

Issue Brief

**October 2026
No: 553**

**Myanmar Post 2025–2026
General Elections:
President Min Aung
Hlaing's Visit to India
Bilateral Implications and
China's Strategic Response**

**Brig Digvijay Singh
SM**



Myanmar Post 2025–2026 General Elections: President Min Aung Hlaing’s Visit to India

Bilateral Implications and China’s Strategic Response

Abstract

Myanmar’s general elections held in phases from December 2025 to January 2026, concluded the transitional governance of military after the February 2021 coup. However, the elections did not result in an accepted democratic transition. Instead, it consolidated the position of the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and cleared the path for Min Aung Hlaing to assume Myanmar’s Presidency. However, post elections, the situation remains disturbed marked by armed resistance, ethnic conflict, economic contraction, displacement, international criticism, and legitimacy of electoral process. Post his ascendancy to President, Min Aung Hlaing chose India for his first official foreign visit—from 30 May to 03 June 2026 and signing various agreements to include border security, connectivity, trade, energy, mining, critical minerals, education and development cooperation. For India, the friendly relations with Myanmar remains key to security in the Northeast, success of connectivity initiatives, access to Southeast Asia and the management of China’s ever-increasing ingress. At the same time, China, has supported the electoral process in Myanmar and has renewed its engagement with the newly formed government. Therefore, the emerging situation presents India with important strategic opportunities mixed with diplomatic, humanitarian and security challenges.

Keywords: Myanmar Elections, Min Aung Hlaing, India–Myanmar Relations, China–Myanmar Relations, Act East Policy, Kaladan Project, Border Security, Critical Minerals

Introduction

India and Myanmar share land and sea borders and the relation between the two can be explained as complex history. This can be best understood by appreciating Indian perspective on Myanmar society and nation.

Myanmar is often referred to as ‘The Gateway’ or ‘The Bridge’ to Southeast Asia wherein India, China and Southeast Asia meet, creating array of opportunities for various stakeholders. Geographical contiguity, ethnic and cultural heritage, shared Asian values and the legacy of religions viz. Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam have been permanent factors moulding ties between India and Myanmar. It holds a crucial geostrategic position and is frequently seen as a buffer state between China and India, the two Asian superpowers. Myanmar’s location at the

geographic heart of Southeast Asia and India, makes it strategically important for India. Myanmar and Northeastern India share 1,643 kilometres of open land border in addition to a 725-Km Sea border in the Bay of Bengal. The only nation where India's "Act East Policy (AEP)" and "Neighbourhood First Policy" converge, is Myanmar.

Since the military coup of 01 February 2021, Myanmar has faced continued political turmoil, ethnic violence, the rise of the National Unity Government (NUG), People's Defence Forces and incessant armed conflict between pro-democracy groups and ethnic armed organisations (EAO). By the time elections commenced in December 2025 till January 2026, Myanmar had effectively divided the areas controlled by the military, ethnic armed groups and various resistance forces.

The Tatmadaw claimed the elections as the fulfilment of its promise of return to constitutional governance. However, majority of population has argued that the process did not include major political parties, opposition leaders and large tracts of conflict affected areas. This has led to the post-election government having formal constitutional authority but lacking political legitimacy and pan country territorial control (Reuters, 2026).

Min Aung Hlaing visit as President in May 2026 to India, marked a landmark moment in Myanmar's search for diplomatic legitimacy post elections. For India, the visit culminated in opportunities to address cross-border insurgency, illegal immigration, smuggling specially narcotics, delayed connectivity projects, trade, rare earth minerals and China's ever-increasing presence.

The 2025–2026 General Elections

The general elections for 420 seats were held in three phases between 28 December 2025 and 25 January 2026. The Upper House of Myanmar's Parliament is the Amyotha Hluttaw (House of Nationalities), and the Lower House is the Pyithu Hluttaw (House of Representatives). Together, they form the National Bicameral Legislature known as the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Assembly of the Union) (Myanmar General Election, 2025-26).

According to official reports, the voting was supposed to take place in 263 townships, however, the voting could not be held owing to zero voter turnout or complete boycott in conflict-affected areas. In the final tally, the military affiliated Union Solidarity and Development

Party won total 339 seats to include 231 seats in the Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) and 108 seats in the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) {Xinhua, 2026}.

Myanmar's 2008 Constitution earmarks one quarter of parliamentary seats to serving military officials appointed by the Commander-in-Chief. This arrangement, combined with the USDP substantial electoral victory, resulted in a political framework wherein military affiliated forces have considerable control over the legislature, constitutional processes, and presidential appointments.

Although, the electoral environment was considerably restricted, and the polling was organised mainly in military government-controlled regions, however tribal areas including States of Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Karenni, Karen, and Sagaing remained largely contested or under the control of resistance groups. National League for Democracy (NLD), which was the largest elected party during the general elections of 2020, was dissolved for failing to adhere to registration stipulations. Aung San Suu Kyi and several other senior politicians remained imprisoned, and a large number of opposition activists were either jailed, displaced or forced into exile (Reuters, 2026).

On 03 April 2026, Min Aung Hlaing was elected as the President. He won 429 out of 584 votes and assumed Presidency on 10 April 2026. His assumption of the office of the President of Myanmar transformed his role from Commander-in-Chief and leader of the post-Coup government to a civilian Head of State. Although, owing to the ongoing influence of Tatmadaw and the near absence of the opposition, this change is more cosmetic than far-reaching.

China and Russia both acknowledged the electoral process by sending their observers, and few Southeast Asian nations continued to engage with the authorities. Moreover, initially, ASEAN as a bloc did not respond positively this change and decided not to send observers or certify the elections (Rath, A. 2026). However, later, Individual ASEAN member adapted divergent positions on the electoral process. Western countries, human-rights organisations and Myanmar's Opposition Parties also rejected the elections for lacking transparency, inclusivity and credibility (Rath, A. 2026).

Political and Security Situation, Post-Elections

Myanmar's general election was not able to pacify the civil conflict. The Tatmadaw has continued its fight against ethnic armed groups (EAGs) and People's Defence Forces (PDF) and, at the same time, the resistance factions rejected the new government, hence resulting in the post-election administration controlling the central institutions but lacking authority nationwide. The conflict and insecurity continued unabated in large parts of the country, and opposition candidates and some ethnic groups were also excluded from the elections (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2026).

In recent times, violence has erupted in border areas. The Arakan Army is consolidating its presence in the Rakhine State, that hosts the India funded strategically important Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP). Chin resistance groups especially the Chin National Army (CNA) is operating close to the Indian States of Mizoram and Manipur, while the Kachin Independence Army controls and competes for regions rich in jade, gold, and heavy rare-earth resources near the Yunan region of China. The intermittent fighting also continues in northern Shan, Karen, Karenni, and Sagaing.

Renewed military efforts in 2026 were aimed to regain access to vital border routes and resource-rich areas, specifically in the Chin State bordering India, routes linking central Myanmar to Kachin State, and locations abundant in heavy rare-earth minerals (Banerjee. S, 2026). Despite government proposed negotiations with select armed groups, lack of trust and disagreements over federalism, military accountability, and political representation have obstructed a comprehensive resolution.

According to the United Nations, humanitarian crisis remains harsh— an estimated 3.6 million people have been displaced by conflict and earthquake, with 1.7 million being in the hardest-hit regions in the Northwest, Rakhine, and Southeast (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2025). The access of the population to humanitarian assistance is severely restricted due to ongoing violence, centralised controls, damaged and inadequate infrastructure.

Factors such as weak domestic demand, electricity shortages, damaged infrastructure, labour migration, currency exchange restrictions, and ongoing conflicts have hindered recovery efforts leading to a shrinking economy (World Bank, Myanmar economic monitor, 2025). The earthquake in March 2025 caused an estimated \$11 billion worth damages, which is roughly 14

percent of the country's GDP. The reconstruction efforts have generated some economic activity but have added to already stretched limited capacity of the government.

Presently, the post-election government faces a significant dilemma. While it has achieved continuity in constitutional and institutional frameworks, at the same time it lacks nationwide acceptance, peace and effective administrative control. This led its foreign policy to focus on seeking diplomatic recognition, economic investment, reconstruction aid and security collaboration from neighbouring countries.

President Min Aung Hlaing's Visit to India

President Min Aung Hlaing's visited India on his first official foreign visit from 30 May to 03 June 2026, on the invite extended by the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi. Since China has been Myanmar's main external political and economic ally following the 2021 coup therefore this visit was symbolically very significant.

President Min Aung Hlaing commenced his visit from Bodh Gaya, wherein he visited the Mahabodhi Temple and the Mahabodhi Meditation Centre, highlighting the cultural and Buddhist connections between India and Myanmar. Subsequently, in Delhi he met the President, Shri Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi; he also met the External Affairs Minister Shri S. Jaishankar and the National Security Adviser Shri Ajit Doval (PMO India, 2026).

The Myanmar delegation included ministers from foreign affairs, finance, agriculture and industry as well as the Governor of the Central Bank of Myanmar. A large business delegation from industries like agriculture, pharmaceuticals, banking, energy and information technology also accompanied the President, hence pointing towards the intent of Myanmar to pursue not only political ties but also investment, technology, financial cooperation and access to Indian markets (MEA, 2026).

Major Decisions and Understandings

A major outcome of the visit was an agreement to enhance security and border management cooperation. India reiterated its support for Myanmar's sovereignty and territorial integrity and both nations agreed that their territories should not be used for activities inimical to

each other's security. President Min Aung Hlaing assured the Indian authorities that Myanmar would not allow its territory to be used against Indian security interests, particularly concerning Indian insurgent movements that have historically maintained camps or movement routes across the border (PMO India, 2026).

Both governments committed to advancing the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway. The Kaladan project aims to link India's eastern coastline with Sittwe Port in the Rakhine State, transport cargo via inland waterways to Paletwa then connect by road to Mizoram and further to Assam. The Trilateral Highway seeks to connect India with Thailand through Myanmar. However, both initiatives have faced delays owing to conflicts, challenging terrain, administrative hurdles and incomplete infrastructure.

Moreover, India and Myanmar agreed to promote trade through a rupee–kyat settlement mechanism that is active since May 2024. Increased use of local currencies will decrease reliance on the US dollar, cut transaction costs and enhance commerce amidst Myanmar's international banking restrictions (PMO India, 2026).

The two sides identified common sectors like agriculture, agriproduct processing, petroleum, energy, mining, healthcare and information technology for deeper collaboration. Both sides discussed critical minerals and rare earths materials essential for electronics, renewable energy equipment, electric vehicles and defence production. While Myanmar has rich mineral resources, India is working to diversify its supply chains and reduce dependence on China. For India, the visit is an opportunity to dilute China's outsized influence on Myanmar while working to secure access to the country's deposits of critical rare earths, and bolster security along its northeastern borders (PMO India, 2026) (Reuters, 2026).

The educational and capacity-building cooperation was also intensified. India announced that the annual Mekong–Ganga Cooperation scholarships for Myanmar students would rise from 36 to 100 from 2026. This move aims to strengthen India's long-term people-to-people connect and offer an alternative to China's widespread scholarship and training programs.

The discussions included cooperation in maritime security, cyber security, clean energy, healthcare, heritage restoration and institutional capacity-building. President Min Aung Hlaing's visit to the NTPC Energy Technology Research Alliance complex emphasises Myanmar's interest

in integrating renewable energy, improving power-system efficiency, ensuring grid resilience and clean energy research.

Even though no specific treaty or financial package was announced during the visit, however both governments established a comprehensive framework for ongoing official collaboration and agreed to fast track negotiations on outstanding agreements and memoranda of understanding. President Min Aung Hlaing also extended an invitation to Prime Minister Modi to visit Myanmar.

Implications for India–Myanmar Bilateral Relations

The President's visit symbolizes India's shift from cautious interactions to more noticeable political involvement with Myanmar's government following the elections. While India has not officially recognised the elections as fully democratic or representative, but it projects its approach through meaningful engagement by reiterating its stand that the progressive dialogues are essential for safeguarding its interests.

For India, the immediate advantage is increased interaction with the border guarding authorities. India shares 1,643 Km long unmanned and treacherous border with Myanmar adjoining the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. Any instability in Myanmar triggers issues of insurgent movements, arms trafficking, narcotics smuggling, refugee inflows and organised crime that creates chaos in India's northeast.

In addition, the visit could boost the opportunity of completing India's connectivity projects. Without functional access through Myanmar, India's Act East Policy faces geographical limitations. The Kaladan project can reduce the reliance of India's northeastern states on the narrow Siliguri Corridor whereas the trilateral highway can enhance road connectivity to mainland Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, merely securing agreements with the Central government will not ensure early completion since the sections of both routes traverse disturbed territories.

From an economic standpoint, enhancing rupee-kyat trade and collaborating in areas like agriculture, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, energy and digital services can assist the Indian companies to establish a stronger foothold in Myanmar. India's contribution in medicine,

agricultural machinery, financial technology and small business expertise will certainly address Myanmar's developmental needs.

Nevertheless, the visit carries perception challenges. The direct engagement with President Mr Min Aung Hlaing might be seen by both Myanmar's opposition and the international community as 'legitimising a government elected on a restricted electoral process'. Moreover, there is a risk that security cooperation with Central government may cause unrest among the ethnic communities along the border, closely related to people in Northeast India. A balanced approach is imperative to clearly differentiate legitimate counter-insurgency efforts from involvement in Myanmar's internal political strife.

China's Stand on the Elections and Post-Election Government

China has been a main international supporter of Myanmar's transition to democracy. After the third round of voting, a spokesperson for the China's Foreign Ministry called the electoral process smooth and orderly, extending compliments to Myanmar and expressing hope that the elections would foster peace and reconciliation (Xinhua, 2026).

Following the appointment of Mr Min Aung Hlaing as President, China officially congratulated him and offered its support for the new government in maintaining stability and pursuing development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026). President Xi Jinping even sent a special envoy to the oath taking ceremony on 10 April 2026, wherein the envoy reaffirmed China's commitment to Belt and Road cooperation, border stability and safeguarding of Chinese investments and personnel (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026).

On 25 April, Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Naypyidaw to meet President, during which the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor, energy, infrastructure, trade, reconstruction and measures against telecommunications fraud and online gambling were discussed. President Min Aung Hlaing stated that Myanmar consistently regards its relationship with China as the most important bilateral tie, stays committed to the 'OneChina Policy', and highly appreciates and actively supports the four global initiatives proposed by President Xi Jinping (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026).

China's interests in Myanmar includes ensuring stability along its border, protecting its huge investments, accessing natural resources and advancing the China–Myanmar Economic

Corridor which connects China's southwestern regions to the Indian Ocean via various transport infrastructures. Additionally, China is concerned about issues such as criminal networks, online fraud activities, refugee flow in its bordering areas and conflicts near its border.

While maintaining relations with the Central government, Beijing also exercises influence over various ethnic armed groups in northern Myanmar. This dual approach enables China to mediate ceasefires, apply pressure on armed factions and protect its economic interests. Therefore, China's endorsement of the elections should be viewed less as an endorsement of democratic practice but more as a support for framework that could stabilise Myanmar and safeguard China's strategic interests.

Implications of China's Position for India

China's support offers diplomatic validity, investment opportunities and negotiating leverage to the newly elected government in Myanmar. Whereas India falls short of China in terms of financial backing, infrastructure investments and political influence in Northern Myanmar. However, the Myanmar President's choice to visit India before China conveys the intention to reduce reliance on Beijing.

This opportunity opens the door for India for increased investments, address its security concerns, enhance connectivity, rare earth minerals and for Myanmar to leverage its growing ties with India to improve its negotiating stance with China. This may increase the competition over rare earth minerals since rare earth deposits in Kachin State are vital for both China and global supply chains. While Indian access to Myanmar's mineral resources could mitigate supply risks however this may be challenging owing to the deposits being in conflict zones controlled by ethnic armed groups.

China's significant advantage lies in its engagement capabilities with the Central government as well as with ethnic armed groups. Whereas Indian policy has historically been focused on government-to-government engagements. However, to protect its interests, New Delhi needs an inclusive strategy involving provincial authorities, ethnic groups and local communities while maintaining respect for Myanmar's sovereignty.

Policy Recommendations for India

- India to engage with the Myanmar government for achieving lasting stability by inclusive dialogue, federal accommodations and reduction in violence. However, should not equate this to a political endorsement.
- Security cooperation to include intelligence sharing, joint operations against Indian insurgent groups, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, cybercrime, and human trafficking, while safeguarding the sensitivity of ethnic connect across border.
- India must ensure the early completion of the Kaladan project and Trilateral Highway to project its efficiency to execute infrastructure projects similar to China. In addition, project implementation must involve local communities and authorities jointly managing the region.
- India should increase its support in humanitarian aids, healthcare, early assistances during natural calamities, education scholarships and training programs since such initiatives will foster greater bonding with citizens of Myanmar rather than only with its leaders.
- India must work in sync with ASEAN, Japan and other regional stakeholders and at the same time maintaining dialogues with China regarding border stability, humanitarian access and transnational crime, ensuring that Myanmar is not viewed as a battleground for India-China rivalry.

Conclusion

The general elections in Myanmar established a new constitutional government, however the ongoing crisis in the country continues. The Central government still have very limited hold in ethnic controlled areas. The complete success of the Union Solidarity and Development Party and the assumption of presidency by Mr Min Aung Hlaing consolidates the military dominance instead of facilitating a more inclusive government. Post elections the country is still mired with armed conflict, economic instability, human displacement and territorial divide.

Despite these challenges, the President's visit to India marked an important diplomatic milestone. It has consolidated bilateral relations and progressed agreements in security, trade, connectivity, energy, critical minerals, education and capacity building. This visit has reinforced India's standing on border stability, boosted its Act East policy and offered enhanced access to Myanmar. At the same time, it has also pointed to Myanmar's aspiration to reduce its China over dependency.

China has accepted the new government. It has further extended its economic and strategic ties with Myanmar. China's influence in Myanmar is significantly stronger than India's, especially in infrastructure, investment, border resolution and relationships with northern ethnic groups like Kachin and Shan. To counter this, India needs to adopt a strategic and multi-dimensional approach instead of working on to outmanoeuvre China.

India's crucial challenge is to protect its strategic interests and at the same time addressing Myanmar's internal crisis of legitimacy. An effective workable Indian policy is the amalgam of engagement with the government aiming towards peace in the country. This strategy will certainly enhance India's influence in Myanmar.

Works Cited

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, Myanmar's military elections will not lead to peace or improvement in the political crisis (2026, February 4). *ACLED*. <https://share.google/1zLdjWNMeuvdSf12Q>.

Banerjee, S. (2026, February 2). Myanmar's managed elections and implications for India's strategic calculus. *Observer Research Foundation*. <https://share.google/rWc075snE2Vnz9gqZ>.

China supports all parties in Myanmar to achieve peace and reconciliation via general elections (2026, January 26). *Xinhua News Agency*. <https://share.google/M06E6F29Qi50q5JsV>.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning's regular press conference on (2026, April 3). *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*. <https://share.google/p8c1bMJ16gwXAaIuS>.

Junta-backed party secures sweeping victory in Myanmar election (2026, January 30). *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-election-delivers-victory-military-backed-party-amid-civil-war-2026-01-30/9>.

Myanmar economic monitor: Moderate signs of recovery amid earthquake and conflict impact (2025, December). *World Bank Group*. <https://share.google/T7XFUX6Q2bx8eXRNy>.

Myanmar's USDP wins majority of seats in Union Parliament (2026, January 29). *Xinhua News Agency*. <https://share.google/46y3SjWlvryLw8jee>.

Myanmar's President Min Aung Hlaing meets with Wang Yi, Government of the People's Republic of China (2026, April 25). *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*. <https://share.google/lpH1M49sXqVaYrh7U>.

Myanmar's junta chief turned president heads to India, with an eye on China (2026, May 30). *Reuters*. <https://share.google/rkVLW0mQzEzZ4kOgn>.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Myanmar election violence, United Nations Media (2026, January 30). <https://share.google/5t4KAd3H3pA7HrhLY>.

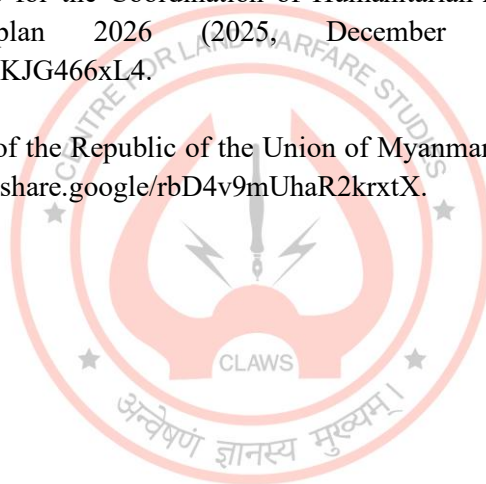
President Xi Jinping's special envoy attends the inauguration ceremony of Myanmar's President Min Aung Hlaing, Government of the People's Republic of China (2026, April 10). *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*. <https://share.google/EruJKgddioqn3ozK0>.

Prime Minister's Office, Government of India, India–Myanmar joint statement during the official visit of the President of Myanmar to India (2026, June 1). *PMO, India*. <https://share.google/61FSF0YnS2h0X08J2>.

Rath, A (2026, February 20). ASEAN's response to the elections in Myanmar: An overview. *Indian Council of World Affairs*. https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=1&ls_id=14245&lid=8669.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Myanmar humanitarian needs and response plan 2026 (2025, December 10). *United Nations*. <https://share.google/cXD5evbsKJG466xL4>.

Visit of the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to India, 2026, May 30–June 3 (2026, May 28). *MEA*. <https://share.google/rbD4v9mUhaR2krxtX>.



About the Author

Brigadier Digvijay Singh, SM, is an Infantry officer commissioned into The Sikh Regiment and holds a PhD on *India-Myanmar Relations: A Study of its Strategic Implications*.



All Rights Reserved 2026, Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS)

No part of this publication may be reproduced, copied, archived, retained or transmitted through print, speech or electronic media without prior written approval from CLAWS. The views expressed and suggestions made in the article are solely of the author in his personal capacity and do not have any official endorsement. Attributability of the contents lies purely with author.