



ASEAN Chair Malaysia leading defence counter-terrorism working group with participation of Myanmar military, undermining calls for peace

Even as Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim calls for peace in Myanmar and urges a post-earthquake ceasefire, Malaysia – current Chair of ASEAN – has welcomed the Myanmar military into ASEAN's counter-terrorism initiatives, deepening the bloc's complicity in war crimes and undermining its own stated commitments.

This contradiction was laid bare in March when the Myanmar military participated in the 14th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus Experts Working Group on Counter-Terrorism, co-chaired by Malaysia and India.

The two-day session, held in New Delhi, brought together ASEAN members and dialogue partners including China, the United States, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. Notably, India, the current co-chair of the EWG on Counter Terrorism, remains one of the Myanmar junta's leading arms suppliers.

The meeting marked the start of Malaysia and India's multi-year co-chairmanship of the working group. The program will include a table-top exercise in Malaysia in 2026 and a field training exercise in India in 2027.

These engagements are designed to build "on-ground experience" and deepen regional security cooperation – effectively providing technical and tactical support to the Myanmar military, which is actively waging a nationwide campaign of terror, including airstrikes, artillery assaults, and widespread arson, committing atrocities with total impunity, often in the guise of "counter terrorism".

The Myanmar military led the ADMM counter-terrorism working group with Russia from 2021-2023. In 2023, the group held counter terrorism military training exercises in Russia, with Myanmar military personnel trained in tactics that the junta can deploy in its campaign of terror against the people, using weapons that are in the junta's arsenal.

The military has continued its terror campaign in the aftermath of the devastating 7.7 magnitude earthquake that struck Myanmar on March 28. Since the earthquake, the military has launch at least 280 air and artillery attacks across the country, killing and maiming civilians and destroying communities.

The Myanmar military's continued inclusion in ASEAN platforms – from its seat on the ADMM Cybersecurity and Information Centre of Excellence (ACICE) and training courses in cyber defence to ADMM retreats and regional defence universities, colleges and institutions meetings – illustrates a pattern of legitimisation and military training that runs counter to vehement calls for ASEAN to cease engagement with the illegal junta and to hold them accountable for the commission of international crimes.

ACICE, for instance, allows a brigadier general from the Myanmar military to sit on its advisory board. It has also facilitated a cyber threat simulation with Temasek Polytechnic in Singapore, which included junta participation and further embedded them within ASEAN's cyber defence networks as it continues to build its digital dictatorship.

April 24 marks four years since ASEAN and junta leader Min Aung Hlaing agreed to the Five Point Consensus, a peace plan that has failed to stop the junta's violence.

Despite the failure of its peace plan and the junta's ongoing atrocities, ASEAN and its member states continue to engage with Min Aung Hlaing — claiming to lead efforts to resolve the Myanmar crisis, while in reality worsening the situation and impeding effective international action.

On April 17, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim met Min Aung Hlaing under the pretext of a humanitarian dialogue, urging respect for a post-earthquake ceasefire.

While the Prime Minister described the engagement as “very successful,” the junta has only intensified its attacks against civilians, launching new airstrikes across the country, including in earthquake affected regions.

For instance, in the two days following Min Aung Hlaing's meeting with Anwar Ibrahim, the junta killed 36 civilians, including children, in two villages of the Thabeikkyin township of Mandalay.

ASEAN's continued diplomatic, technical, and military engagement with the junta – through counter-terrorism training, cyber cooperation, and intelligence sharing – only enables further atrocities. It also shields the junta from broader international pressure and robust action by the UN and other global actors.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "ASEAN's ongoing military cooperation with the Myanmar junta lays bare the utter hypocrisy of its Five-Point Consensus and Malaysia's hollow calls for peace.

"ASEAN, its members and partners cannot claim to be presenting solutions in Myanmar while it is actively enabling the junta to commit atrocities, and while it is complicit in the junta's international crimes.

"Enabling the junta as it bombs civilians is a moral outrage that should shame ASEAN to its core, especially as it claims to champion peace.

"ASEAN's complicity in the junta's crimes has gone on far too long and is a dark stain on its credibility. It's time to end this shameful support for the Myanmar military and engagement with war criminals.

"If ASEAN wants to show its commitment to peace, it must respect the voices of Myanmar people, who continue to put their lives on the line to courageously resist the military junta for federal democracy.

"Peace can only be achieved through a Myanmar people-centred approach that moves beyond the Five-Point Consensus, as civil society have demanded."

More information:

Justice For Myanmar is a covert group of activists using research, data visualisation and reporting to expose the companies and criminals profiting from brutality, war crimes and mass-scale suffering.

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