

# MP-IDSA

## *Issue Brief*

# President Hlaing's Visit to India and Strategic Diversification Policy of Myanmar

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## **S***ummary*

President Min Aung Hlaing's visit to India is significant given that Myanmar's civil war since 2021 has affected India's border security and management. From India's perspective, Myanmar is an important player in its Act East calculus. India has engaged with Myanmar while dealing with the post-coup wave of refugees and the drug and arms trafficking which is exacerbating community tensions and conflict in Manipur.

## Introduction

The President of Myanmar, Min Aung Hlaing, who assumed office in April 2026, concluded his first foreign visit to India in early June 2026. Hlaing's visit to India began with prayers at the Mahabodhi Temple in Gaya, Bihar, on 30 May. He later travelled to New Delhi for official talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi before proceeding to Mumbai, where he met business leaders to explore investment opportunities and strengthen bilateral trade relations.

Discussions with Prime Minister Modi focused on trade, connectivity, defence, healthcare, education and cooperation in advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and space exploration. They also revolved around “refugee flows from Myanmar to India, cybercrime, connectivity projects, and broader security cooperation”.<sup>1</sup> During engagements with stakeholders in India's energy sector, the Myanmar President explored cutting-edge net-zero technologies, including green hydrogen, solar power and carbon capture. President Hlaing also met President Smt. Droupadi Murmu, during which the two leaders engaged in productive discussions to strengthen bilateral ties.<sup>2</sup>

Min Aung Hlaing's visit is significant in several respects, particularly because of the ongoing civil war in Myanmar since 2021, which has had important implications for India's border security. Myanmar and India share a 1,643 km border. The Ministry of External Affairs stated that New Delhi continued to support enduring peace and an inclusive political process involving all stakeholders in Myanmar, arguing that sustained dialogue rather than disengagement offers the best prospect for progress. Furthermore, President Hlaing, the former head of Myanmar's military junta, assured India that Myanmar's territory would not be permitted to be used against India's security interests.

## First Visit to India: A Background

India and Myanmar share a multi-dimensional relationship encompassing historical, cultural, economic and strategic dimensions. The strategic and border-security dimensions of this relationship have become increasingly relevant over the last three decades. Hlaing has been governing the country essentially as Commander-in-Chief and junta leader since the February 2021 military coup, when the military refused to accept the results of the 2020 general election. Since then, his authority has been derived from the military and, now, from the 2008 Constitution. The latest elections,

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<sup>1</sup> [“India-Myanmar Ties: PM Modi Raises Border Security, Refugee Concerns in Talks With President Min Aung Hlaing”](#), *The Times of India*, 1 June 2026.

<sup>2</sup> [“President of India Receives President of Myanmar”](#), Press Information Bureau, President's Secretariat, India, 1 June 2026.

held between December 2025 and January 2026, did not fundamentally change who controls the country. The face of the regime in Myanmar's governance is a civilian government backed by the military.<sup>3</sup>

Hlaing's presidency has brought constitutional legitimacy and greater acceptability in the diplomatic realm. It reflects a broader pattern in which the military assumes political office, directly and indirectly institutionalising military dominance within a civilian framework. Myanmar has witnessed this pattern before. This introduces another dimension to the international legitimisation of the new regime. Therefore, his early foreign visits should be viewed as more than mere diplomacy. They represent an effort to secure external recognition and enhance the regime's political legitimacy at a time when its domestic authority remains contested.

Since the coup in February 2021, Min Aung Hlaing, as the head of the junta government and acting president since July 2024, has faced persistent questions of legitimacy from most Western democracies and even from ASEAN as a collective body.<sup>4</sup> Even amid these circumstances, Hlaing has continued to travel to China and Russia. Since the coup, he has visited Russia four times and China twice, and Chinese ministers and officials have continued to visit Naypyidaw regularly.<sup>5</sup> His overseas travel has otherwise included only two visits to ASEAN member states, Thailand and Indonesia.<sup>6</sup> Since President Hlaing assumed office, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has been the only foreign official to visit Myanmar's new president. This is indicative of the priorities and direction of President Hlaing and his administration. Given that his visit to India took place at India's invitation, the trip is especially significant.

## The Beijing Guarantor

In April 2026, Myanmar's new President Hlaing received Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi only a few days after assuming office.<sup>7</sup> China's approach to Myanmar has demonstrated that political stability remains its primary concern, often taking

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<sup>3</sup> [“Myanmar’s New Administration: Military Consolidation, Not Transition”](#), International Crisis Group, 3 June 2026.

<sup>4</sup> [“Pro Tem Presidential Duties Transferred to State Administration Council Chairman”](#), *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 23 July 2024.

<sup>5</sup> [“Myanmar Junta Chief Meets China's Xi for First Time: State Media”](#), *The Times of India*, 10 May 2025; [“SAC Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing Holds Talks with President of Russian Federation Mr Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin”](#), *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 8 September 2022.

<sup>6</sup> [“SAC Chairman Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing Leaves for Thailand to Attend 6th BIMSTEC Summit”](#), *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 4 April 2025; [“Myanmar Keeps Close Cooperation with ASEAN Member Countries in Accord with the ASEAN Charter: Senior General”](#), *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 25 April 2021.

<sup>7</sup> [“Myanmar’s President Min Aung Hlaing Meets with Wang Yi”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, 25 April 2026.

precedence over concerns such as democracy, federalism, political reform and human rights. In the current context, the central question is no longer the future of democracy in Myanmar but whether the country remains governable despite persistent instability. This suggests that China is likely to support any authority capable of maintaining order and safeguarding its strategic interests there.

Myanmar is a vital component of China's grand strategy because it provides an alternative route to mitigate China's 'Malacca Dilemma'. The oil and gas pipelines running from Kyaukphyu Deep Sea Port to Yunnan Province allow energy imports to bypass the Strait of Malacca.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) strengthens China's economic presence along the Bay of Bengal.<sup>9</sup>

Myanmar occupies a strategic position between South Asia and Southeast Asia, and the development of economic infrastructure gives Beijing significant strategic leverage. This should be examined in relation to India's strategic interests, as China's presence is increasingly intertwined with India's strategic objectives, including the Act East Policy, Northeast connectivity and border security. In other words, Chinese investment in Myanmar offers an important lens for understanding the long-term strategic competition between China and India.

China has been one of the few countries to endorse both the recent electoral process and Min Aung Hlaing's presidency. This has led many observers to draw three conclusions. First, the current political-military order is likely to remain the dominant force in Myanmar's political landscape for the foreseeable future. Second, the existing situation on the ground suggests that no opposition group is presently capable of replacing the current order. Third, engagement with the existing political structure is viewed as necessary to safeguard strategic and economic interests.

Another significant stakeholder in Myanmar's political and social landscape is the network of ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), several of which operate along the China–Myanmar border. China has maintained interactions with these groups and developed quid-pro-quo relationships as a form of strategic hedging.<sup>10</sup> Rather than seeking their complete elimination, Beijing appears to prefer a balance in which border areas remain manageable and Chinese investments and infrastructure projects remain protected. This reflects a degree of policy ambiguity. While China officially supports Myanmar's territorial integrity and national unity, it is also reluctant to relinquish its leverage over the EAOs, partly because many of these

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<sup>8</sup> Carlos Alatorre, “[China's Investments in Myanmar: Analyzing the Status of Projects](#)”, *Tearline*, 8 May 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Bidisha Deka, “[China's Naval Playbook in Myanmar: India's Bay of Bengal Dilemma](#)”, *Centre for Joint Warfare Studies*, Vol. 30, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Morgan Michaels, “[What China's Growing Involvement Means for Myanmar's Conflict](#)”, *IISS Myanmar Conflict Map*, 7 August 2023.

groups continue to control substantial territories.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, China occupies a unique position amid Myanmar's political turmoil, enabling it to engage simultaneously with the government, ethnic armed organisations and local power brokers.

In addition to managing domestic upheavals, China has been instrumental in providing Myanmar with a diplomatic shield. China has helped reduce Myanmar's diplomatic isolation and mitigate punitive international initiatives against it.<sup>12</sup> It has also facilitated Myanmar's re-entry into multilateral forums. This Chinese approach certainly has a few long-term consequences, including greater reliance on Chinese investment, technology, finance and trade. From a future perspective, this state of dependency makes it increasingly difficult for Myanmar to balance China against India, Japan, ASEAN and Western partners.

## Russia as the Military's Critical Enabler

Since the 2021 military coup, Myanmar has increasingly relied on Russia as its principal defence partner, with Moscow playing a significant role in supporting the military's campaign against resistance forces. Russia has continued to engage with Myanmar despite numerous international sanctions and restrictions imposed by Western countries.<sup>13</sup> Along with China, Russia has helped Myanmar mitigate the effects of international isolation and sanctions. Beyond military assistance, Russia has also provided diplomatic, economic and technological support.

According to a 2023 United Nations report, Russian entities supplied arms, military equipment, raw materials, and related goods worth approximately US\$ 400 million to Myanmar.<sup>14</sup> These supplies included Su-30SME fighter aircraft, Mi-38T helicopters, air defence systems, radar complexes, rocket launchers, and spare parts for existing military platforms.<sup>15</sup> Military training, technical maintenance and logistical support have emerged as equally important, if not more significant, than hardware transfers, given the ongoing civil war and the military's sustained operations against armed resistance groups. These forms of assistance have

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<sup>11</sup> [“Chinese FM: China Supports Early Political Reconciliation in Myanmar, to Deepen Bilateral Cooperation”](#), The State Council, The People's Republic of China, 15 August 2024.

<sup>12</sup> Lwin Cho LATT, [“China’s Involvement in Myanmar’s Peace Negotiations: An Analysis with Special Emphasis on the Non-Interference Principle”](#), *Journal of the Asia-Japan Research Institute of Ritsumeikan University*, Vol. 4, November 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Umang Bhansali, [“Myanmar - Russia Partnership: Deepening Strategic Ties”](#), Vivekananda International Foundation, 19 March 2025.

<sup>14</sup> [“UN Rights Expert Exposes \\$1 billion ‘Death Trade’ in Arms for Myanmar Military”](#), United Nations, 17 May 2023.

<sup>15</sup> [“Myanmar's Air Force Inducted Three Russian Mi-38T Helicopters and Two Chinese Y-8F-200W Transport Aircraft”](#), Global Defense Corp., 12 November 2025.

enhanced the operational capabilities of the Tatmadaw. In addition, both countries renewed their defence cooperation agreement for another five years in early 2026.<sup>16</sup>

Beyond defence cooperation, the two countries have developed a broader strategic convergence over the past six years. Russia's state-owned nuclear corporation, Rosatom, has partnered with Myanmar on nuclear energy development and plans to establish a low-capacity nuclear power plant in the country.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Russia has emerged as Myanmar's leading oil supplier, accounting for more than 90 per cent of the country's oil imports in 2024.<sup>18</sup> On the economic front, expanding trade, financial cooperation, investment promotion, and potential collaboration on infrastructure projects such as the Dawei Special Economic Zone have elevated Russia's role beyond that of a purely transactional partner.<sup>19</sup>

Another important dimension of the relationship is evident in efforts to develop bilateral financial mechanisms to reduce dependence on Western financial systems. Cooperation has also expanded into advanced technology sectors, including remote sensing projects and space-related initiatives involving the Russian space agency.<sup>20</sup> There have also been reports of possible Russian support for Myanmar's reconnaissance satellite ambitions,<sup>21</sup> although neither government has officially confirmed such cooperation.

## Bound by Necessity, Divided by Deficits

The 2021 military coup was a disruption for India—as it was for ASEAN and other geopolitical players. India's priority was stability along the border. Established mechanisms such as sectoral-level meetings were held with the Myanmar junta to address issues relating to insurgent activities against India from Myanmar's territory and other cross-border threats affecting connectivity projects and vital maritime trade. The last such meeting was held in January 2025.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> [“Russia and Myanmar Sign Military Cooperation Agreement”](#), *The Moscow Times*, 3 February 2026.

<sup>17</sup> [“Rosatom Expands Cooperation with Myanmar in the Field of Nuclear Infrastructure”](#), Communications Department of ROSATOM, 11 October 2023.

<sup>18</sup> [“Russia and Myanmar Sign Energy Cooperation Agreement: Analysis”](#), *Russia's Pivot to Asia*, 22 April 2026.

<sup>19</sup> Umang Bhansali, [“Myanmar - Russia Partnership: Deepening Strategic Ties”](#), no. 13.

<sup>20</sup> [“Myanmar and Russia Join Forces for Peaceful Space Exploration”](#), *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 27 September 2025.

<sup>21</sup> [“Myanmar and Russia to Boost Space Technology Ties”](#), National Defence and Security Council Office, Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 27 February 2026; Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, [“Russia Expands Strategic Ties with Myanmar; Offers Satellite Support to Fight Rebels”](#), *The Economic Times*, 18 March 2025.

<sup>22</sup> [“India - Myanmar Relations, General and Bilateral Brief: India-Myanmar”](#), Consulate General of India, Sittwe, Myanmar, July 2025.

Economically, the 2024 operationalisation of the Rupee-Kyat Trade Settlement Mechanism has smoothed commerce, as reflected in trade data, which reached US\$ 2.15 billion, and both sides are now aiming to increase this to US\$ 5 billion by 2030.<sup>23</sup> India has also strengthened its position as a ‘first responder’, as evidenced by the massive humanitarian response during the 2025 earthquake through ‘Operation Brahma’, underscoring its intent to remain a stabilising regional power.<sup>24</sup> This is supported by balancing infrastructure development with essential capacity building to maintain its strategic foothold in Southeast Asia.

From India's point of view, Myanmar is not only an important player in its Act East calculus, but a security concern due to the refugee inflows into Mizoram and Manipur, cross-border insurgent sanctuaries, narcotics trafficking, weapons smuggling, and instability generated by civil war. Media reports suggest that these issues were part of the Modi–Hlaing talks.<sup>25</sup>

India has been managing the border with Myanmar in a situation where the other side lacks a central authority to deal with; in other words, the absence of any official authority. As per policy, India does not recognise the EAOs' authority, also due to deep fragmentation within the EAOs, even among those groups that operate along Indian borders.<sup>26</sup> The geographical positioning of EAOs from India's perspective is highly sensitive, as it is closely tied to India's strategic outlook and several infrastructure projects, such as the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway.<sup>27</sup>

A large portion of these projects falls within areas where EAOs and resistance forces maintain a presence. This hinders the completion of these projects, and their relevance could be called into question if the smooth functioning of economic activity through these projects is not assured.<sup>28</sup> Recent advancements by the Myanmar military suggest it is regaining offensive momentum and has recaptured several strategic territories from resistance forces. The primary areas and territories recaptured by the military include Chin State (Northwestern Border Region), Tanintharyi Region (Southern Border Region),<sup>29</sup> Northern Transport and Trade

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> [“India-Myanmar Ties: PM Modi Raises Border Security, Refugee Concerns in Talks With President Min Aung Hlaing”](#), no. 1.

<sup>26</sup> [“A Rebel Border: India’s Evolving Ties with Myanmar After the Coup”](#), International Crisis Group, 11 April 2025.

<sup>27</sup> [“Implementation of the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project in Myanmar at the Revised Cost Estimate of Rs. 2904.04 Crore”](#), PM INDIA, 14 October 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Rajeev Bhattacharyya, [“Has the Indian Flagship Kaladan Project in Myanmar Hit a Dead End?”](#), *The Diplomat*, 27 February 2024.

<sup>29</sup> [“Myanmar Military Recaptures 2 Strategic Border Towns from Ethnic Militias”](#), *The Hindu*, 21 May 2026.

Corridors (Mandalay-to-Myitkyina Highway),<sup>30</sup> and Magway Region (Central Heartland).<sup>31</sup>

The post-election political environment suggests that the trajectory of Myanmar’s civil war may be transformed into a lower-intensity conflict rather than a comprehensive resolution.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, historical patterns of the military’s strategy towards armed groups suggest that a status quo phase may occur, and the civil war is likely to be partial, localised, and uneven. In the recent past, Myanmar has witnessed multi-layered and non-linear peace and reconciliation processes among various actors, such as the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).<sup>33</sup> The more likely scenario involves negotiated arrangements at the regional or sub-national level, and a few actors may choose co-existence over integration, consolidating control within defined territories.<sup>34</sup> For India, the key is to continue engaging with the government while maintaining mechanisms for access in areas outside direct state control. India’s connectivity projects meanwhile can focus on phased, context-sensitive implementation.

## Conclusion

President Min Aung Hlaing’s presidency has provided greater opportunity for constitutional legitimacy and diplomatic acceptability. India has engaged with Myanmar, while dealing with an insecure border, civil war spillover, the post-coup wave of refugees and drug and arms trafficking, which is exacerbating community tensions and conflict in Manipur. The junta is leaning on China and Russia for the bulk of its support. Regardless of the other relationships being established, India is crucial for Myanmar. India can still gain from this situation as it has the potential to influence Myanmar and India simply cannot afford to be absent.

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<sup>30</sup> [“Myanmar Junta Pushes to Retake Rare-earth Belt Near China Border”](#), The Nation, Asia News Net Work, 26 May 2026.

<sup>31</sup> Nyein Chan Aye, [“Myanmar’s Political Makeover Unmasked by Revolutionary Reality”](#), *Asia Times*, 1 May 2026.

<sup>32</sup> H.T. Zaw, “Conclusion: The Futures of Myanmar”, in H. T. ZAW and K. Ostwald (eds), *The Futures of Myanmar Post-Conflict Scenarios*, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2026, pp. 43–48.

<sup>33</sup> M. Naing, [“National Ceasefire Agreement: What is it and Where is it Going?”](#), Indian Council of World Affairs, 2 December 2025.

<sup>34</sup> [“Myanmar’s Dangerous Drift: Conflict, Elections and Looming Regional Détente”](#), International Crisis Group, 18 July 2025.

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