

## **ASEAN Begins Gradual Re-engagement With Myanmar**

ASEAN foreign ministers will hold an informal meeting in Bangkok with Myanmar's Foreign Minister Tin Maung Swe, marking the first in-person engagement between Myanmar and ASEAN foreign ministers since the 2021 military coup. While ASEAN emphasized that the meeting does not change its policy of excluding Myanmar's political leadership from high-level summits, it represents a cautious effort to reopen dialogue after years of diplomatic isolation.

The renewed engagement follows Myanmar's recent elections and the appointment of Min Aung Hlaing as civilian president. Although the elections have not been recognized by ASEAN as fully legitimate, some member states, particularly Thailand, view them as an opportunity to restart communication and encourage gradual progress toward political stability. The discussions are expected to focus on exchanging views on Myanmar's current situation and exploring possible pathways to reduce the country's prolonged conflict.

The initiative reflects growing divisions within ASEAN over how to deal with Myanmar. Countries such as Thailand favor pragmatic engagement to encourage incremental improvements, while others continue to insist that Myanmar must first make meaningful progress on the Five-Point Consensus, including ending violence and promoting inclusive political dialogue.

The broader motivation behind ASEAN's outreach is to prevent Myanmar's crisis from further destabilizing Southeast Asia. Since the 2021 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar has experienced a devastating civil war that has reportedly claimed more than 100,000 lives, displaced millions, and generated cross-border security, refugee, and humanitarian challenges. By reopening communication with Myanmar's new administration, ASEAN hopes to regain diplomatic leverage, encourage confidence-building measures, reduce regional instability, and keep Myanmar engaged within the regional framework rather than allowing the crisis to deepen further.

## **The Philippines' Military Space Ambition: Enhancing Security in the South China Sea**

The Philippines plans to establish a military space center by 2028 to strengthen its surveillance, communication, and command-and-control capabilities. The initiative is part of the country's broader military modernization program and could eventually evolve into a full space command. Philippine military leaders believe that developing satellite capabilities will improve monitoring of the country's vast archipelago and provide better situational awareness in contested areas such as the South China Sea.

One of the main objectives is to enhance intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. Dedicated satellites would allow the Philippines to collect information more independently, reduce reliance on foreign systems, and improve coordination of military assets such as drones, radars, and missile systems. Experts note that achieving this goal will require significant investments in satellites, ground stations, data-processing infrastructure, and highly trained personnel.

The Philippines is pursuing this effort largely because of growing security concerns in the South China Sea, where it faces increasing tensions and maritime disputes with China. A sovereign space capability would provide continuous monitoring of activities in contested waters, strengthen territorial defense, and support deterrence efforts. It would also reduce vulnerability to disruptions in foreign-provided satellite services during crises. In addition, recent conflicts such as the war in Ukraine have demonstrated the crucial role of space-based systems in modern warfare, encouraging Manila to prepare for future security challenges through greater technological self-reliance and cooperation with allies such as the United States, Japan, and Australia.

## **Initiating a Criminal Code Bill on LGBTQ in Indonesia**

The Indonesian government has rejected claims that Presidential Regulation No. 111/2025 institutionalizes discrimination against LGBTQ individuals. Coordinating Minister for

Legal Affairs, Human Rights, Immigration, and Corrections, Yusril Ihza Mahendra, stated that the regulation identifies the spread of LGBTQ culture as a non-military socio-cultural threat to national resilience, but does not authorize violence, persecution, or the denial of legal rights to LGBTQ persons. According to the government, the regulation is intended to safeguard social cohesion, family values, and moral principles rooted in Indonesian ideology, Pancasila, as well as Indonesia's religious and cultural traditions.

However, the regulation has sparked criticism from human rights organizations, including Amnesty International Indonesia. Critics argue that framing LGBTQ-related issues as a national security concern could legitimize stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion while potentially conflicting with constitutional guarantees of equality and Indonesia's international human rights obligations.

Despite receiving criticism from certain groups, Indonesia must enact legislation regulating LGBT behaviour and propaganda within its territory. Such legal measures are necessary to prevent deviant conduct from freely spreading its associated moral and health risks across the country. This step is crucial for reinforcing Indonesia's position as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation against moral degradation that could potentially undermine the future of society. Moreover, as an open and liberal country, Indonesia is particularly vulnerable to the infiltration of foreign cultural influences that conflict with its indigenous religious and cultural values.

### **Philippines Hardens Stance Against China as South China Sea Tensions Deepen**

Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. has declared that meaningful negotiations with China are currently “not possible,” citing what Manila views as Beijing’s lack of good faith and continued activities in disputed areas of the South China Sea, particularly around Scarborough Shoal. While limited military communication channels will remain open to avoid miscalculation, the Philippines insists that broader engagement cannot progress unless China changes its behavior in contested waters.

The dispute is part of the broader South China Sea conflict, one of Asia’s most significant geopolitical flashpoints. China claims sovereignty over nearly the entire sea through its “nine-dash line,” a position rejected by the Philippines and several Southeast Asian states. In 2016, an international arbitral tribunal in The Hague ruled that China’s expansive maritime claims had no legal basis under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a decision that Beijing continues to reject. Scarborough Shoal, located approximately 185 kilometers from the Philippines but nearly 900 kilometers from China’s Hainan Island, remains a major source of tension.

Relations deteriorated further after Beijing imposed sanctions on Teodoro and his family in June 2026, accusing him of harming bilateral relations. In response, Philippine leaders criticized the sanctions and argued that they only increased regional tensions.

Against this backdrop, Manila is also moving to strengthen its domestic security legislation. The government has proposed updating its outdated Anti-Espionage Act and introducing new laws targeting foreign interference and influence operations. Philippine authorities argue that existing laws contain loopholes that make it difficult to prosecute foreign espionage activities during peacetime. The legislative push follows investigations into alleged surveillance near military facilities, monitoring of U.S. naval activities, and reported attempts to obtain information on Philippine resupply missions in the South China Sea. China has denied these allegations.

The latest developments underscore how the South China Sea dispute has expanded beyond maritime territory into diplomacy, national security, intelligence operations, and strategic competition between China and U.S.-aligned regional partners. As the Philippines deepens defense cooperation with the United States, Japan, Australia, and other partners, the South China Sea is increasingly becoming a central arena in the broader Indo-Pacific security landscape.