hospitals in Rakhine and Sagaing regions have raised serious concerns about the safety and availability of medical services, particularly for internally displaced people (IDPs) and pregnant women.

On November 1, the junta launched an airstrike involving two jet fighters and four bombs against a maternity clinic in Mrauk-U, an area controlled by the Arakan Army (AA). The attack killed six civilians, including two infants and medical staff, and wounded nine others. The bombing has heightened fears among pregnant women who now feel unsafe seeking medical assistance at hospitals and clinics. One pregnant woman told DVB that she did not know where she could safely deliver her baby after the maternity clinic was bombed. She urged the junta not to attack hospitals and clinics that have no military relevance.

A similar incident occurred on October 5, when a junta airstrike struck a voluntary clinic in Ponnagyun, another AA-controlled area. The clinic had suspended its services for two months because of the junta's military offensive toward the town and had no patients at the time of the attack. However, an 18-year-old female volunteer was killed after suffering a severe head injury. Medical supplies and equipment were also damaged. The clinic had previously provided free healthcare to local residents, particularly IDPs from Pannilar camp. An IDP told local media that the closure had left displaced people with fewer options for medical treatment, especially as transportation had become increasingly difficult because of airstrikes. The IDP appealed to domestic and international donors to help reopen the clinic.

In another attack, the junta bombed a hospital operated by the National Unity Government (NUG) in Kawlin Township on November 4, amid its ongoing military offensive in the area. A jet fighter from Tadaroo Airbase reportedly dropped a 300-pound bomb, killing five medical personnel, including a doctor and a medical student, and seriously injuring patients. A local resident told RFA Burmese that the destruction had effectively eliminated the township's main healthcare service, describing the loss as irreplaceable.

These incidents demonstrate how airstrikes are undermining healthcare provision in resistance-held areas. Beyond the immediate casualties and physical destruction, attacks on medical facilities create fear among patients, discourage people from seeking treatment and further weaken an already fragile healthcare system.


Photo: AFP

MYANMAR WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS WELCOME ASEAN BAN ON MYANMAR JUNTA LEADER ATTENDING MEETING, ISSUE WARNING

Women's rights organizations, networks and alliances, pro-democratic forces and civil society organizations of Burma-Myanmar have welcomed ASEAN's exclusion of Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing from the ASEAN meeting in Manila.

The following is their open letter:

Women's groups, networks, and alliances of Burma/Myanmar welcome the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs' confirmation on 11 November 2026 that junta leader Min Aung Hlaing will be excluded from the ASEAN Summit in Manila on 15–17 November. This decision sends a clear message that war criminals have no place on the regional stage and that ASEAN must not legitimize a military junta waging war against Myanmar's people.

Nevertheless, Ma. Theresa P. Lazaro, Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary and Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar during the Chairship has failed to deliver on the commitments of ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in the eyes of WPS advocates, women's rights organizations, alliances, and networks as well as pro-federal democratic proponents from Burma/Myanmar. That is because ASEAN's Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace, and Security (RPA- WPS) commits ASEAN and its Member States to protect women and girls from violence, ensure women have an equal role in peace and security decisions making, and meet the needs of women and girls in humanitarian relief and recovery as guaranteed through the Plan's Six Strategic Outcomes.

Her recent visit to the city of Taunggyi, a military-controlled area of Shan State, as part of a humanitarian mission to Myanmar under the aegis of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance to deliver the aid to affected communities, fell far short of what women's groups and local humanitarian actors have repeatedly called for. Women groups have been pointing out that the military junta that commits grave forms of human rights violations and atrocities against civilians, women and girls, LGBTQIA+ people, and

people with disabilities weaponize aid against the people.

Coinciding with the debut of the Philippines' Chairship of the ASEAN 2026 and International Women's Day, March 8 2026, Myanmar's women's organizations, networks, and alliances, developed a common position paper which was endorsed by over fifty pro-democratic people's organizations, and critiqued the ASEAN WPS-RPA collectively. The key recommendations from this paper are loud and clear:

- Firstly, ASEAN is called on to change who represents Myanmar at ASEAN by recognizing emerging ethnic governance bodies, the National Unity Government. There should be establishment of safe, regular consultations with women from federal units' governance councils, women's rights organizations and civil society actors to actively participate in ASEAN's policy towards Myanmar.

- Secondly, the RPA should be overhauled to make it implementable and accountable to the WPS situation in Myanmar.

- Thirdly, transnational protection mechanisms should be built for women's human rights defenders, democracy activists, and peacebuilders who are forced to exile in the ASEAN region to seek refuge and seek basic social protection and be covered by a non-refoulement policy.

Likewise, support the survivors of gender-based violence, conflict related sexual violence and trafficking via shelters and referrals, ethical documentation, healthcare, psychosocial care, legal aid, and visa or administrative assistance.

- Fourthly, fund women-led prevention directly and over the long term. Resource local mediation, early warning, and evacuation plans that account for people's mobility and communication needs during airstrikes and disasters.

- Finally, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre) and other ASEAN mechanisms should recognize women's organizations as leaders in resistance, frontline humanitarian responders, initiators of sustainable solutions, and accountability holders of the international and regional obligations.

ASEAN's failure to act on these calls is both a moral and a political failure. More specifically, ASEAN has been urged to channel aid through local responders, women led organizations, existing boarder based ethnic health and humanitarian organizations, by giving a direct role in ensuring that aid reaches to community most affected. The visit completely ignores the wishes of people's organizations.

Under the Strategic Outcome six, the ASEAN RPA on WPS commits ASEAN to establishing mechanisms to coordinate implementation, monitor and report progress, and adapt its approach in light of consultations and evidence, including inputs from women's organizations and civil society at large.

By that standard, the visit by Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs, in her capacity as Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar to oversee aid delivery through junta-controlled channels runs counter to the RPA-WPS principles that should guide humanitarian assistance under the Five Point Consensus, which has been reaffirmed by the ASEAN Leaders in October 2025 review on the progress of the Five Point Consensus, which stated that humanitarian assistance should directly reach people internally displaced by armed conflict through borders based efforts.

Lastly, women groups and WPS advocates call on ASEAN Envoy and the incoming Chair to honour ASEAN's WPS commitments in Myanmar. Give women-led organisations, local responders, and border-based ethnic health and humanitarian organisations an equal say in how aid is planned, allocated, and delivered. Fund the border-based networks that already reach communities cut off from assistance. Tell those communities what will change, when it will change, and how they can hold ASEAN to its commitments.



AUN-JAPAN CALLS FOR A 'FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC UNION' IN MYANMAR AT EVENT IN JAPAN

Members of the Association of United Nationalities in Japan (AUN-Japan) held an event on 15 November in Tokyo calling for a Federal Democratic Union in Myanmar.

AUN-Japan is an organization founded in 2004 to promote cooperation, human rights, and equal rights among ethnic minority organizations from Myanmar residing in Japan.

At the Federal Festival, Than Lwin Oo, chairman of AUN-Japan gave the following speech in Burmese:

Distinguished guests, brothers and sisters from all ethnic communities, representatives of various revolutionary forces, artists, partner organizations, and everyone attending today's Federal Festival,

Warm greetings to you all.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the festival organizing committee, volunteers, supporters, and all partner organizations whose dedication and hard work have made this meaningful event possible.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Federalism is not merely a political system. It is about people of different ethnicities, languages, cultures, and traditions respecting one another and living together in equality.

Our country is home to many ethnic nationalities, languages, and diverse cultures. These differences are not our weaknesses. On the contrary, if we can build mutual understanding, respect, and unity, our diversity can become one of our greatest strengths.

To establish the Federal Democratic Union that we all aspire to, the efforts of a single ethnic nationality or organization are not enough. We need the collective strength, shared commitment, and united efforts of all ethnic nationalities, all democratic forces, and the entire population.

We may have different perspectives, opinions, and approaches. However, rather than allowing these

differences to divide us, it is essential that we stand together in pursuit of our common goals.

Embracing diversity is the foundation of unity, and respecting equality is the cornerstone of a federal union.

Today's Federal Festival is much more than a celebration. It is an opportunity to showcase the rich cultural traditions of our ethnic communities and a gathering that allows us to deepen our mutual understanding and strengthen our relationships.

At this festival, brothers and sisters from different ethnic communities will proudly share their traditional clothing, dances, songs, food, and cultural heritage.

Through these experiences, the most important lesson we should all take away is that, despite belonging to different ethnic communities, we can live and stand together as equals.

Our goal is not for one ethnic nationality to dominate another. Rather, it is to build a union that belongs to all of us—a union founded on mutual respect for the rights, dignity, and self-determination of every ethnic nationality.

Finally, I would like to encourage everyone attending today's Federal Festival:

Let us respect one another's cultures.

Let us understand one another's difficulties and challenges.

Let us build mutual trust, stand together in solidarity, and move forward collectively toward the Federal Democratic Union that we all aspire to establish.

With these words, I conclude my remarks.

Thank you very much.




Photo: AFP

MYANMAR KNOCKS ON ASEAN'S DOOR, BUT...

KAVI CHONGKITTAVORN FOR THAI PBS

Is Myanmar really serious about returning to the ASEAN family? The answer is "maybe or maybe not." President Min Aung Hlaing wants ASEAN leaders to guess what his next moves will be. After all, he has successfully dragged his feet in implementing the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) for the past five years.

Following the election early this year, he seems to be getting serious, judging from his diplomatic moves over the past three months. He has been shuttling among capitals in ASEAN, India, Russia, Belarus, and China. Like a magician, he can produce unexpected moves—now you see them, now you do not.

Min Aung Hlaing's latest diplomatic moves suggest that his government begin to recognize the importance of improving ties with ASEAN and fulfilling the 5PC. ASEAN has been disappointed with Myanmar's response to it 5PC. Singapore, the upcoming chair, has maintained that meaningful progress has yet to be made.

The most frequently asked question now is whether ASEAN should judge Myanmar solely on its failures or instead recognize the incremental steps that could generate further progress.

Positive signs from Naypyidaw have been evident. Granting permission for Aung San Suu Kyi to communicate with her son and to meet representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were confidence-building gestures.

The recent visit by Philippine Foreign Secretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro, as the ASEAN special envoy, was considered a positive development. She visited Taunggyi in Shan State, where she could assess humanitarian conditions and explore ways to expand assistance.

Lazaro is expected to build on this opening. Her planned further consultations with Myanmar's ethnic armed organizations, following an earlier meeting in Pattaya in July, are particularly important. A second meeting is expected to take place soon at an undisclosed location inside Thailand. This much-needed political dialogue will bring more stakeholders into the peace process.

Thailand has consistently argued that the Myanmar quagmire is not an isolated problem, as its internal turmoil directly impacts neighboring countries through border security issues, refugees, and illicit activities. Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow has urged Naypyidaw to do more while pursuing a calibrated re-engagement. He is visiting Myanmar on Nov. 12 to hold talks with Myanmar officials over the latest spillover of fighting impacted on the Thai border and to review progress on the implementation of the 5PC.

In Singapore last week, Sihasak offered a candid assessment of ASEAN's own shortcomings. He lamented that discussions on Myanmar too often begin with reaffirming the 5PC and end with member states leaving everything to the annual rotating special envoy without providing clear guidance or an implementation strategy.

Sihasak also called for stronger leadership by the ASEAN chair and a more permanent troika arrangement involving the immediate past, current, and incoming chairs. These proposals could help ensure continuity and prevent the Myanmar issue from being reset every year.

In a related development, Myanmar recently set up an ASEAN Affairs Coordination Office, which held its inaugural meeting recently. Through this office, Naypyidaw sent a strong signal that it wants to engage with ASEAN as it prepares for more active involvement with the bloc.

Myanmar realizes that it faces a huge challenge when Singapore assumes the ASEAN chairmanship in 42 days. Singapore has made it clear that current Myanmar leaders cannot attend high-level ASEAN meetings without "meaningful progress" in implementing the 5PC.

Singapore has legitimate concerns due to ongoing violence inside Myanmar and is standing firm to protect the bloc's credibility. ASEAN has been under strong pressure from dialogue partners to demonstrate its mettle and show that it can resolve its own intra-member issues.

However, Singapore's reservations must not hamper wider engagement with Myanmar. The incoming chair can wait until Naypyidaw demonstrates tangible progress; in the meantime, technical, humanitarian, and diplomatic channels should remain open. ASEAN has scheduled an informal extended consultation on Myanmar ahead of its summit to assess the crisis.

Lazaro is scheduled to brief ASEAN foreign ministers on her latest humanitarian trip during this informal extended consultation ahead of the summit. At this juncture, Myanmar must make further concessions, reduce violence, facilitate humanitarian assistance, and engage in meaningful dialogue with democratic forces and ethnic armed organizations.

There is also a larger geopolitical consideration. As Sihasak warned, an isolated Myanmar is not good for the region. Prolonged exclusion risks creating more space for major-power competition. Geographically and strategically speaking, Myanmar is too important to be left outside regional diplomatic efforts.

Thailand's dual-track policy provides a more practical alternative: maintaining working ties with Naypyidaw while encouraging inclusive dialogue and humanitarian access. Bangkok has an important role to play due to its proximity and connections with Myanmar's various stakeholders.

Myanmar is knocking on ASEAN's door again. The bloc should not close it, but neither should it throw it wide open. Naypyidaw must show that it is genuinely committed to peace, reconciliation, and responsibility.

By Kavi Chongkittavorn

Courtesy of Thai PBS


Photo: AFP

THAILAND, MYANMAR TO MEET LATER THIS MONTH TO DISCUSS RIVER POLLUTION

Thailand and Myanmar have agreed to hold a meeting on November 25 and 26 to discuss cross-border river pollution affecting the Sai and Kok rivers.

Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said upon his return from Myanmar on Thursday evening that the Myanmar government had expressed its readiness to cooperate in addressing river pollution, following growing concerns over contamination in the two rivers.

Sihasak visited Myanmar on Wednesday, where he paid a courtesy call on Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing and held talks with his counterpart U Tin Maung Swe and Lt-Gen Yar Pyae, the defence minister and chairman of the National Solidarity and Peacemaking Negotiation Committee.

Sihasak said the meeting of the bilateral working group on river water quality had been brought forward at Thailand's request. It was originally scheduled for late November.

The two sides also discussed tensions along the Thai-Myanmar border after Myanmar's military operations affected the Thai side and left Thai people injured. Myanmar expressed regret over the incident and reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring that its military operations would not affect Thailand. It also proposed a special meeting between the two countries' military representatives under the Regional Border Committee framework.

Other issues discussed included bilateral trade, investment, labour and energy cooperation, as well as Myanmar's political situation and efforts to promote national reconciliation.

The two countries also discussed cooperation against transnational crime, particularly scam operations along the border. Sihasak said Myanmar had expressed its willingness to work with Thailand and agreed to establish a bilateral working group to improve coordination and speed up joint efforts to tackle the problem.

Courtesy of Thai PBS

Open Letter

အိတ်ဖွင့်စာ

190 MYANMAR CSOS EXPRESS THANKS TO GERMAN CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES FOR STANDING WITH THE MYANMAR PEOPLE

On 13 November, 193 Myanmar civil society organizations published a letter of thanks for the German Chargé d'Affaires for his support of the Myanmar people.

The following is an abridged version of the letter:

Dear Mr. Licharz,

We, the undersigned 193 Myanmar civil society organizations, write to thank you for your video message of 8 November 2026, marking the 75th birthday of President U Win Myint.

In that message you said forthrightly what the United Nations' position has long been: that U Win Myint remains Myanmar's legitimate President. You also told the public that although Germany and the European Union welcomed the announcement of his release in April, you have sought to meet him ever since and have not been permitted to do so. In a few honest sentences, you exposed the truth the junta works hard to hide: President U Win Myint is not free.

We learn what followed. On 10 November the junta's Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned you and warned you for saying it, invoking the Vienna Convention and threatening consequences if you speak again. We want you to know that your words were heard by the people of Myanmar, and that they mattered. At a time when the junta stages fraudulent elections and demands that the world treat it as a legitimate authority, a diplomat who refuses to pretend is a true friend of our people.

Your stand gives strength to the families of the more than 15,000 political prisoners who remain behind bars in the brutal hands of the junta: men and women who, with brave hearts, are defending the rights of our people while facing extraordinary hardships in prison. It also gives hope to all who continue to call for the release of President U Win Myint, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and every person detained for their beliefs in democracy.

We respectfully ask that Germany and the European Union continue to stand with the people of Myanmar by pressing for the full and unconditional freedom of President U Win Myint and all political prisoners, refusing to recognize the junta and its inherently fraudulent and violent election, and upholding the democratic will our people expressed in 2020 and have continued to defend at enormous cost ever since.

Please accept our sincere gratitude. We stand in solidarity with you, as you have stood with us.

Yours sincerely,

Signed by 193 civil society organizations, including 27 who have chosen not to disclose their name.



Photo: AFP

AIRSTRIKES MADE UP HIGHEST SHARE OF FIGHTING SINCE 2021 AS CIVILIAN DEATHS ROSE EACH MONTH

The Myanmar Conflict Analysis Research Institute (MCARI), a new research group that says it has documented more than 96,000 conflict incidents since the February 2021 coup, launched on 11 November and published its third-quarter 2026 Myanmar Conflict Monitor. The group's website carries conflict data by state and region, township maps, quarterly reports and five-year reports for 2021 to 2025 in Burmese and English.

MCARI recorded 3,871 incidents in 251 townships between July and September 2026, with 3,004 deaths, of which 729 were civilians. It also recorded 6,677 arrests or detentions and 291,643 instances of displacement. MCARI says its figures are minimums, and that displacement instances are a count of each time people were displaced, not individual people.

Total incidents fell 35.4 percent from the previous quarter, while deaths fell only 23 percent. The 100 deadliest incidents were 2.6 percent of all events and 60.7 percent of deaths. September had 1,257 deaths, up 44.3 percent from August, because of fighting along the Bhamo–Shwegu stretch of the Ayeyarwady and the offensive in Ponnagyun. Shwegu Township in Kachin State had the most deaths of any township, 304.

Ground battles fell 34.7 percent to 661, while there were 231 airstrikes, giving an airstrike-to-ground-battle ratio of 0.349, the highest since 2021, MCARI said. Attacks on civilian targets, at 779, were the most frequent type of incident. Another tracker, the Myanmar Internet Project, counted 581 airstrikes in the quarter with a different method.

MCARI says 622 of the 729 civilians killed, or 85.3 percent, died in attacks by the military, with monthly civilian deaths rising from 211 in July to 240 in August and 278 in September. It cites the 28 September airstrike on a market in Kyauktaw, which killed at least 50 people including Rohingya, and reports that Rohingya in Sittwe Township were arrested and placed in front of advancing military columns.

The 6,677 detainees include people arrested for political reasons and also people forced into military service, forced to act as porters, or detained for use as human shields. The highest number was in Mohnyin Township, where 892 were detained, including about 600 forced into military service at a rate of one person per household.

Rakhine State's incidents rose 25.1 percent. MCARI says the military shifted from defense to offense on the Sittwe–Ponnagyun front on 5 September with about 1,000 troops. Offensives on the Kalay–Tamu highway displaced about 30,000 people in Kalay Township, and artillery along the Chindwin displaced about 20,000 in Mingin Township, it said. Displaced families in Kalay urgently need food, tarpaulins and malaria medicine.



NUG-LINKED PDF ORDERS KTV LOUNGES CLOSED IN 'ANYAR DUBAI' OIL FIELD AREA, CITING DRUG TRAFFICKING

The People's Defense Force (PDF) under the National Unity Government (NUG) Ministry of Defense's Pakokku District Military Command ordered all karaoke (KTV) lounges in the oil field areas of Pauk and Myaing townships closed permanently from 11 November, citing drug trafficking, according to a statement issued on 11 November.

The order covers a large oil field area of western Myaing and northern Pauk townships in Magway Region with hundreds of hand-dug wells, known locally as "Anyar Dubai."

"It has been learned that not only civilians but also revolutionaries are indulging in drug use at KTV rooms, and are also involved in the consumption, sale, and transportation of drugs," the statement said. An official from the command told Mizzima that the drive will concentrate on closing "High Rooms," slang for rooms used to take drugs, but that for now the announcement orders all KTVs closed. The statement warned that "effective action" would follow if the order is ignored, and the official did not say what form it would take.

Resistance forces say they have controlled the Myaing oil fields, formerly run by the state-owned Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise, since 2023 or 2024, and the district command said the arrival of migrant workers when the fields resumed work brought entertainment businesses and more drug use.

The junta has tried to retake the fields. A military operation from 31 August to 27 September found 131 "illegal" wells in Myaing and 735 in Pakokku Township, and the junta said PDF groups were collecting payments from operators, according to reports in The Star and AFP. The resistance still holds most of the fields, it is believed.

On 9 November the NUG's Pauk Township department for women, youth and children's affairs, labour and humanitarian affairs said 958 households, 3,341 people, from Wun Chone, Kyauk Khwat, Ai Kyel, Thee Chauk, Tharaphi and Lel Lan villages in southern Pauk have fled into forests because of drone and heavy artillery fire from junta troops based in Pakokku and Myaing, and that continuous rain is adding to their hardship.



Photo: AFP

MYANMAR JUNTA LAUNCHES DAILY AIRSTRIKES IN SOUTHERN MYAWADDY

Fighting between Myanmar junta forces and resistance groups continues to intensify in areas south of Myawaddy Township in Karen State, along the Thai-Myanmar border, with the military using air support on a daily basis, according to local sources.

As of 12 November, fierce clashes were reported near the Thae Phyu Chaung area, where a military column is operating in southern Myawaddy. The junta has been providing both air and artillery support, a source said.

"Aircraft come day and night, but there are more of them at night. This morning's fighting took place around Thae Phyu Chaung and Taung Ni. Artillery was also used. There is fighting. On this side, around Phalu-Minhletpan, things have been relatively quiet for about two days," the source said.

A military source said the junta had been deploying aircraft repeatedly because its ground forces had suffered heavy losses.

"They keep using aircraft because they have suffered such heavy losses. They come every day," the source said.

Although the military situation has eased somewhat around Phalu-Minhletpan, residents of Minhletpan village said they still frequently hear heavy and small-arms fire at night.

Junta forces have deployed at least three military columns to areas south of Myawaddy, including Phalu-Minhletpan, Thae Phyu Chaung and Waw Lay, and are continuing their offensives, resulting in intense fighting. The military is relying heavily on air support, while artillery fire is also being provided by junta positions, including Infantry Battalion 275, the garrison unit in Myawaddy, as well as Lat Khat Taung and Ingyin Myaing.

Fighting in these areas has remained intense for several months, forcing local residents to flee and seek refuge in border areas on the Thai side.

Some shells and other ammunition fired during the clashes have repeatedly landed and exploded in villages on the Thai side of the border, causing injuries and damage to buildings. Thai authorities have increased security along the border, according to a Minhletpan resident who has taken refuge in Mae Ko Khing village.

"Security has been stepped up by the Thai military. Heavy artillery shells frequently land on this side and have damaged Thai homes. The other night, they even fired flares over here," a resident of Mae Ko Khing said.

The junta began launching military columns and offensives in late 2025 in an attempt to retake border outposts it had lost to combined forces led by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and to regain full control of the Thai-Myanmar border area. However, attacks and blockades by KNLA-led joint forces have so far prevented the military from re-establishing control over the territory.

In addition, according to a source in Myawaddy, military convoys from Military Division 22, based in Hpa-an, have arrived at Infantry Battalion 275 in Myawaddy and military positions in Thingannyinaung. The junta may use these forces to reinforce its troops in areas south of Myawaddy, the source said.



Photo: Supplied

LAUNCHING OF MCARI AND THE MYANMAR CONFLICT MONITOR FOR Q3 2026

Myanmar Conflict Analysis Research Institute (MCARI), an evidence-based research institute that systematically records and analyses conflict events in Myanmar, has announced its launch on 11 November.

MCARI is an independent research organization that has recorded more than 96,000 conflict events across Myanmar since the military coup of 1 February 2021, each by date, place and circumstance. Their website, www.mcari.org, now offers data by state and region, interactive township-level maps, quarterly reports, forecasts, and our five-year research reports for 2021–2025, in English and Burmese.

On the same day, they have published their flagship analysis, The Myanmar Conflict Monitor — Q3 2026 (1 July to 30 September 2026). It examines 3,871 conflict events recorded in 251 townships, 3,004 deaths (including 729 civilians), 6,677 people detained, and 291,643 displacements.

This quarter, the effects of the conflict reached well beyond the front lines into residential wards, villages and civilian markets. Although ground fighting declined, deaths became concentrated in a small number of large events, and reliance on air strikes reached its highest level since 2021.

They identify four strategic shifts:

1. Concentrated lethality, and a shift to the river corridor

Total events fell by 35.4% from the previous quarter, but deaths fell by only 23.0%. In September, fighting along the Bhamo–Shwegu stretch of the Ayeyarwady and the offensive into Ponnagyun pushed deaths to 1,257, a sudden rise of 44.3% over August. The 100 deadliest events, only 2.6% of all events, accounted for 60.7% of all deaths nationwide. The combined share of deaths in Sagaing and Magway fell to 27.8%, while Shwegu Township in Kachin State, on the Ayeyarwady supply corridor, recorded 304 deaths, the highest of any township in the country.

2. Air strikes per clash at their highest since 2021

Ground clashes fell by 34.7% to 661, yet air strikes within armed conflict rose to 231. The ratio of air strikes to clashes reached 0.349, the highest since 2021. "Fire on civilian targets" (779 events) outnumbered ground clashes and became the most frequent sub-event type of the quarter.

3. A renewed Rakhine front, and rising civilian deaths

Conflict events in Rakhine State rose by 25.1%. On the Sittwe–Ponnagyun front the Myanmar military moved from defence to offence, and on 5 September launched an offensive of about 1,000 troops into ULA/AA-held Ponnagyun Township. Of the 729 civilians killed nationwide, 622 (85.3%) were killed in attacks by the Myanmar military, and civilian deaths rose each month, from 211 in July and 240 in August to 278 in September. A military air strike on the central market of Kyauktaw on 28 September killed 50 civilians, Rohingya among them, and reports emerged from Sittwe Township of Rohingya residents being detained and placed at the front of advancing military columns.

4. Forced conscription and a humanitarian crisis

The 6,677 people detained include not only political detentions but many people forcibly conscripted, pressed into portering, or held as human shields. In Mohnyin Township, 892 people were detained, the highest of any township, including about 600 forcibly conscripted at one person per household in the Indawgyi area of Kachin State. In all, 291,643 displacements were recorded, among them about 30,000 in Kale Township from the offensive along the Kale–Tamu highway and about 20,000 in Mingin Township from shelling along the Chindwin River. Displaced families in Kale faced urgent needs for food, tarpaulins and malaria medication during the monsoon.

MCARI say they hope these figures help journalists, researchers and policymakers report and assess the underlying shifts in Myanmar's conflict accurately.

www.mcari.org

Note: All figures are conservative minimums of what could be recorded, not estimates. Displacement figures count the times people were displaced in each event, not individual people.



Photo: NUG

NUG SPOKESPERSON DENIES THEIR SPECIAL REGION MILITARY HEADQUARTERS HAS FALLEN

The National Unity Government (NUG) has denied the military junta's claim that it had captured the NUG's Special Region Military Headquarters and 11 Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA) bases in areas along the border between Mon State and Bago Region, saying the junta's announcement was not entirely accurate.

Junta-controlled media widely reported on November 9 and 10 that junta forces had launched offensives and captured the NUG's Special Region Military Headquarters and KNLA bases in Kyaikto and Shwegyin townships between November 3 and 8, seizing weapons and ammunition.

In response, Nay Phone Latt, spokesperson for the NUG Prime Minister's Office, told Mizzima that the junta's propaganda statements were disconnected from the actual situation on the ground.

"The terrorist military's statements are not entirely accurate. The Special Region is a mobile military region, and its headquarters is also mobile. There is no such thing as the Special Region Headquarters falling. PDF forces and revolutionary groups are engaging and attacking enemy forces that have advanced deep into this battle zone. We cannot disclose further details at this time, but we will make an announcement with supporting information when the time is appropriate," Nay Phone Latt told Mizzima.

Local sources said intense clashes had erupted between junta troops and resistance forces led by the KNLA after more than 1,000 junta soldiers advanced into the area. More than 15,000 residents from over 20 villages, including Wadet Kwin and Zee Byawng, have reportedly fled their homes to seek safety.

On September 24, junta forces also carried out an airstrike on the location of the Special Region Military Headquarters, killing several resistance members, including Staff Sergeant Nay Win Aung, an air force serviceman who had joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

Clashes between resistance forces and junta troops are continuing in areas surrounding the border region, according to Mizzima's sources.



Photo: AFP

UN RAPPORTEUR KELLEY CURRIE TO VISIT ROHINGYA CAMPS IN BANGLADESH AS MYANMAR JUNTA SAYS IT IS NOT READY TO HOST HER

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Kelley E. Currie, will visit Bangladesh from 11 to 18 November to assess how Myanmar's deteriorating human rights situation, including the armed conflict and developments in western Myanmar's Rakhine State, is affecting Bangladesh and the Rohingya refugees it hosts, while the junta has told her it is not ready to receive her inside Myanmar.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which announced the trip on 10 November, Currie will meet government officials, civil society representatives, victims and survivors, among others. She will visit Dhaka, Cox's Bazar and refugee camp sites in Cox's Bazar District, and will also look at opportunities for future cooperation. Bangladesh hosts more than one million Rohingya refugees, most of whom fled a military crackdown in Rakhine State in 2017.

Currie has formally requested access for a country visit to Myanmar, and the military regime informed her that it was not ready to accommodate one, OHCHR said.

She will hold a press conference at UN House in Dhaka at 14:00 local time on 18 November, open only to accredited journalists. Currie, who succeeded Tom Andrews in the role this year, will present her next report to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2027.



SHWEBO TOWNSHIP RESISTANCE COMMITTEE HOLDS ONLINE MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR KYAW MOE TUN

Members of the Shwebo Township Strike Committee, a local resistance group in Sagaing Region, held an online meeting with Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, the committee said. Questions and answers were exchanged, and the committee said he can voice more loudly to the international community the concerns of people who want justice and freedom. The committee did not say what the Ambassador told them, and Mizzima has not had comment from him.

The committee said it will continue community-based revolutionary activities until military dictatorship ends and a genuine federal democratic union emerges.

The meeting comes as the UN Credentials Committee is due to review credentials for the General Assembly's 81st session in late November or early December. The committee has deferred any decision on Myanmar's seat for five years, allowing Kyaw Moe Tun to stay in post. The junta has nominated Aung Thurein, a former military colonel, to replace him. Supporters in Myanmar and abroad have campaigned for him to keep the seat, including a rally outside the UN in New York on 19 September.

Kyaw Moe Tun has used UN meetings to present evidence of alleged military war crimes, including his statements to the Third Committee in October.



EU ADDS €16 MILLION IN AID FOR MYANMAR AND ROHINGYA REFUGEES BUT DOES NOT SAY HOW IT WILL BE SPLIT

The European Union on 6 November allocated an additional €16 million in humanitarian aid for communities affected by conflict in Myanmar and for Rohingya refugees and their host communities in Bangladesh.

According to the European Commission, the money in Myanmar will go to food assistance, healthcare and nutrition, mainly in response to a worsening food crisis driven by conflict, the projected effects of a Super El Niño, higher global fuel prices and recent flooding.

In Bangladesh, where around 1.2 million refugees continue to live in precarious conditions, the funding will prioritise food security, healthcare and protection services as camps face growing pressure from new arrivals from Myanmar, the Commission said. It added that more than 4 million people have been forced from their homes inside Myanmar.

The new allocation comes on top of more than €50 million provided since January for the Myanmar crisis and its regional impact, and more than €23 million already allocated to Bangladesh this year. The Commission did not say how the €16 million would be divided between the two countries or which organisations would deliver it.



NUG FM ZIN MAR AUNG SAYS REVOLUTION COULD SUCCEED WITHIN TWO YEARS WITH UNITY AND RIGHT LEADERSHIP

National Unity Government (NUG) Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung said at a public meeting in Incheon, South Korea, that it is possible for the Spring Revolution to succeed within two years if there is the correct leadership and public unity, an organizer who attended told Mizzima.

Recording was restricted during the Q&A, so Mizzima could not confirm the remark, and the Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF) did not respond to comment.

"She emphasized that for the revolution to succeed within a specific timeframe, it requires public unity, correct leadership, and active participation from everyone," said Kyaw San, secretary of a Korea-based Myanmar federal democracy committee that helped organize the event. He said that when asked whether two years is possible, she said it is, but her main point was that unity and participation are the key factors.

The meeting was organized by the NUG's representative office in South Korea and held at Bupyeong Town Hall on 8 November from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. and attended by more than 100 Myanmar citizens in South Korea. The SCEF delegation included Zin Mar Aung, SCEF secretary; Neineh Plo of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), who also leads the Karenni Interim Executive Council's foreign affairs committee; Chin National Front General Secretary Salai Thla Hei; and NUG Planning, Finance and Investment Minister Tin Tun Naing.

Officials explained political developments, the SCEF's structure and history and its progress, then took questions. Neineh Plo described the SCEF's unity policies as a response to the military's divide-and-rule tactics and sham negotiations and encouraged Myanmar citizens in Korea to take part, and Yan Naing Tun, Myanmar's representative to South Korea, gave information on residency matters. Only the officials' speeches were posted on social media, according to a Mizzima source.

Kyaw San said attendees were satisfied because they could discuss matters frankly. The Q&A lasted about two hours, he said.

The delegation met South Korean lawmakers in Seoul on 4 and 5 November. Zin Mar Aung is due at the Paris Peace Forum on 10 and 11 November, where a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron on the sidelines is being prepared, according to diplomatic sources cited.



FEVER AND SKIN SORES SPREAD AMONG MYANMAR'S SHWEBO DISTRICT IDPS AS WEATHER SWINGS, AID GROUP SAYS

Children and older people among displaced residents in Shwebo District, Sagaing Region, have fevers and skin sores in recent days as the weather swings between hot and cold, according to local residents and an aid group helping the displaced.

"It is raining now. Because the heat and cold are imbalanced, many people are in poor health. People are experiencing fevers and skin sores," an official from the S&C relief group told Mizzima on 10 November. He said temperatures have risen in the day with occasional rain while mornings and nights are cold, so there can be up to three kinds of weather in one day. Aid workers said weakened immunity from malnutrition adds to the illnesses.

Aid workers said medicine is hard to get to displaced people because the junta has restricted transport of medical supplies and goods into Shwebo District. Relief convoys were turned back at junta checkpoints during the August floods, and the district police chief threatened people who help flood victims, Mizzima and Progressive Voice reported at the time.

The NUG Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement said on 9 November that rain may continue in some areas from 9 to 11 November because of atmospheric instability in the northern Bay of Bengal and a possible low-pressure area in the Andaman Sea, with scattered rain likely in Tanintharyi, Kachin and Mon. It also warned that a strong El Niño may bring higher-than-normal temperatures, less rain, water shortage and fire hazard between October 2026 and February 2027, and told households to prepare. The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said on 8 October that a strong-to-very-strong El Niño is likely through early 2027.

The S&C group rebuilds homes destroyed in junta arson attacks and provides food, health and education help to displaced people.



KARENNI IEC DRAFTS 90-DAY PLAN TO PUT SECURITY FORCES UNDER CIVILIAN CONTROL, SAYS WORKSHOP

The Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC) has drafted a 90-day plan to bring its security sector under civilian leadership and accountable administration, following a three-day workshop on 14 to 16 October. The plan has been drafted, and Mizzima has not seen evidence that it has been adopted.

The workshop was supported by the Myanmar-Women Peace and Security (M-WPS) group, with sessions led by Dr. Miemie Winn Byrd, Kyaw Kyaw and Khin Maung Win of the Institute for Peace and Social Justice (IPSJ). Byrd is a professor at the U.S. Defense Department's Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. Twenty-three representatives of the IEC's departments of Defense, Home Affairs, Justice, and Women and Children's Affairs attended.

The aim was to put the Karenni State Interim Arrangement into practice. It was first promulgated in January 2023 and confirmed in revised form in October 2024. Participants studied civilian-military relations and civilian-led administration, looking at U.S., NATO and European Union models, including the principle that civilian authorities control strategic policy, budgets and deployment while military command stays separate. Based on the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, they discussed letting the Department of Home Affairs run civilian-led policing and stability operations so the Department of Defense can focus on fighting the junta. Trainers also covered conflict management and preventing sexual and gender-based violence.

Under the plan, the Department of Defense would be placed under civilian authority and withdraw from domestic law enforcement, and Home Affairs would work to form a civilian-led police force quickly. The Department of Women and Children's Affairs would build gender equality and protection measures into local administration, and the Department of Justice would set up independent accountability mechanisms so security personnel answer regardless of rank or affiliation. The Departments of Women and Children's Affairs and Justice were also tasked with victim-centered protection systems, secure complaint procedures and independent prosecution capacity in line with international transitional justice standards.



JUSTICE FOR THE ROHINGYA IS JUSTICE FOR ALL PEOPLES OF MYANMAR

KHIN OHMAR

On 19 November, in The Hague, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) will deliver its judgment in the genocide case against Myanmar.

It was The Gambia, a small country on the other side of the world, that took Myanmar to the ICJ in 2019. The Court ordered provisional measures to protect the Rohingya in January 2020. It rejected the junta's attempts to have the case thrown out. And now, after years of written pleadings and hearings, there will finally be a judgment. There will be no appeal to this judgment.

For the Rohingya people, this moment has been a lifetime in the making. For the rest of Myanmar's peoples, it should matter just as much.

I write this before the ruling, with strong hope. I hope the Court finds that Myanmar violated the Genocide Convention, the treaty our country signed in the years after the Second World War, when the world promised "never again" to every people, including ours.

What the Court decides will demonstrate something fundamental about our country: whether the crimes the military committed in our country's name will finally be called as what they really are, and whether justice in Myanmar is something that belongs to all of its people or only to some.

These crimes belong to the military, not the country of Myanmar

Let me be clear about what this case is, because the junta and its apologists have spent years trying to blur it. They will certainly continue after the judgement is delivered.

The case is not an attack on Myanmar or its people. It is a case about the acts of a military that committed genocidal atrocities against the Rohingya and then lied about those atrocities to the world.

In 2017, that military drove more than 700,000 Rohingya from their homes in Rakhine State in what it called "clearance operations." Villages were burned, people were burned alive, women were raped, and children were killed. The Rohingya who survived crossed into Bangladesh carrying nothing but their testimony.

Nearly a decade later, more than a million of Rohingya still live in refugee camps in Bangladesh, and those who remain in Myanmar are denied their citizenship, without freedom of movement, and without safety, under a genocidal junta and its hate-mongering ultranationalists who refuse even to say their name.

We should be able to call them "Rohingya". That is their ethnic identity and the name they wish to be called. And it is when we recognise that name that we are first able to understand its denial as an act of violence intended to strip them of their humanity.

A ruling for Rohingya justice is a ruling against impunity

I also write this to my fellow Myanmar people, and this is the heart of what I want to say.

To hold the military accountable for crimes against the Rohingya is not just for the Rohingya. It is for the people of Myanmar. I said this in 2022, five years after the genocide, and I repeat it now. Following the military's illegal coup attempt of 2021, the same criminals who

committed genocide against the Rohingya carried out a nationwide campaign of terror and war crimes against all peoples of Myanmar.

There is one perpetrator, and it has never distinguished between us. When we allow the Rohingya to be separated out, as if their suffering were a different from ours, we accept the military's oldest strategy: divide us so that it can destroy us one people at a time.

So let us say it plainly: Justice for the Rohingya is justice for all the peoples of Myanmar. A ruling for the Rohingya is a ruling against the impunity that has crushed every one of us.

If the Court rules in favor of the Rohingya, it will be a historic moment: The first time an international court has held the Myanmar State to account for committing genocide against the Rohingya. It will tell every Rohingya mother in Cox's Bazar that the world heard her. It will tell the survivors that what happened to them has a name, and that the name is not the one the military gave it – not "clearance operations," but genocide.

A country that cannot face what was done to the Rohingya cannot build a federal democracy we are fighting for, because a union built on denial will carry the rot of the old order into its foundations. We must face the grave injustices against the Rohingya head-on and work to build an inclusive Myanmar that draws its strength from its diversity and solidarity for humanity, rather than denying and holding onto the status quo.

Justice delayed is justice denied

The truth has waited long enough. The Rohingya have been denied their name, their identity, their citizenship, and their homes for generations. They have waited through commissions that whitewashed the crimes against them, through promises that evaporated into thin air, through nine years in the camps since 2017 and seven years of proceedings in The Hague. I have been warning that the international community's failure to act was a gift to the military junta, a free pass to the very men who committed genocide. Justice delayed is justice denied, and for the Rohingya, justice has been delayed beyond any honest excuse. It should be delayed no longer.

That is why I call on the people of Myanmar, in the country and in exile, to stand with the Rohingya now, openly and without reservation.

Genuine solidarity is neither charity nor pity. It is the recognition that when one community is not free, none of us are free, and that if rights are denied to one community today, another may face the same tomorrow. And this has been the case for our peoples in Myanmar for decades. When minorities were persecuted by the military, majorities turned their backs on them. The next turn came to the majority.

That solidarity must extend beyond empathy to shared risk and coordinated action against our common oppressor. It cannot wait until standing together becomes safe or convenient.

The Rohingya must not stand alone on 19 November

When the judgment is read on 19 November, let our Rohingya sisters and brothers hear from us – the civil society groups of Myanmar of various ethnicities, religions, and nonreligious backgrounds, inside and outside Myanmar – that they do not stand alone in that moment. Let our democratic forces, our civil society, and our communities say what the junta has spent decades trying to prevent us from saying: you are of this country, your suffering is not for us to feel ashamed to face, but it is our duty to repair, and your justice is our justice.

Whatever the Court decides, our obligation does not end in The Hague. If the ruling is positive, as I hope and pray it will be, we must press for it to be honored in full: protection for the Rohingya who remain in Myanmar; the restoration of their ethnic identity, citizenship, and rights; accountability for those responsible; and reparations for what was taken. Yet, if the ruling is negative, the junta will undoubtedly attempt to use it to minimize the severity of the atrocities committed against the Rohingya and will stir up hatred against them again through its ultranationalists. We must not allow this criminal junta to succeed in its ongoing genocidal campaign against the Rohingya people. Regardless of the Court's decision, we must stand with our Rohingya sisters and brothers and continue to push for those responsible to be held criminally accountable.

A judgment is a door. It is for us to walk through it. On 19 November, all eyes will be on The Hague. Let the world hear Myanmar's peoples, standing together at last, saying that no one in our country will be left outside the reach of justice again.

(Khin Ohmar is a Myanmar human rights activist who was involved in organizing the 1988 nationwide pro-democracy uprising. She is also the founder and Acting Executive Director of Myanmar human rights organization, Progressive Voice.)

This commentary was filed just before the ICJ court decision.



Twan Mrat Naing

THE HOMECOMING GENERAL: TWAN MRAT NAING'S 48TH BIRTHDAY AND THE ARAKAN ARMY'S DAUNTING CROSSROADS

SAI WANSAI

A Brief Biography

Twan Mrat Naing, also known as Tun Myat Naing, was born on November 7, 1978, in Akyab, now known as Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State. Unlike most military commanders who emerge from formal armed forces backgrounds, his path was unconventional. He studied law in Sittwe before dropping out and later worked as a tour guide in Yangon. His political awakening came early; he confronted the military while in the ninth grade and became active as a student leader.

In 1998, following the death of several Arakan revolutionaries during Operation Leech, he began crossing the border into Bangladesh. He eventually traveled to India, where he connected with Arakan National Congress leaders in Delhi and Manipur. Through contacts at Yangon University, he established links with the Karen National Liberation Army and the Kachin Independence Army. In 2004, he collaborated with Dr. Nyo Twan Awng, who now serves as the Arakan Army's Vice Commander-in-Chief. In April 2009, they founded the Arakan Army in Laiza, Kachin State, starting with just twenty-six members and reportedly only one gun. The fledgling group found shelter with the KIA and received early support from the Kokang's Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army.

Today, at forty-eight, Twan Mrat Naing commands what has grown into one of Myanmar's most powerful ethnic armed organizations. With an estimated thirty thousand to fifty thousand well-disciplined troops, the Arakan Army now controls roughly ninety percent of Rakhine State. On June 6, 2025, after sixteen years of operating from exile, Twan Mrat Naing returned to his homeland—a symbolic and strategic turning point in the struggle for Arakanese self-determination.

Formation and Historical Timeline

The origins of the Arakan Army lie in survival and exile. Born in Kachin State, the group focused initially on building internal cohesion and establishing training camps. Early support from the MNDAA and access to Chinese border trade routes helped arm the

growing force. By the mid-2010s, the Arakan Army had expanded its operations into Rakhine State, shifting from a purely military organization to a governance entity. It established administrative structures, collected taxes, and began providing basic services in areas it controlled.

The period between 2019 and 2021 marked a dark chapter defined by international condemnation. The Arakan Army's operations against Rohingya communities in Buthidaung and Maungdaw drew intense criticism from Human Rights Watch, Fortify Rights, and the United Nations, which documented massacres, village burnings, and forced displacement. Arrest warrant requests were filed against the group's leadership. Simultaneously, the personal toll on Twan Mrat Naing deepened as family members were detained in Singapore, Thailand, and Myanmar.

Following the military coup in February 2021, the Arakan Army shifted from a regional conflict to a broader anti-junta fight. The informal ceasefire broke down after a junta airstrike on an Arakan Army base in Karen State. The group aligned with other ethnic armed organizations and the People's Defense Forces, participating in coordinated offensives that rapidly eroded junta control. By mid-2025, the Arakan Army controlled approximately ninety percent of Rakhine State, including the entire 271-kilometer border with Bangladesh.

Twan Mrat Naing's return to his homeland on June 6, 2025, marked a new phase. He declared that Rakhine State would be governed as a unitary state system and began establishing the Arakanese People's Revolutionary Government. The group has now vowed to clear all junta troops from Rakhine State by the end of 2027, leaving the military holding only the state capital of Sittwe and the Kyaukphyu project areas.

The Challenges Ahead

The Arakan Army's stated goal of eliminating all junta presence by 2027 is ambitious. The remaining junta strongholds, particularly Sittwe and Kyaukphyu, are the most heavily fortified positions in the state. Kyaukphyu presents a unique complexity because the deep-sea port, Special Economic Zone, and China-backed oil and gas pipelines are guarded by Chinese special security forces operating with junta approval. A direct assault risks a diplomatic incident with Beijing. The Arakan Army must navigate this carefully, advancing toward total victory while reassuring Beijing that its economic interests remain safe. China has signaled that it will tolerate an Arakan Army victory only if its infrastructure is untouched, meaning the group may need to negotiate a bloodless transition rather than pursue a full military conquest.

Diplomatically, the Arakan Army faces a delicate balancing act with its neighbors. China's relationship with the group is pragmatic. While Beijing supplies weapons through proxy networks like the United Wa State Army, it exerts diplomatic pressure to protect its investments. If the Arakan Army's offensive becomes too chaotic, China could freeze border trade and weapon supplies. India's engagement is more transactional and subnational. Through the Mizoram state government and local trade associations, India has signed memorandums of understanding with the United League of Arakan to keep the Kaladan Project alive. India officially maintains ties with the junta but has accepted the Arakan Army's de facto control out of necessity. However, New Delhi remains wary of the Arakan Army's Chinese connections and its historical ties to insurgent groups in India's Northeast. Bangladesh's relationship is the most delicate of all. Dhaka shares a direct border with Arakan Army territory and has had direct contacts with the group, prompting protests from the junta that Bangladesh dismissed. The Rohingya issue is central to this relationship; Bangladesh wants to repatriate over one million refugees, but any repatriation framework requires cooperation from the Arakan Army, which remains restrictive. Cross-border attacks by Rohingya armed groups from Bangladesh further complicate matters, with the Arakan Army pressuring Dhaka to crack down on these militants.

The Rohingya issue remains the Arakan Army's most significant challenge and the key to its international legitimacy. Human Rights Watch, Fortify Rights, and the United Nations have documented mass killings, systematic village burnings, forced labor, and internal displacement of Rohingya civilians. These allegations have severely damaged the group's standing in the international community. Twan Mrat Naing denies war crimes, arguing that Rohingya armed groups collaborate with the junta as human shields and proxy forces. He describes what he calls lawfare—the

weaponization of human rights narratives by diaspora activists and media outlets to discredit the Arakan Army. The group has reopened mosques, integrated some Muslims into its administrative apparatus, and claims racial harmony is improving in inland areas.

To gain international legitimacy, the Arakan Army must do more than deny allegations. It needs to allow independent humanitarian and human rights organizations access to affected areas, cooperate with investigations, and demonstrate concrete steps toward inclusive governance that genuinely includes Rohingya representation. It must distinguish clearly between legitimate military operations against armed groups and abuses against civilians. Without these steps, the Arakan Army risks remaining isolated—militarily powerful but politically pariah.

The Prospect of Rakhine's Fate

The trajectory of Rakhine State is inextricably linked to Myanmar's broader future. If the Arakan Army clears the junta by 2027 and establishes a functional administration, it could negotiate a federal arrangement within a post-junta Myanmar. This would require proving it can govern inclusively rather than just militarily. If successful, Rakhine could become a model for ethnic-state autonomy within a restructured federation. Alternatively, the Arakan Army might control most of Rakhine but fail to take Sittwe and Kyaukphyu, leaving the weakened junta holding these enclaves with Chinese and Russian support. This would result in a de facto partitioned state—a frozen conflict with periodic violence that leaves the Rohingya crisis unresolved.

There is also the possibility that Twan Mrat Naing transcends his Rakhine base to become a national leader in a post-junta Myanmar. This is the scenario that many ethnic armed organizations and the National Unity Government hope for. But it requires the Arakan Army to demonstrate that it is not exclusively Rakhine nationalist and that it genuinely supports a federal, democratic Myanmar inclusive of all ethnicities. The Rohingya issue is the litmus test. If Twan Mrat Naing can resolve or at least credibly address it, he could position the Arakan Army as a national player. If he cannot, the group remains regional.

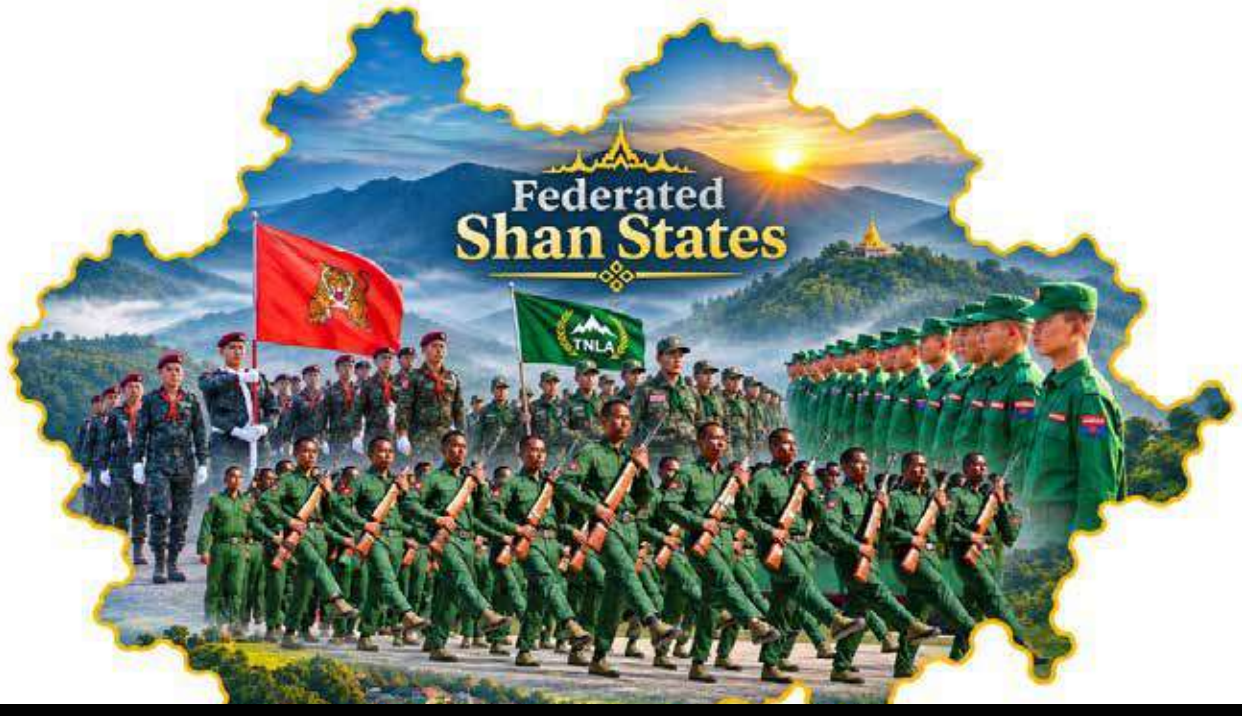
Opinion and Speculation

Twan Mrat Naing stands at a crossroads that mirrors the broader dilemma facing all ethnic armed organizations in Myanmar's revolution. He built an army from twenty-six men and one gun. He returned to his homeland at the head of a force that controls ninety percent of Rakhine State. He is forty-eight years old, at the peak of his power. But power without legitimacy is brittle. The Arakan Army's greatest vulnerability is not military but political and moral. The allegations against the Rohingya are the group's Achilles' heel. Whether these allegations are entirely accurate, partially true, or strategically amplified by opponents is secondary to the political reality. The international community will not embrace an Arakan Army-led Rakhine that has systematically marginalized its Muslim population.

Twan Mrat Naing has signaled that he wants to be more than a Rakhine leader; he wants to be a national leader. But the world will judge him not by his intentions but by his actions. Will he allow independent investigators into Rakhine? Will he negotiate a genuine political settlement for the Rohingya, even if it is unpopular with his base? Will he resist Chinese pressure to protect pipelines at the expense of civilian populations? Will he engage India and Bangladesh as partners rather than transactional counterparts? The answer to these questions will define not just Rakhine's future but Myanmar's. The Arakan Army has proven it can win battles. Now it must prove it can build peace.

The forty-eighth birthday of Twan Mrat Naing is not just a celebration; it is a reckoning. The Arakan Dream remains unfinished. The weight of deciding its fate falls on one man who left Rakhine as a student activist and returned as a general. Whether he can transform from a military commander into a statesman may be the most important question in Myanmar today.

Courtesy of Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN)



RECONFIGURING SHAN STATE: A SEQUENCED APPROACH TO ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM IN A FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC UNION

SAI WANSAI FOR SHAN
AN AWARENESS-BUILDING REPORT FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Executive Summary

Armed competition over administrative status has become a defining feature of Myanmar's post-coup conflict landscape. In Shan State, several ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) are seeking elevated administrative standing — territories governed directly by, or in direct liaison with, the federal centre rather than subordinated to the existing state administration. These demands are politically legitimate expressions of self-determination aspiration, yet they collide with a demographic reality that makes neat territorial demarcation unachievable.

This report argues that the appropriate response is neither capitulation to maximalist territorial claims nor rigid defence of existing boundaries, but a sequenced political process conducted within a genuine Federal Democratic Union (FDU) framework. It draws on the institutional architecture of the Federated Shan States (1922–1948) not as a template to be restored, but as a source of structural ideas — layered autonomy, a collective consultative body, and a clear division between local and union-level competencies — which must be reconstructed on wholly democratic foundations.

The report also addresses the principal objection to invoking that precedent, sets out a phased sequence for constituent unit (CU) formation, and identifies where each stakeholder group can contribute constructively.

Background: The Post-SAC Political Configuration

The State Administration Council (SAC), established on 2 February 2021, was dissolved on 31 July 2025. Authority subsequently passed to an election commission, and general elections have been staged from December 2025 onward. The resulting administration is led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and is dominated by the military together with the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

For analytical purposes, the significant point is one of continuity rather than nomenclature. Whatever the formal title of the governing body, the constitutional

architecture of the 2008 constitution remains operative; the armed forces retain decisive influence over defence, security, border affairs and natural resources; and the threshold for creating new constituent units — a supermajority requirement never once satisfied since 2011 — remains effectively prohibitive. Any proposal for administrative reconfiguration must therefore contend with a structure designed to resist precisely such change.

It is against this backdrop that recent contacts between the regime's peace-coordination machinery and EAO leaderships in Shan State should be assessed: as tactical engagements rather than as evidence of a settled political programme.

The Demands: What Is Being Sought

2.1 Upgraded administrative standing

The central demand advanced by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA, commonly known as Mongla) is that their administered territories be recognised as entities of higher administrative rank — in practical terms, areas dealing directly with the union government rather than falling under Shan State authority. This would represent a qualitative shift: not merely greater autonomy, but a change in constitutional position.

2.2 A wider pattern

Comparable aspirations are articulated by the Pa-O National Liberation Organisation and affiliated Pa-O bodies, by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in respect of Palaung-inhabited areas, and in varying degrees by Danu representatives. Each seeks recognition proportionate to its own demographic footprint and military presence.

2.3 The Shan position requires accurate framing

Any assessment of these competing claims must record that the Shan are not a minor constituency within Shan State. On conservative estimate they constitute roughly 35 per cent or more of the state's population, and are represented by two substantial armed formations — the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) and the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) — whose combined strength is estimated at approximately 20,000 to 40,000 personnel.

This matters for two reasons. First, no configuration of new constituent units carved from Shan State can proceed without Shan participation and consent; a settlement imposed over Shan objections would reproduce the very grievance that has driven Shan armed resistance since 1959. Second, the relative weakness of Shan representation in earlier national peace architectures — most notably the exclusion of the SSPP/SSA from the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement process — means that Shan concerns about marginalisation are grounded in documented experience, not mere apprehension.

2.4 Why the current framework cannot accommodate these demands

The 2008 constitution permits self-administered zones only where a nationality forms a majority in two or more townships, and requires a parliamentary supermajority for any creation of a new constituent unit. Both provisions operate as barriers. Consequently, negotiation under the present charter tends to produce arrangements that satisfy no party durably.

The Structural Obstacle: Overlapping Demography

Shan State is not a mosaic that can be reassembled into single-colour tiles. Across much of the territory, Shan, Wa, Ta'ang, Pa-O, Danu, Akha, Lahu, Intha, Kokang and Bamar communities are interspersed at village and tract level. Three consequences follow.

Majority-minority inversion. A group forming a majority in one township may be a dispersed minority in adjacent townships it regards as historically relevant. The TNLA's proposed Ta'ang boundaries, as circulated, extend beyond the existing Self-Administered Zone into areas where Ta'ang are not the majority — a prospect that has generated concern among Shan and other communities. Similar friction attends speculation about Pa-O claims touching Taunggyi.

Protection deficits. New boundaries drawn to serve one group's claim create new minorities inside those boundaries, requiring guarantees that no single-unit arrangement supplies.

Risk of inter-ethnic conflict. Territorial competition between allied EAOs is not hypothetical. In the aftermath of Operation 1027, launched by the Three Brotherhood Alliance, clashes have occurred involving the TNLA and the Kachin Independence Organisation, the TNLA and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) or Kokang, and the SSPP and the MNDAA. The late-2023 ceasefire between the RCSS and the SSPP — both Shan armies — was itself a response to

disputes over territorial ownership. Military facts on the ground do not resolve legitimacy questions, and can sharpen them.

The inference is procedural rather than defeatist: because the map cannot be settled by arithmetic, it must be settled by agreement, and agreement requires criteria agreed before claims are adjudicated.

Historical Precedent: The Federated Shan States, 1922–1948

4.1 What the federation was

Formally constituted on 1 October 1922, the Federated Shan States united some 34 Northern and Southern Shan principalities with the Karenni states under a single Resident Commissioner resident at Taunggyi, reporting to the Governor of Burma. Coverage was approximately 56,000 square miles with a mid-1930s population of around 1.5 million.

Reform-minded Shan figures pressed further even within colonial constraints. Sao Hkun Kyi of Hsatung petitioned at the Burma Round Table Conference (1931–32) for a reformed structure incorporating elected commoners, proposing a bicameral body with at least 90 per cent Shan representation overseeing departments including finance, education and transport. The direction of travel was toward popular legitimacy, and it was arrested by colonial veto and by war.

4.2 Pre-empting the obvious objection

Invoking this precedent invites a serious criticism, which should be met directly rather than sidestepped: indirect rule was a colonial instrument. It preserved feudal privilege, co-opted elites through titles and subsidies ranging from Rs 1,000 to 10,000 annually, suppressed broader political development, and — by isolating the hill principalities administratively from the directly ruled Burman lowlands — contributed to the mutual suspicion that poisoned post-independence politics. Its abolition in 1959, whatever its coercive execution, responded to genuine grievances of ordinary Shan against saopha authority.

The answer is that the precedent is invoked for its architecture, not its content. What merits recovery is the insight that a multi-ethnic territory can be administered through layered competencies and a collective council without being either unitary or fragmented. What must be discarded entirely is hereditary rule, elite co-option, and the deliberate separation of peoples from one another.

4.3 The innovative, modern adaptation

Under this scheme, the multi-ethnic (Wa, Kokang, Mongla, Pa-O, Ta'ang, Danu, Intha, Akha and Lahu etc.) areas could hold constitutionally entrenched self-government over language, education, land tenure, customary justice, policing and local resource royalties, while a Shan Federal Council manages shared infrastructure, river-basin and environmental management, cross-border trade licensing and dispute mediation. Disposition of defence and external relations rests with the federal authority. Crucially, none of this requires the total redrawing of the map, and none of it creates a jurisdiction in which a previously resident community becomes a disenfranchised minority without remedy.

A Necessary Precondition

No version of the above is achievable while the armed forces retain a constitutionally guaranteed share of decision-making power. This is a structural observation, not a partisan one: a federal system allocates and limits authority, whereas the 2008 design reserves defence, home and border affairs to the military and guarantees it a quarter of parliamentary seats plus effective veto over constitutional amendment. A settlement negotiated inside that architecture would be a redistribution of patronage, not of power — and EAOs have consistently declined offers framed on that basis.

Equally, however, the absence of a military role is a necessary condition, not a sufficient one. A post-military Myanmar could still fail federally if the largest nationality group replicates majoritarian dominance in civilian form. This is why the parallel question of a Bamar-majority constituent arrangement, treated at length by NUG Justice Minister U Thein Oo in 2022, cannot be deferred: it bears directly on whether Bamar resistance fighters perceive federalism as loss or as fair restructuring.

Recommended Sequence for Constituent Unit Formation

Drawing on comparative federal practice — Anderson's five-point framework for CU creation, and the near-universal requirement of a two-thirds threshold across Belgium, Canada, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa and Switzerland — the following phasing is proposed.

Phase I — Foundational agreement

Agreement on the principle of an ethnic-based federal union, and on the exclusion of the armed forces from political decision-making.

Determination of whether the political map is to be redrawn comprehensively or adjusted incrementally. Both options carry costs; the choice should be explicit rather than defaulted.

Phase II — Rule-making before claim-adjudication

Convene an inclusive constitution-making body — all current constituent units, all aspiring groups, non-self-governing minorities, women's and civil society representatives — to draft rules governing CU creation. No exclusions.

Specify empowered actors (federal legislature; state/region legislatures; affected populations) and required levels of consent. A high threshold, with referendum confirmation in affected areas, is preferable to simple majorities given the irreversibility of boundary decisions.

Adopt published criteria: contiguity, demographic composition and minority safeguards, economic and administrative viability, historical precedent, ecological and river-basin coherence, and connectivity to markets and services. Publishing criteria first reduces later accusations of arbitrariness.

Phase III — Codification

Embed the rules, criteria and a dedicated transitional chapter in a draft FDU constitution, with provision for later amendment.

Ratify the constitution, thereby initiating boundary determination under agreed procedure rather than under arms.

Phase IV — Implementation with protection

Establish the Shan Federal Council and equivalent bodies elsewhere as interim mechanisms, competent to administer shared subjects during transition.

Attach binding protections for residents who fall on the "wrong side" of any new line: residency rights, dual representation, property guarantees, and access to services.

Sequence disarmament, security-sector reform and administrative integration jointly. Disarmament preceding credible autonomy guarantees has failed repeatedly in Myanmar and should not be attempted again.

Contributions Expected of Each Stakeholder

Ethnic armed organisations in Shan State. Beyond bilateral negotiation with Nay Pyi Taw, structured intra-Shan dialogue among the SSPP/SSA, RCSS/SSA, TNLA, MNDAA, NDAA, UWSA, Pa-O and Danu parties is needed, addressing smaller nationalities explicitly. Given Shan demographic weight and the combined strength of the two Shan armies, Shan participation is not a courtesy concession but a precondition of any durable arrangement. Publicly committing to minority safeguards within prospective units would materially reduce neighbouring anxiety and strengthen each claimant's credibility.

The National Unity Government (NUG), National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and pro-democracy forces. The Federal Democracy Charter addresses constituent unit creation in only two paragraphs. Refinement is overdue. The Articles of Federal Transitional Arrangements (AFTA), announced by the NUG and NUCC as completed in July 2026, add little: it provides only that the Union may comprise existing states or federal units, temporary transitional states or units, councils representing ethnic groups, and ethnic resistance organisations still working to establish states or federal units during the transitional period — leaving future boundaries and the creation of new states wholly to a later constitutional process and national conference. By contrast, the Federal Constitution Drafting and Coordinating Committee's (FCDCC) 2008 second draft offers more usable text on autonomous regions and new-state formation, including a 60 per cent popular-consent mechanism, and deserves serious reconsideration. Equally, NUCC/NUG membership does not encompass all EAOs and parties, and the gap should be closed before, not after, positions harden.

The Nay Pyi Taw administration. If the electoral process is intended to carry political weight, it must demonstrate substance on the two questions EAOs actually raise: administrative status and the military's political role. Interim administrative arrangements in areas where no active combat obtains — including parts of the Special Region 4 territory — could serve

as verifiable tests of intent. Rhetoric about elections scheduled for 2027 will not substitute for either.

Civil society, academia and legal experts. Constitutional lawyers and political scientists should prepare model drafting language for a CU-creation chapter, alongside independent demographic and geographic research to inform criteria. Documenting the civilian cost of territorial contestation, including displacement patterns, keeps the human stakes visible in what otherwise risks becoming an abstract technical debate.

Regional and international actors. Engagement should support an inclusive, intra-Burmese political process rather than legitimising administrative tinkering under military supremacy. China's particular leverage with UWSA, NDAA and MNDAA leaderships makes its posture consequential for whether territorial disputes are pursued militarily or referred to political mechanism. Humanitarian access and civilian protection obligations apply irrespective of administrative outcome, and should be raised in every channel.

Conclusion

The demand for upgraded administrative status in Shan State is not a distortion of the federal idea; it is evidence that the federal idea has never been implemented. But satisfying legitimate aspiration through unilateral declaration or military fait accompli would generate new grievances faster than it resolves old ones, because Shan State's demography does not permit clean separation.

What the 1922–1948 experience genuinely demonstrates is that a plural territory can be governed through differentiated autonomy and collective deliberation without collapsing into either unitary command or fragmentation. Transposed onto democratic foundations — elected rather than hereditary office-holders, a Shan Federal Council exercising real competence under collective leadership, and a central federal authority whose powers are enumerated and justiciable rather than imperial and discretionary — that architecture offers a workable answer to the specific impasse now facing Myanmar's negotiators.

Two conditions govern everything else. Disputes must be resolved by political negotiation rather than armed confrontation, and federal authority must derive from the constituent units upward rather than be delegated downward by a centre that answers to its own army. Absent those, sequencing and criteria are academic. With them, the cycle need not repeat.

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Courtesy of Shan Herald Agency for News. This is an abridged version of the commentary published 7 November. Please see original story here: https://english.shannews.org/archives/30424



Who Paid for the Sky to Kill Our Children?

By Alan Clements

In Burma, a teacher found a way to open a school for children who had lost their homes. The men who bombed it belong to a military with suppliers around the world. What do those suppliers owe the children who survived?

By Alan Clements

In Loikaw Township, in eastern Burma, somebody opened a school for children who had already lost their homes. I keep thinking about what it takes to make so modest a promise to a child. Come here tomorrow. There will be a teacher. There will be a place for you. We can pick up where we left off.

On October 31, during classes, an airstrike hit the school. UNICEF reported that three children were killed and five injured. The same weekend, in Rakhine State, an airstrike reportedly hit a temporary health facility and killed health workers and a newborn. A baby had been born. In the midst of all that flight and hunger, somebody had found a place for a woman to lie down and give birth. It lasted long enough for her child to enter the world.

In 1979, when I was ordained as a Buddhist monk in Rangoon, Burmese families fed me. Somebody washed the rice I ate. Somebody cooked it. Enough was set aside for a young American who had come to study suffering. This year the World Food Programme estimates that 12.4 million people in Burma face acute hunger. I think of the hands that filled my bowl.

The United Nations estimates that 16.2 million people in Myanmar need humanitarian assistance, including 4.9 million children. On October 26 it recorded 4,054,900 people displaced inside the country. Read those figures alongside the hunger count and remember that a single child can appear in all three and still be waiting for one meal. That school in Loikaw represented somebody's answer to what happens to a child in the meantime. The children had already fled once. Their teacher had found them. So had the war.

By September 12, the conflict monitor ACLED had recorded 102,131 conflict-related deaths since the military overthrew the elected government in February 2021. That count includes civilians and fighters on all sides. It cannot tell us how many people have died of untreated illness in a village whose clinic closed, or what to put on the death certificate of someone who might have lived had the road to a hospital remained open.

By the end of June, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners had documented 1,083 children killed by junta violence since the coup. Of those children, 632 were thirteen or younger. In a separate accounting for this year, from January 1 through October 28, the association documented 148 children killed by the junta. Airstrikes killed 110 of them.

The three children at the school in Loikaw died after the October count closed.

The day before that school was struck, the Associated Press reported the assessment of Kelley Currie, the UN special rapporteur on Myanmar. The military was deliberately attacking civilians to frighten them into submission, she said. Its purchases of arms from Russia, China and elsewhere were increasing. Chinese and Russian aircraft give the military an extraordinary advantage over people on the ground. I cannot tell the parents in Loikaw who made the aircraft that struck their school. Beijing and Moscow can tell us which aircraft they supplied, when they supplied them and what reports of civilian deaths were already on their desks when they approved the next delivery.

Burma has arms factories of its own. Its military can manufacture munitions while depending on foreign partners to sustain its air power. The relationship runs both ways. In October, the Lowy Institute noted reports that Myanmar's state factories had supplied mortar rounds and other munitions to Russia. A Burmese factory can serve a Russian war while a Russian aircraft serves a Burmese general. In August, Min Aung Hlaing travelled to Russia for talks with Vladimir Putin. He travels as a president. The woman whose elected government he overthrew still needs his government's permission to telephone her son.

Consider one ship. In September 2025, before the tanker Reef delivered aviation fuel to Myanmar in October, its electronic position placed it hundreds of kilometers from the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas. Amnesty International's investigators examined satellite images and placed the vessel at Bandar Abbas with high confidence. They established the delivery to Myanmar. They could not establish who supplied the cargo or conclusively establish where the fuel originated. There is an important distinction between sighting a ship at an Iranian port and proving who sold what was in its tanks. Somebody who was party to the sale knows considerably more than the public does.

At one end of this business a human rights investigator needs a satellite. At the other end somebody has the bill of lading.

Myanmar's port records show that at least 109,604 metric tons of aviation fuel entered the country in 2025, a rise of 69 percent in a year. Civilian aircraft need fuel, too. What those figures establish is that commercial arrangements continued to function on a considerable scale while families were losing the use of roads, clinics and schools. I would like the parties to the Reef shipment to put their records before independent examiners. Who paid for the cargo? Who took delivery? What assurances about its use were required, and did anybody check whether they were honored? None of that requires a mother in Loikaw to produce a fragment of an aircraft.

The money leaves a record of its own. In a 2025 report to the UN Human Rights Council, then special rapporteur Tom Andrews said he had identified more than $50 million in junta military procurement passing through the international financial system in the four months from July through October 2024. Thai regulators, examining dealings involving parties named in an earlier investigation, said they had found transactions with some of those parties and no evidence connecting the transactions they reviewed to arms procurement. An independent examiner could begin with a fairly ordinary piece of accounting. Put the payment alongside the invoice. Put the invoice alongside the goods received. Explain any difference to the public whose children have to live with it.

On October 30 this year, the Financial Action Task Force renewed its call for heightened scrutiny of financial dealings involving Myanmar. It also urged governments to keep humanitarian aid and personal remittances moving. Consider a Burmese woman working abroad who sends part of her wages home so her mother can buy rice. If a bank is prepared to ask that daughter where her money came from, surely it can ask a military purchaser where his aircraft parts went.

A government need never sell a single bomb to look upon Burma and see an opportunity. On November 2, Reuters reported on a US diplomatic strategy linking American engagement in peace negotiations to opportunities for US companies to gain access to rare earths. Consider the distance the word peace has to travel across that table. For a displaced family it may mean permission to go home. For a foreign company it may mean permission to dig there. The people whose land it is deserve to know the terms before anyone congratulates himself on bringing them peace.

The military has added armed drones to the weapons overhead. The UN Human Rights Office has described how new surveillance technologies extend its reach into civilian life. I do not know whether any artificial intelligence system had a part in selecting the school at Loikaw. I know what kind of human intelligence it took to see children who had lost their homes and understand that they would still need a

teacher. I know which of those achievements I would sooner have my country finance.

At its most obscene, the war machine looks to me like men masturbating to murder. An entire village can be made to serve one man's experience of his own potency. He can empty its streets. He can decide whether its children sleep indoors. He can do all this without once having to stand in front of a woman whose child he killed and hear what she thinks of him. Abroad he can count on being received with the courtesies due a head of state.

There is something ancient in that appetite. A people said whom they wished to govern them. A general found their answer intolerable. He might have gone home to grow old, a man whose grandchildren could visit on a Sunday. Other people's grandchildren are dead. For all the uniforms and titles and talk of sovereignty, murderous patriarchy begins with a question familiar to anyone who has ever desired power over another human being. What am I prepared to do when you tell me no?

On November 11, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners said it had confirmed that 15,169 people arrested for opposing the military takeover were still in detention. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is eighty-one. The authorities say they are holding her under house arrest at an undisclosed location in Naypyitaw. On October 22, her son Kim Aris heard her voice on the telephone for the first time in more than five years. They had twenty minutes. Somebody had the authority to allow minute nineteen. Somebody had the authority to deny them minute twenty-one.

In Rangoon, in the conversations that became The Voice of Hope, I asked Daw Suu whether the generals would face criminal charges if the struggle for democracy succeeded. She declined to promise anyone immunity. Such a decision belonged to the party representing the people, she told me. Then she said something I wish could be heard in every boardroom whose business has entered this war. "Once the truth has been admitted, forgiveness is far more possible."

My question had invited her to dispose of other people's claims against the men who ruled them. She understood the limit of her authority even in the act of imagining victory. Her answer makes a demand on me as her friend. Rohingya families have every right to ask how she answered for Myanmar before the International Court of Justice. The court has scheduled its judgment in the Rohingya genocide case against the state of Myanmar for November 19. A Rohingya mother is entitled to her reckoning. Daw Suu is entitled to her freedom. I want to live in a world in which neither woman needs the other's permission to be heard.

"Father, forgive them," Jesus asks from the cross. What right have I to carry that prayer into a classroom where three children have just been killed? None, if I mean to instruct their parents. Forgiveness belongs to the injured. There is a religious obligation I can speak of from my own training. It begins with refusing to turn away from what we know. A banker reads a credible account on Monday of what a customer's purchases have helped make possible. On Tuesday an authorization for the same customer reaches his desk. What was once ignorance now requires an effort to maintain. He can set down his pen. He can ask for the record. If a colleague tells him somebody else will sign, he can refuse to let that be his reason for signing.

That much can reasonably be asked of a man with a desk and a salary in a country at peace. Consider what we have already asked of a teacher in Burma who agreed to open a school for children driven from their homes. Consider what we will ask of the next teacher who agrees to open one.

A mother can teach her child how to cross a road. Take my hand. Wait for the truck. Look again. She can walk him all the way to school. Who among the rest of us will take responsibility for the sky?

About the Author

Alan Clements is an American author, human rights journalist, spoken-word artist and former Buddhist monk. Ordained in Rangoon in 1979, he studied with Mahāsi Sayadaw and Sayadaw U Pandita. His conversations with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi became The Voice of Hope. He founded World Dharma Publications. His books include Politics of the Heart: Nonviolence in an Age of Atrocity, A Future to Believe In, Wisdom for the World, Instinct for Freedom and Conversations with a Dictator. His forthcoming three-volume collection, Fifty Conversations with Visionary Women, grew out of three years of conversations exploring patriarchy, authoritarianism and the role of the divine feminine in contemporary society.



MYANMAR OPPOSITION FORCES HOPEFUL THAT U.S. STRATEGY COULD BRING ABOUT PEACE

Armed ethnic groups and members of Myanmar's shadow government are hoping that a recently made public U.S. strategy for their country decrease fighting and bring about peace with the military-backed government, the organizations told Radio Free Asia.

The U.S. State Department recently released an Integrated Country Strategy document for Myanmar that outlines Washington's aims to use diplomacy to promote peace in the volatile Southeast Asian country, potentially providing access to rare earth deposits dominated by China.

The policy document lays out four mission goals, which include protecting U.S. citizens, addressing trade deficits, promoting peace, and increasing U.S. regional influence through engagement.

To achieve these goals, dealing with Myanmar's military-backed government – headed by the same people who ousted the previous government in a coup in 2021 – cannot be avoided. Washington initially shunned engagement with the military after the coup and imposed sanctions on its most senior leaders, but has since softened its stance, rolling back some sanctions and even holding high level talks in September 2026.

A U.S. State Department spokesperson on Tuesday explained the shift to RFA.

"The Administration has been evaluating how to calibrate Washington's policy towards Burma to achieve regional stability, and also make progress on key U.S. priorities and has determined that wholesale disengagement with the authorities in Naypyidaw countered U.S. strategic interests in Burma and the region. We are pursuing a policy that welcomes dialogue with all stakeholders involved in the conflict as we encourage Burma to make progress on key U.S. priorities, including addressing scam centers, improving the domestic operating environment for U.S. businesses, and building towards a genuine peace process that stabilizes the country."

David Gum Awng, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for the National Unity Government, or NUG, a shadow government made up of former government officials who were ousted in the 2021 coup, told RFA he understood the realities of the situation.

"The NUG respects and acknowledges that the U.S. government is actively engaging in Myanmar affairs and formulating a strategy aimed at peace, economy, and regional stability. The NUG will continue to engage in discussions with the U.S. government, Congress, and the international community including relevant partner nations.

We will also continue to urge that the U.S. government's policies and practical actions towards Myanmar support the democratic and federal aspirations of the Myanmar people, address the root causes of the conflict, and lead toward an inclusive political resolution. International engagement in Myanmar affairs should not prolong the military dictatorship, but should aim to bring about genuine political change based on the will and rights of the people after escaping from this bad system."

Kyaw Ni, Deputy Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration for the NUG, shared his opinion that amidst the policies of superpower nations, one must strive to achieve benefits for one's own country.

"In this policy shift of a superpower nation, small countries suffer a lot, so a country undergoing revolution like Burma suffers even more. It is likely to be affected. Since these are superpower nations, they write policies based on their own interests. So our public also has to struggle among these policies to reach our desired revolutionary goal without harming the interests of our country, our people, and our revolution."

Salai Htet Ni, spokesperson for the Chin National Front, an armed ethnic rebel group, said the U.S. government needs to understand the underlying problems in Myanmar politics and get deeply involved.

"The U.S. government needs to understand the military junta's unjust violence and killing of the people. They need to consider that. On our part, if they can perform first-stage actions like humanitarian aid for war refugees and addressing violent attacks and killings, we would welcome the U.S. involvement even more."

Another ethnic armed group, — the Karen National Union — said U.S. involvement might reduce the amount of internal fighting, spokesperson Saw Kler Say told RFA on Wednesday.

"The new U.S. strategy could bring about changes or have a specific impact on our country from a military perspective. Firstly, it might lead to a situation where the military junta is compelled to stop its attacks targeting the civilian population.

Secondly, the U.S. might take steps — or offer recommendations — aimed at halting the ongoing internal conflicts. Politically, we also believe they are likely envisioning a political landscape that is acceptable to all parties—one that would include both the detained opposition leaders and the revolutionary forces.

To achieve sustainable peace in Myanmar by 2030, the first step must be to cease attacks targeting the civilian population. The next step involves reaching a consensus on a dialogue process aimed at ending internal conflicts; only through such a mutually agreed-upon framework can a ceasefire be attained.

In addition to these measures, all detained opposition leaders and political prisoners must be released. Without these actions, I believe that any dialogue will be extremely difficult. If detained political prisoners are excluded, meaning the process fails to be truly all inclusive, then a successful outcome may well be entirely impossible.

Regarding the emergence of a federal democracy in Myanmar, the new U.S. strategy presents both positive opportunities and concerning risks. On one hand, it could potentially lead to a genuine transition toward

a federal democracy—for instance, by facilitating the abolition of the 2008 Constitution and the drafting and adoption of a new federal constitution. On the other hand, there is a risk that if the discourse is driven solely by U.S. interests, the path toward the federal democracy we envision could be diverted, creating significant challenges."

Representatives of the Kachin Independence Army and the Arakan Army responded that they were not ready to comment.

The Arakan Army's Khaing Thukha asked that questions be channeled through official emails.

Hla Thein, spokesperson for the Union Solidarity and Development Party – formed by former military officers – told RFA that the U.S. strategy document is constructive for mutual interest and should be welcomed.

"Big nations becoming interested in our country, interested from a positive and beneficial perspective, should be welcomed no matter what. We have no permanent friends and no permanent enemies. If they come to cooperate fairly for our country's interest, our people's interest, and national interest, we will warmly welcome them."

RFA attempted to contact Khaing Khaing Soe, spokesperson for the military government's presidential office, but received no reply.

Col. Saw Kyaw Nyunt, spokesperson for the 7 EAO Alliance of ethnic armed organizations that have individually signed a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement with the military, said the shift in U.S. attitude might be due to an understanding of Myanmar's needs.

"In attempting to restart the peace process, international support and assistance are needed. The shift in attitude by the U.S. toward the peace process is likely because they realized that peace is urgently needed due to Myanmar's reality. By 2030, which is in three or four years, seeking ways to build sustainable peace during that period can be viewed as assessing and speaking on our country's needs."

Salai Shein Tun, a secretariat member of the Chin National League for Democracy Party, which won a single seat in Myanmar's parliament in the 2020 general election, told RFA that the new U.S. policy might face challenges from competitors.

"Speaking of challenges, the challenge from China as a big power is strong. Inside Myanmar and within ethnic regions, the challenge is also strong. In areas bordering neighboring China, they approach with a Chinese style model, whereas looking at the western side, in Chin, Kachin, and Rakhine states, they emphasize federalism. The country they connect with is India ... Areas connected with neighboring China do not talk about federalism. Discussions will take quite a bit of effort when those following the Chinese model want to negotiate with the domestic groups that follow the federal model."

According to the Integrated Country Strategy document, the released text was approved by the Trump administration on Aug. 31, 2026, before the mid-September secret visit to Naypyidaw by Michael Vance, the assistant secretary of state for intelligence and research.

Vance also led at least 12 U.S. government officials during a second round of talks with Myanmar military government officials in Tokyo in the second week of October.

Courtesy of Radio Free Asia



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



THE HIDDEN FRONT OF CHINA'S CENTRAL ASIA EXPANSION

SUN LEE

For more than a decade, China expanded its presence across Asia, Africa, and Europe through ports, highways, railways, power plants, and other Belt and Road Initiative projects. These investments were presented as engines of development, yet many recipient nations later found themselves burdened by debt, unequal trade relationships, and growing dependence on Beijing.

As criticism of China's lending practices has intensified globally, a new and more sophisticated strategy is emerging in Central Asia. Rather than relying solely on roads and railways, China is increasingly investing in universities, research centres, artificial intelligence, agricultural biotechnology, data infrastructure, and digital partnerships. The objective appears clear: influence future generations of scientists, researchers, policymakers, and technology leaders in neighbouring countries.

Nowhere is this trend more visible than in Uzbekistan. Over the last two years, Uzbekistan and China have expanded cooperation across higher education, scientific research, digital technologies, and artificial intelligence. Joint academic programmes, research laboratories, technology parks, AI partnerships, and scholar exchanges have become prominent features of bilateral relations. While such initiatives are often presented as mutually beneficial cooperation, they also create networks of influence that may endure far longer than physical infrastructure projects.

The significance of this shift should not be underestimated. Railways can deteriorate. Highways can be replaced. Scientific institutions, however, shape the minds that will lead countries for decades. When students receive scholarships, researchers gain funding, and universities develop dependence on particular foreign partners for technology and expertise, intellectual influence becomes embedded within national institutions. Such influence is less visible than a bridge or a port, yet it may prove far more enduring.

According to official figures, China became Uzbekistan's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding $13 billion in 2024. Alongside commerce, both countries have accelerated cooperation under programmes linking Uzbekistan's national development strategy with China's Belt and Road Initiative. Joint university programmes have multiplied, while institutions such as the Muhammad al-Khwarizmi International Mathematical centre, developed in partnership with Chinese universities, reflect Beijing's

growing presence within Central Asia's knowledge ecosystem.

China's ambitions extend beyond education. Central Asian governments are increasingly being encouraged to participate in collaborative projects related to artificial intelligence, agricultural biotechnology, green energy, advanced materials, and digital governance. At first glance, such initiatives appear entirely benign. Every developing country seeks improved technology, greater scientific capacity, and enhanced digital infrastructure. Yet technological dependence can be every bit as strategic as financial dependence.

Artificial intelligence is becoming the defining technology of the twenty-first century. The countries that provide AI platforms, cloud services, algorithms, training programmes, and digital infrastructure are also likely to influence future economic and regulatory frameworks. By helping establish AI standards and digital ecosystems in neighbouring countries, China positions itself at the centre of future technological development across Central Asia and make neighbours dependent for the technology.

Equally significant is the growing focus on data centres and digital infrastructure. Data has become one of the world's most valuable strategic assets. Nations increasingly view control over data storage, cloud computing, and digital networks as a matter of national security. China's investment in digital infrastructure across neighbouring countries can therefore be viewed through a geopolitical lens. Establishing multiple regional data hubs creates redundancy, strengthens connectivity, and expands China's technological footprint across the region. It also ensures that Beijing remains a central player in the emerging digital economy of Central Asia.

Another dimension involves agricultural biotechnology. China has invested heavily in agricultural research as it attempts to strengthen food security and modernise agricultural production. By extending biotechnology cooperation to neighbouring countries, China gains access to research partnerships, testing opportunities, scientific cooperation, and agricultural markets. These relationships may ultimately translate into broader political and economic influence.

The strategic logic behind these policies is understandable. Central Asia occupies a critical position in China's security and economic calculations. Beijing seeks stable borders, dependable trade corridors, secure energy supplies, and friendly governments along its western frontier. Scientific cooperation, university partnerships, and technology investments offer effective tools for maintaining long-term engagement without attracting the political resistance that often accompanies large-scale infrastructure loans.

At the same time, China appears determined to maintain its technological advantage within the region. Beijing understands that Western countries, particularly the United States and members of the European Union, increasingly view Central Asia as an important arena for economic and technological competition. As a result, China has moved aggressively to establish partnerships before rival powers can gain comparable influence. The race is no longer merely about roads or pipelines. It is increasingly about algorithms, patents, research networks, laboratories, and digital ecosystems.

For Central Asian nations, including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, the challenge is not whether to cooperate with China. Such cooperation is likely unavoidable given geography and economics. The real challenge is preserving strategic autonomy while welcoming foreign investment. Educational exchanges, research funding, and technology partnerships can generate enormous benefits, but only if they are balanced by cooperation with multiple international partners.

The lesson from the Belt and Road era is clear: dependence on any single external power carries risks. Today, China is expanding its influence not primarily through concrete and steel but through knowledge, technology, and innovation. Laboratories are replacing railways as instruments of influence. Research centres are becoming as strategically important as ports. Data may prove as valuable as oil. The countries of Central Asia must ensure that scientific cooperation remains a pathway to development rather than a gateway to dependency.

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



US President Donald Trump meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Photo: AFP

TRUMP SAYS US OPPOSES 'GLOBALIST REGULATION' OF AI

The United States opposes "globalist regulation" of artificial intelligence in any form, President Donald Trump said on Thursday ahead of talks with China's Xi Jinping, expected to broach the topic.

Trump has repeatedly rejected calls for wide-reaching international governance of AI, warning it could hold his country back in its race with China.

"It's super intelligence, but we have to watch it," he told leaders at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Shenzhen, using his administration's preferred term for AI.

"We have to be careful. We have to cherish it. It's almost completely good, but it's got some bad elements, and we have to be very careful in managing those bad elements," Trump said.

"So we oppose any form of globalist regulation or anything to control and stifle SI, and we won't allow that to happen, frankly."

Trump and Xi are due to hold talks later on Thursday, with the issues they are set to discuss including how to address the rapid changes brought by AI.

Despite the countries' fierce tech rivalry, AI safety risks of shared concern range from infrastructure hacking to people using the technology to help build bioweapons.

Another problem in the spotlight is out-of-control AI agents, tools that complete real-life tasks online, after ChatGPT maker OpenAI's bots hacked into websites including an Australian government portal, incidents followed by similar reports by other labs.

Military use and mass surveillance are also potential flashpoints for the world's two leading AI powers.

Looming over the talks, however, is Jensen Huang's resignation as boss of US chip titan Nvidia after revelations of an affair with a suspected Chinese spy.

Trump and Xi agreed in September to create a channel for urgent communication on AI incidents, with details to be hammered out on Thursday.

Xi this summer said the technology should be "always under human control" -- calling for more "laws and regulations, technological monitoring, early warning and emergency response systems".

At APEC on Wednesday, the Chinese leader said leaders should "deepen cooperation in the digital economy and artificial intelligence", without giving details.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney meanwhile said Wednesday that the lack of global governance on AI poses an "enormous risk".

"It is past time" to develop international frameworks for reining it in, Carney added.

AFP



MOVING PARTS

"They don't sleep with their leg on." For Jason Bender, that simple fact corrects one of the easiest misconceptions about prosthetics: a prosthetic limb may restore mobility, independence, and the possibility of work, but it does not erase amputation.

Bender is a certified prosthetist who lived and worked in Myanmar from 2014 to 2021, training local practitioners and fitting people who had lost limbs through disease, accidents, and landmines. After the 2021 coup, he spent roughly two more years in Thailand supporting cross-border work. His experience points to a widening problem: conflict is producing greater need for prosthetic care just as insecurity, displacement, checkpoints, and disrupted health systems make the long-term relationships that good prosthetic care requires increasingly difficult to sustain.

This episode continues our "Navigating a Minefield" series, which brings together experts, practitioners, and community leaders working across the field of humanitarian mine action. Through a wide range of perspectives and areas of expertise, the series examines the devastating human consequences of landmines, the complex challenges of addressing them, and the efforts underway to protect lives, support survivors, and confront this enduring crisis.

Bender entered the field through mechanical and biomedical engineering before completing graduate training in prosthetics and orthotics at the University of Pittsburgh. In the United States, an amputee can move from surgeon to prosthetist to physical therapist through an established chain of referrals. In Myanmar, those connections were often absent. Surgery could end with a patient simply going home and having to discover for themselves where prosthetic services exist. Clinics also work with cheaper and more basic components because they have to stretch limited funds across many patients. The underlying principles of fitting a limb are the same, but almost everything surrounding the work—materials, follow-up, transportation, rehabilitation, and access to specialists—has to be reconsidered.

Even receiving a leg was far from the endpoint. In many of the Myanmar programs Bender knew, patients generally waited around six months after amputation before traveling to a clinic, partly to make sure the residual limb had healed enough to tolerate a prosthesis. A lower-limb device typically consisted of a custom socket fitted over the residual limb, a foot, and an adjustable pylon connecting them. Patients might stay near a clinic for days or several weeks while the socket was made, fitted, aligned, and followed by basic walking instruction. Then the body continued changing. Post-surgical swelling subsided, muscles atrophied, sockets loosened, and feet wore out. For an active person living and working outdoors, Bender says six months could be a good lifespan for a foot. A first socket might need replacement within six months to a year, followed ideally by refitting every three to five years.

CATCH THE PODCAST

Read more and listen to the Insight Myanmar Podcast here: https://insightmyanmar.org/complete-shows/2026/10/19/episode-629-moving-parts


Photo: AFP

ASEAN SHOULD ACCEPT MYANMAR BACK AT DIPLOMAT LEVEL: BANGKOK

Myanmar's foreign minister should be allowed back into meetings of the ASEAN regional bloc, Thailand's top diplomat said on Thursday after a visit to the war-torn country.

Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said his meetings with President Min Aung Hlaing and others had revealed "a desire on the part of Myanmar to engage, to return to ASEAN". But he said there was no talk of specific steps.

Myanmar has been excluded from high-level meetings of the 11-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) since a 2021 military coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and triggered an ongoing civil war.

Thailand has been leading efforts to normalise ties since coup leader Min Aung Hlaing was installed as civilian president earlier this year following elections dismissed by monitors as a charade.

"For Thailand, we believe that the next step is to have the foreign minister of Myanmar participate in the ASEAN meetings at the level of foreign minister," Sihasak told reporters.

His comments came ahead of a meeting of ASEAN leaders starting Sunday in the Philippines.

Sihasak said he had also raised the "very urgent problem" of water pollution among tributaries of the Mekong River, which straddles five Southeast Asian countries and China, saying a working group would meet later this month.

Last week, authorities in northern Thailand suspended tap water production after arsenic levels at the waterworks intake was found to be 30 times higher than the safety standard. More than a dozen villages were affected by the suspension.

A subsequent field sample from the nearby Sai River measured arsenic at 25 times the safety standard, the government said.

Thai officials previously pinned the toxic sediment on wastewater from mining activity upstream in Myanmar.

Sihasak said he also raised the issue of a spillover of violence into Thailand.

AFP



SOCIAL MEDIA USERS RAP MYANMAR LEADER CLAIMS HE IS IN TALKS WITH 'ADVERSARY' US

Social media has been abuzz this week after Myanmar Myanmar's coup leader turned civilian president Min Aung Hlaing said Wednesday that talks were ongoing with the United States, which shunned his country after the 2021 putsch but is now eyeing its rare earth resources.

"Now, we have discussions with our adversary, great power the United States, which has been constantly having issues with us," the former general told parliament.

"There is a certain level of engagement anyway. However, it has not yet been fully finalised. Relations and discussions are ongoing."

Needless to say, critics took to social media to rap the leader.

Media reports said a top US official, Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research Michael Vance, joined talks with Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw in September -- the highest-level publicised contact since the coup.

The discussions ostensibly focused on trying to free a US businessman held in Myanmar.

At the time, State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott told AFP: "You don't solve problems by ignoring them. You solve problems by addressing them."

A US State Department policy document in August noted the potential for investment in Myanmar, including "opportunities to access Burma's bountiful rare earth resources".

It also emphasised the importance of tackling online scam networks, many of them based in Myanmar, which has been mired in civil war since the coup.

Min Aung Hlaing, who led the putsch as armed forces chief before becoming civilian president in April following widely criticised elections, said other nations were also making overtures.

"Some other countries are also making ground-level approaches to establish formal diplomatic ties and ambassador-level relations with us. It is no longer like before," he said, without naming them.

His comments came the day before the top United Nations court rules whether Myanmar's crackdown against its mostly Muslim Rohingya minority constituted genocide -- an accusation authorities have always denied.

In 2022, the United States declared violence against the Rohingya amounted to genocide, saying there was clear evidence of an attempt to "destroy" the group.

Min Aung Hlaing has spent the last few months touring several Asian nations as part of a diplomatic blitz to bring his once isolated country back into the fold.

Myanmar was largely shunned by the international community after the coup ousted the democratically elected government of Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. She remains in detention.

Min Aung Hlaing was the top military commander during the 2016 and 2017 crackdown on the Rohingya, and remains sanctioned by the United States.

Myanmar has argued its actions targeted a military uprising from insurgents after a series of attacks left a dozen security personnel dead.

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.