

CLAWS Newsletter



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The developments between April and May 2026 demonstrate Myanmar's continued transition toward a militarized political order under President Min Aung Hlaing. While the formal shift from direct junta administration to a military-backed civilian structure seeks to improve legitimacy, the extensive use of martial law and continuing conflict indicate that coercive control remains central to governance.

Regional actors, particularly India and Thailand, have increasingly pursued pragmatic engagement with Myanmar due to concerns over border stability, maritime security, migration and organized crime. India's continued military cooperation and Myanmar's participation in multilateral exercises suggest that strategic considerations continue to outweigh political criticism in regional security calculations.

At the same time, Western sanctions and international criticism remain significant constraints on Myanmar's diplomatic normalization. The persistence of armed resistance, humanitarian challenges and economic instability suggests that Myanmar's internal conflict will continue shaping regional geopolitics throughout 2026.



INTERNAL AFFAIRS

1 April (News on Air): Min Aung Hlaing Formally Assumes Presidency; New Cabinet Sworn In

Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was formally elected President of Myanmar by the military-dominated parliament on 3 April 2026 and sworn in on 10 April. A 34-member Union Government was constituted with Nyo Saw and Nan Ni Ni Aye as First and Second Vice Presidents. General Ye Win Oo was simultaneously appointed the new Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services, replacing Min Aung Hlaing who had held the position since 2011. The transition is widely viewed as a cosmetic civilian veneer over continued military control — critics note the parliament was composed overwhelmingly of junta-backed USDP lawmakers and constitutionally reserved military appointees.

17 April ([The Irrawaddy](#)): Myanmar's Former President U Win Myint Freed Under Junta Amnesty

Myanmar's former president, U Win Myint, was released after more than five years in detention under a traditional New Year amnesty announced by the military junta. He was arrested during the 2021 coup alongside Aung San Suu Kyi, he had been serving a prison sentence on charges widely seen as politically motivated. After his release, he reportedly said he had never broken any law and refused to sign a conditional release document. His release comes amid reports that Suu Kyi's sentence has also been reduced and she has been moved to house arrest.

24 April ([Reuters](#)): Myanmar's Military-Backed Government Imposes Martial Law in 60 Townships

Myanmar's military-backed administration has imposed martial law in 60 townships across Chin, Kachin, Rakhine, Shan, Sagaing, and Magway regions, granting military commanders executive and judicial powers for 90 days. The move came shortly after Min Aung Hlaing assumed the presidency following controversial military-supervised elections.

30 April ([Aljazeera](#)): Aung San Suu Kyi Moved to House Arrest

Myanmar authorities transferred former State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi from prison to house arrest after reducing her sentence under a nationwide amnesty. The move generated cautious international responses, with the United Nations, Japan and the Philippines describing it as a potentially positive step toward political dialogue.

However, Suu Kyi's lawyers and family stated that they were denied direct access to her and remained unable to confirm her condition or exact location. The National Unity Government argued that the move was intended to improve the junta's international image rather than represent genuine political reform.

The junta said the measure was necessary to restore stability and combat armed resistance groups, while critics argued it reflects the regime's continued reliance on military force despite its transition to a nominally civilian government. International observers also questioned the legitimacy of the new administration, citing the exclusion of opposition and pro-democracy groups.

30 April (UNB): Myanmar Military Regains Momentum as Resistance Faces Setbacks

After more than five years of civil war, Myanmar's military, known as the Tatmadaw, has regained the strategic initiative and is shifting back to offensive operations against resistance forces. Strengthened by tens of thousands of newly conscripted soldiers, the military has reversed some of its earlier losses and appears better positioned to expand operations across the country.

Several resistance groups, including ethnic armed organizations and pro-democracy People's Defense Forces, have been weakened by internal divisions, supply shortages, and battlefield fatigue. Analysts note that while the broader resistance movement remains active, public exhaustion and growing pressure from China for stability have altered the conflict dynamics. China has played a key role by brokering ceasefires with some ethnic groups and seeking to protect its economic investments in Myanmar.

Following a widely criticized election, Min Aung Hlaing was sworn in as president and has offered peace talks to armed groups, while continuing military offensives in key regions. Although the conflict is far from over, the military's improved position may allow it to negotiate selective ceasefires and consolidate its control.



FOREIGN AFFAIRS

27 April (Reuters): European Union Extends Sanctions on Myanmar

The European Union extended sanctions against Myanmar for another year, maintaining restrictions on more than one hundred individuals and multiple entities linked to the military administration. The measures included travel bans, asset freezes and continued arms embargoes. EU officials stated that the decision was taken in response to ongoing human rights concerns, suppression of democratic institutions and continued violence against civilians. The sanctions regime also maintained export restrictions on dual-use technologies and surveillance equipment. Myanmar authorities criticised the sanctions as external interference in domestic affairs.

2 May (PIB): India and Myanmar Strengthen Maritime Cooperation

Indian Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi conducted a four-day official visit to Myanmar focused on maritime security, operational coordination and defence cooperation. During the visit, he held discussions with Myanmar's senior military leadership including General Ye Win Oo and Defence Minister U Htun Aung. The meetings reviewed ongoing bilateral maritime cooperation, naval training exchanges and operational coordination in the Bay of Bengal and eastern Indian Ocean region. The visit also reflected India's continuing strategic engagement with Myanmar despite international criticism of the military administration.

Security analysts noted that India views Myanmar as strategically significant for maritime connectivity, regional stability and counter-insurgency cooperation along the India–Myanmar border.

4 May (Mizzima): Civil Society Urges ASEAN to Reject Myanmar Junta's Push for Regional Legitimacy

Ahead of the ASEAN Summit, Progressive Voice and more than 200 civil society organisations called on ASEAN to deny legitimacy to Myanmar's military regime. They argued the Five-Point Consensus has failed to curb violence and warned that any engagement with the junta could undermine ASEAN's credibility. The groups urged exclusion of all junta representatives and instead engagement with the NUG, ethnic resistance organisations and civil society. They also called for expanded cross-border humanitarian assistance and support for international accountability efforts, with particular urgency addressed to the Philippines as ASEAN Chair.

4 May (Mizzima): Timor-Leste Court Advances War Crimes Case Against Min Aung Hlaing

A war crimes complaint against Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has moved to judicial review in Timor-Leste, according to the Myanmar Accountability Project. The case, filed by the Chin Human Rights Organization, accuses Min Aung Hlaing of command responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Chin State, including killings, sexual violence, and attacks on hospitals and churches.

Supporters of the case say Timor-Leste has a legal obligation to open an investigation and note that evidence from international bodies, including the International Criminal Court and the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, could assist the proceedings. The

complaint adds to a growing number of legal actions against Min Aung Hlaing in several countries, as well as ongoing cases before international courts.

9 May ([Mizzima](#)): ANFREL Calls on ASEAN to Reject Myanmar Election Legitimacy

The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) urged ASEAN leaders not to recognise Myanmar's 2025–26 elections as legitimate, arguing the process failed to meet international democratic standards. ANFREL's joint report said the junta-controlled elections lacked political freedom, inclusive participation and independent oversight, and highlighted difficult conditions faced by journalists, civil society groups and election observers. ANFREL called for ASEAN to engage with democratic actors, ethnic groups and civil society organisations to support accountability and a peaceful democratic transition.

9 May ([TheJakartaPost](#)): ASEAN Weighs Policy Shift on Myanmar Amid Divisions At the 48th ASEAN Summit in Cebu, member states remained divided over whether to re-engage Myanmar's military-backed administration. Thailand advocated a more pragmatic approach and suggested restoring political-level engagement with Naypyidaw, while Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia continued opposing any move seen as legitimising the junta. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. acknowledged frustrations over the lack of progress under ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and suggested that the bloc may need to "fine-tune" its approach toward Myanmar.

The debate reflected growing differences within ASEAN regarding how to address Myanmar's prolonged political crisis. While some countries prioritise regional stability and border management, others continue emphasising democracy and accountability. No consensus was reached regarding Myanmar's full participation in ASEAN mechanisms.

13 May ([Mizzima](#)): NUG Urges ASEAN to Take Concrete, Time-Bound Action Against Junta Violence

Myanmar's National Unity Government welcomed concerns raised at the 48th ASEAN Summit but called on ASEAN to take stronger and time-bound measures to halt junta attacks on civilians. The NUG praised ASEAN's condemnation of escalating violence but stressed that statements alone are insufficient, urging clear mechanisms and deadlines to halt airstrikes and artillery attacks. The NUG rejected the legitimacy of junta-organised elections and warned ASEAN against recognising them, while also calling for humanitarian aid to be channelled through ethnic resistance organisations rather than military-controlled channels.

13 May ([Mizzima](#)): Myanmar Junta Criticises ASEAN 'Discriminatory Measures' After Cebu Exclusion

Myanmar's military-backed government accused some ASEAN members of imposing 'discriminatory measures' by excluding the junta from high-level summits. In a post-summit statement, Myanmar's foreign ministry claimed many ASEAN members recognised 'positive developments' under the new administration but criticised certain members for maintaining restrictions. The junta also accused regional governments of interfering in its domestic affairs, particularly in relation to legal cases filed in Timor-Leste and Indonesia against junta leaders. Countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam are seen as more open to re-engagement, while Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia maintain a tougher stand.

ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENTS

7 May ([Mizzima](#)): Kachin Civil Society Rejects Junta-China Efforts to Revive Myitsone Dam

Nearly 50 civil society organisations and local residents in Kachin State opposed attempts by Myanmar's junta and China's State Power Investment Corporation to revive the suspended Myitsone Dam project. The groups stated the project lacks public consent and would cause severe environmental and social damage, including flooding, biodiversity loss and displacement of thousands. They criticised the junta for threatening legal action against opponents and conducting 'fake' public consultations. The statement called for permanent cancellation, warning that restarting construction during Myanmar's ongoing conflict would worsen instability

9 May ([Mizzima](#)): Myanmar Launches Faster Yangon–Mandalay Rail Service Amid Fuel Crisis

Myanmar Railways introduced a modernised express train service between Yangon and Mandalay using air-conditioned Diesel Electric Multiple Unit coaches, reducing travel time to approximately 10 hours. The service, made possible through Japanese-backed railway improvements and state-funded upgrades, stops at major towns including Naypyidaw and

Taungoo and carries over 300 passengers in first-class and upper-class seating. The launch responds to worsening economic conditions and soaring fuel prices that have disrupted road transportation and driven high demand for more affordable rail alternatives.

12 May ([Mizzima](#)): Thilawa Port Expansion to Boost Trade and Supply Chains

Myanmar's military-backed government is expanding storage and logistics infrastructure at the Thilawa Special Economic Zone near Yangon. Myanmar Agro Green Development Public Co Ltd will invest over US\$3.7 million to build new storage facilities at Thilawa port with a capacity of up to 25,000 tonnes. Located near Yangon, Thilawa remains Myanmar's main maritime trade hub, especially as conflict has disrupted border trade routes. The junta has increasingly promoted infrastructure projects to demonstrate economic continuity despite political and security instability, declining foreign investment and international sanctions.

13 May ([Mizzima](#)) : Northern Shan State Faces Inflation Fears as Junta Curbs Chinese Imports

Residents in northern Shan State expressed concern over potential inflation after the junta tightened restrictions on transport of Chinese goods in areas under its control. Junta forces intensified inspections at checkpoints near Lashio and confiscated imported products, disrupting transport services. While prices had not yet risen at the time of reporting, locals feared shortages and higher costs were inevitable if the blockade continued. The restrictions are reportedly part of a broader military campaign — a '100-day plan' — though official details have not been released. Towns such as Hsenwi and Kutkai faced fewer restrictions than Lashio.

DEFENCE UPDATES

19 May ([Times of India](#)): India Hosts Mega Multinational Exercise with Myanmar Participation

PRAGATI 2026 also highlighted India's effort to promote defence diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific. Myanmar troops trained alongside forces from ASEAN and Indian Ocean countries under simulated combat and humanitarian scenarios. The exercise emphasised rapid deployment capabilities, jungle warfare and multinational coordination. Defence analysts argued that such engagements contribute to confidence-building and operational

interoperability among regional militaries. Myanmar's participation further underscored the Tatmadaw's attempt to sustain military-to-military relations with neighbouring countries despite Western sanctions and criticism

20 May ([Economic Times](#)): Myanmar Participates in PRAGATI 2026 Military Exercise

Myanmar participated in the India-hosted multinational military exercise PRAGATI 2026 held in Meghalaya. The exercise included participation from twelve countries and focused on interoperability, jungle warfare operations, tactical coordination and humanitarian assistance missions. Military officials stated that the exercise aimed to strengthen regional defence partnerships and improve coordination among participating armed forces. Training modules included heliborne operations, room intervention exercises, counter-insurgency drills and casualty evacuation procedures. Myanmar's participation demonstrated the continuation of defence engagement with regional militaries despite the country's political crisis. India's decision to include Myanmar in the exercise reflected broader strategic considerations related to regional security and connectivity.



CONFLICT UPDATES

3 May ([Mizzima](#)): Airstrikes Kill 11 Civilians in Chin State; Bridge Workers Targeted

At least 11 civilians were killed after Myanmar's military carried out two airstrikes on Kyin Dway Bridge in Kanpetlet Township, Chin State. According to the Chin People's Union, most victims were local residents repairing the bridge — a key civilian trade route. The attacks destroyed construction equipment and vehicles. The strikes are seen as part of the junta's broader effort to disrupt supply routes and reassert control over southern Chin State, where aerial bombardment and displacement continue to affect local populations. Local resistance groups urged residents to build bomb shelters as aerial attacks intensify.

3 May ([Mizzima](#)): Myanmar Military Retakes Strategic Kennedy Peak, Chin State

Myanmar's military regained control of Kennedy Peak in Chin State after intense fighting. Resistance groups said they were forced to withdraw due to continuous aerial bombardment, including repeated fighter jet and drone strikes. The strategically important site hosts military communication facilities and has changed hands multiple times. Chin resistance fighters had

captured the peak in 2023 and briefly regained it in late 2025 before the junta launched a renewed offensive. Despite the latest advance, resistance groups report high tensions remain in Tedim Township, with further clashes expected.

14 May ([Mizzima](#)): Resistance Coalition Ambushes Junta Convoy in Upper Sagaing

A coalition of resistance groups — including the Arakan Army, Kachin Independence Army and People's Defence Force units — ambushed a military junta convoy in Upper Sagaing Region on 10 May, between Tigyaing and Katha townships. At least two junta soldiers were killed and several injured. Resistance forces claimed capture of three military vehicles, a motorcycle and seven weapons. A large junta reinforcement convoy of around 30 vehicles and a tank was subsequently seen moving toward Indaw, raising fears of renewed large-scale fighting. More than ten villages began evacuating in anticipation of further clashes.

14 May ([Mizzima](#)): Arakan Army Intensifies Offensive on Junta Artillery Base in Ayeyarwady

The Arakan Army and allied resistance groups launched a major assault on the junta's Artillery Battalion 344 near Ngathaingchaung in Ayeyarwady Region. The offensive aimed to block planned junta reinforcements heading toward southern Rakhine State. Resistance sources reported the battalion near Mrauk San village was under intense pressure as AA-led forces tightened encirclement. The junta deployed additional troops from several infantry battalions to defend the Gwa–Ngathaingchaung road. Some junta soldiers reportedly fled during the fighting, and tensions have been escalating since April across the region.

20 May ([Mizzima](#)): Multiple Junta Soldiers Defect to Resistance Forces Across Regions

Reports from multiple regions in May 2026 documented continued defections of junta soldiers to resistance forces. In Sagaing, five soldiers from a junta troop invading Kani brought weapons and defected to Yinmabin District PDF. In Tanintharyi Region, two soldiers from Ka-Ma-Ya (561) defected with weapons to Myeik District PDF. Three conscripted soldiers in Magway also defected to revolutionary forces in local battles. These incidents reflect ongoing morale deterioration within junta ranks amid a deepening conscription crisis and battlefield exhaustion among frontline troops.

21 May ([Mizzima](#)): Junta Commander Claims Conscripts Satisfied; Young Yangon Residents Fear Arrest

Myanmar's Commander-in-Chief General Ye Win Oo claimed that conscripted soldiers from Batch 2 were satisfied with their service and many proposed continuing in uniform. The claims stand in stark contrast to widespread reports of forced conscription, desertions and civilian fears in Yangon townships over arrest raids targeting young people avoiding military service. Reports from Mizzima described young people in multiple Yangon townships severely limiting their movements to avoid conscription enforcement teams, highlighting a widening credibility gap between junta state media and ground realities.

BORDER UPDATES

13 May ([Mizzima](#)) : Myanmar Resistance Groups Deny Role in Manipur Border Violence

The Kuki National Army-Burma and People's Defence Force denied involvement in attacks on Namli, Wanli and Choro villages in Kamjong District, Manipur on 7 May, where more than 15 houses were reportedly burned, several people injured and two abducted. Indian MP Leishiyo Keishing described the incident as a possible 'foreign incursion.' The Village Volunteer Eastern Zone later claimed responsibility, stating it was in retaliation for an earlier attack linked to the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. Manipur officials visited affected areas and pledged strengthened border security measures.

14 May ([Bangladesh Defence Journal](#)): Tatmadaw Attempts to Re-establish Border Control

Reports indicated that the Tatmadaw intensified efforts to regain control over strategic frontier zones near India. Military operations in Chin State and Sagaing targeted transport corridors, administrative centres and resistance-controlled areas.

The recapture of Falam and Maw Luu was viewed as part of a coordinated strategy to restore state authority over border infrastructure and transportation routes. Analysts noted that the military viewed frontier control as essential for limiting insurgent movement and improving logistical access. The operations also highlighted the strategic significance of the India-Myanmar border for Myanmar's internal conflict and regional security dynamics.

14 May ([Bangladesh Defence Journal](#)) : Junta Recaptures Border Towns Near India; Strategic Implications for New Delhi

Myanmar's military recaptured Maw Luu and other strategically important towns near the Indian border in May 2026. The recapture occurred one day after Admiral Tripathi's visit to Naypyitaw, raising questions about coordination and signalling. The Tatmadaw's push to re-establish control over the India-Myanmar frontier aims to consolidate supply routes and weaken resistance coordination across northern and western fronts. India shares a 1,643-km land border with Myanmar through Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, guarded by the Assam Rifles under dual MHA administrative and Indian Army operational control.

15 May ([Regional Reports](#)) : Cross-Border Security Concerns Intensify in Manipur

Reports from Manipur indicated growing security concerns following militant activity near the India–Myanmar border. Villagers in Kamjong district reportedly faced attacks by suspected armed groups operating from across the frontier. The incident renewed debates regarding border fencing, surveillance and coordination between Indian and Myanmar security forces. Security analysts warned that instability in Myanmar continued to create vulnerabilities along India's northeastern frontier. The issue remains closely linked with insurgency, illegal migration, organised crime and humanitarian challenges across the border region.

17 May ([Economic Times](#)): NCB Dismantles India–Myanmar Drug Network

India's Narcotics Control Bureau dismantled a major transnational drug trafficking network linked to Myanmar-based operators. Authorities arrested Thancintuang alias Chintuang, described as a key figure involved in methamphetamine and heroin trafficking along the India–Myanmar border. The operation involved coordination among multiple Indian agencies and reflected growing concern regarding narcotics smuggling from the Golden Triangle region. Security agencies have increasingly linked border instability in Myanmar with expanding organised crime networks in Northeast India. Officials described the arrests as a major breakthrough against cross-border trafficking operations.

22 May ([Times of India](#)): Mizoram Restricts Fuel Sales to Myanmar

Authorities in Mizoram's Lawngtlai district-imposed restrictions on fuel sales to Myanmar due to concerns regarding smuggling, black-market trade and cross-border security challenges. The decision was expected to affect informal trade networks operating along the frontier.

Local officials argued that tighter regulation was necessary to prevent diversion of fuel supplies amid ongoing instability in Myanmar. Border communities, however, expressed concern regarding the economic impact of the restrictions on livelihoods dependent on cross-border commerce. The development highlighted the complex relationship between border security and local economic interdependence along the India–Myanmar frontier.



About the Author

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