

Lin Myanmar Newsletter

Weekly briefing on Myanmar politics, economy and business

Issue No. 31

Thursday, 10 September 2026

Publisher: Lin Law Firm, Myanmar Office

8 Top Stories from GNLM (10 Sept 2026)

Thanlyin Refinery to Begin Operations in Late September; Thanbayakan Plant Upgraded in Parallel

Thanlyin Township, Yangon Region



Thanlyin Oil Refinery, Yangon Region — front page, GNLM, 10 Sept 2026

Phase I of the Thanlyin Oil Refinery — a modular facility with an annual processing capacity of 500,000 tonnes — is nearing start-up in Yangon Region. Raw materials have already been procured from abroad and shipped to a designated port; from there they will be piped to the plant, with phased production due to begin by the end of September. The Ministry of Electricity and Energy also announced that the Petrochemical Complex (Thanbayakan) Refinery, near Thanbayakan Village in Upper Minhla Township, Magway Region, will be upgraded at the same time.

A ministry official explained that crude tankers will dock at Thilawa, with the oil then piped to the Thanlyin plant, and that the company will handle crude procurement and operations under a joint venture with the government. Phase II will follow completion of Phase I; once finished, the two refineries are expected to supply 60% of the country's petrol needs and 50% of its diesel needs.

Dawei Airport Upgrade Reaches 75% Completion

Dawei, Taninthayi Region

Work to widen the existing 12,000-foot by 100-foot runway by 25 feet on each side along its full length, together with additional paving, is 75% complete. Construction, currently suspended for the monsoon, is due to resume in late October, with the airport expected to accommodate large cargo aircraft by year-end. Combined with the proposed Dawei Special Economic Zone, the upgrade is expected to bring significant benefits to tourism, trade and investment in the region. Similar upgrades were carried out at Dawei, Patheingyi, Lashio, Kengtung, Tachilek, Mong Hsat, Nyaung-U and Myeik airports between 2021 and 2025.

Shipping

Yangon Port Handles 457 Container Vessels, January-August

Myanmar Port Authority (MPA)

Yangon Port received 457 container vessels between January and August 2026, with 61 more scheduled for September. Annual arrivals have risen steadily — 728 vessels in 2025, 633 in 2024 and 629 in 2023. Draft-extension works following the discovery of a new navigation route (the Kings Bank Channel) now allow large international ocean liners to access the inner port; in June, Hong Kong-based SITC's MV SITC Zhaoming (LOA 185.99m, 2,698 TEU) docked at Asia World Port Terminal (AWPT) — the largest vessel the port has ever handled.

China-Myanmar Cultural Cooperation

China Media Group and Eastern Private High School Launch Youth Science Programme

Yangon · China Media Group (CMG) & ELBC

China's state broadcaster CMG and Yangon's Eastern Private High School (ELBC) launched "Science Club" activities in the first week of September, together with the "Deep Blue Resonance" creative collection programme co-organised with the China Science and Technology Museum. The initiative invites young people to submit deep-sea-themed artwork and science questions, with winning entries to be exhibited and prized; educational content on rocket launches and the Haidou-1 deep-sea exploration vessel was also screened. More than 500 teachers and students took part.

Odd/Even Vehicle Rule Lifted from 9 September as Fuel Supply Stabilises

Information Team, President's Office

The odd/even licence-plate driving restriction introduced in March in response to Middle East conflict-related fuel concerns was lifted effective 9 September, the President's Office announced, citing a return to stable fuel consumption. However, the QR-code-based fuel rationing system operated by the Ministry of Electricity and Energy for energy-security purposes remains in place.

Security / Online Scams

56 Suspects Arrested Over Online Gambling Scams in Tachilek

Tachilek Township, eastern Shan State

Acting on a tip-off, authorities arrested 56 suspects — five Chinese men, 25 Myanmar men and 26 Myanmar women — over illegal online gambling and scam operations. Sixty computers, five Wi-Fi devices, 14 tables, 51 chairs and two unregistered vehicles were seized. Those arrested face prosecution under existing law following further investigation.

Humanitarian Affairs

23rd South-East Asia Red Cross/Red Crescent Leaders' Meeting Closes with Yangon Statement

Wyndham Grand Hotel, Yangon

On its second day, the meeting discussed strengthening humanitarian diplomacy, the auxiliary role of the state, accountability in the Mandalay earthquake response and recovery, and strengthening domestic resource mobilisation among national societies. The host country's "Yangon Statement" was adopted, and hosting rights for the 24th meeting were handed to the Philippine Red Cross.

Filmmaker and Legal Expert Aung Soe Oo Dies at 78; Cremation Held in Yangon on the 10th

Yangon

Aung Soe Oo (U Aung Soe) — writer, film director and legal expert, best known as the creator and director of the classic film "Thingyan Moe" — died on the evening of 8 September at the age of 78. Writing music criticism under the pen name Ko Alinka, he was also a prolific author; he sold his own house to finance and direct the film "Naw Yin Mwe," which won Soe Myat Thu Za the Best Actress award at the 1994 Myanmar Motion Picture Academy Awards. A legal adviser to committees on artistes' copyright protection, he also took part in discussions on online media and telecommunications law. He is survived by his wife, Daw Mya Mya Hein, three children and a grandchild; his remains were cremated at Yayway Cemetery in Yangon at 10am on 10 September.

Myanmar Buddhist Funeral Customs

Cremation on the Third Day, Merit-Sharing on the Seventh: Death Rites in Theravada Myanmar

Cultural Note

As it happens, this issue of GNLM carried both the obituary of writer and legal expert Aung Soe Oo and news of his cremation on 10 September. As a starting point, we offer a brief introduction to Myanmar Buddhist funeral customs. Theravada Buddhism, followed by the great majority of Myanmar's population, favours cremation — following the tradition set when the Buddha himself was cremated after his parinibbana — though burial is also practised in some rural areas. Funerals typically continue for about a week, and the remains are traditionally cremated or buried on the third day after death. In the past the deceased was kept at home; in cities today the body is more often kept at a mortuary and brought to the funeral hall only on the morning of the service.

As death approaches, a monk will often visit to offer the verse on impermanence — that "even a king's splendid chariot grows old, and so too does this body" — to console the family. At the funeral, guests are traditionally given a fan bearing the deceased's name, a small booklet of teachings on impermanence (in Pali and Burmese verse), a bottle of blessed water, and soap. Before the coffin is closed, a coin known as ku-do-ka is placed in the deceased's mouth, symbolising the "fare" for the journey out of this life. On the day of cremation, it is also customary to smash a clay pot in front of the house — a practice of Hindu origin symbolising the severing of ties between the deceased and the surviving family.

A single flower that decorated the coffin (or, in some regions, a branch taken from near the crematorium) is brought home and kept with the deceased's clothing; rice and side dishes are set out so that the spirit may linger briefly at home until the seventh day — a custom still observed in Yangon and other cities today. On the seventh day, offerings are made to monks and the resulting merit is dedicated to the deceased, after which the flower or branch is finally removed. Cremation ceremonies for senior monks are generally not held during Vassa (the monks' rains retreat). Among the Rakhine, coffins are carried on bamboo frames in a dance-like procession known as tala-ah-et, while in some areas an eain dance-drama celebrating the deceased's life and the cycle of rebirth is also performed.

Lin Law Firm Note — When advising on inheritance and succession matters in Myanmar, it is advisable to build the family's religious timeline — the third-day cremation, the seventh-day merit ceremony, and so on — into the practical schedule. Note too that other communities, including Chinese, Muslim and Christian communities, generally practise burial rather than cremation, and that funeral customs vary by religion and ethnicity.

Sources: Buddhnet.net, Facts and Details, Myanmar Academy of Arts and Science journal (San San Oo, 2021), mylocalpassion.com, Go Myanmar Tours, Wikipedia (Phongyibyan)

China-Myanmar Economic Cooperation: A Full Overview

Trade, Investment and Infrastructure: The Three Pillars of China-

Myanmar Economic Ties

Comprehensive Analysis

1. Trade — China's position as top trading partner keeps strengthening. China has been Myanmar's largest trading partner for years. Bilateral trade reached US\$19.4 billion in 2025, up 19.1% year-on-year, and hit US\$3.73 billion in January–February 2026 alone, up 50.8% year-on-year. Myanmar mainly exports rare earths, agricultural produce, seafood and minerals, importing textiles, fertiliser, electronics, vehicles and refined fuel from China in return. Rare earths are a particularly critical supply-chain item: Myanmar accounted for 16% of global production in 2024 (China itself accounts for 61%) and exported roughly US\$620 million worth to China in 2025 alone. The border crossing at Ruili handles about 30% of China–Myanmar trade, making it the largest land gateway, and a yuan-denominated border-trade settlement pilot has been running since 2022.

2. Investment — China is the top investor, but overall FDI has collapsed since the coup. According to Myanmar's Directorate of Investment and Company Administration (DICA), China accounts for roughly 26% of Myanmar's cumulative foreign direct investment (FDI), making it the largest investor overall, and its share of new inflows since the 2021 coup has risen to 47%. However, Myanmar's total FDI has fallen by about 74%, from US\$28.7 billion in the five years before the coup (2016–2020) to US\$7.4 billion in the five years since (2021–2025). As of February 2026, the top three source countries for investment were Singapore, China and Thailand, in that order.

3. Infrastructure (CMEC) — the Kyaukphyu port and pipeline are operating, but the railway is stalled. The China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), based on a 2019 MOU covering 2019–2030, is a roughly 1,700km "Y-shaped" corridor running from Kunming in Yunnan through Mandalay and Yangon to Kyaukphyu in Rakhine State, spanning 12 areas of cooperation including industry, transport, energy, agriculture, the digital silk road, finance, tourism, the environment, people-to-people exchange, science and technology, workforce development and water resources. The 770km Kyaukphyu–Yunnan oil and gas pipeline has been operating since 2023 and holds significant strategic value as an alternative route bypassing the Strait of Malacca, through which roughly 80% of China's energy imports pass. The Kyaukphyu deep-sea port and special economic zone (SEZ) are being pursued under a joint-venture structure with China holding 70% and Myanmar 30%, though main construction has yet to begin. By contrast, the US\$9 billion, 431km Muse–Mandalay railway has remained at the "preparatory stage" for years.

4. Risk — the Rakhine conflict creates fundamental uncertainty for project execution. With the Arakan Army (AA) now controlling 14 of Rakhine State's 17 townships, government forces retain control only of the state capital Sittwe and part of Kyaukphyu. Analysts note that Beijing appears to have already factored in the possibility that the Kyaukphyu port could fall under AA control; in February 2026, a US\$140 million VPower power plant near Kyaukphyu was in fact dismantled and relocated amid intensifying fighting nearby.

Lin Law Firm Note — Today's GNLM report on the Thanlyin refinery start-up (see article above) is itself tied to Chinese crude-oil supply and a joint-venture structure, while the CMG–ELBC youth science exchange (see article above) illustrates how cultural and people-to-

people ("Track II") channels continue to expand alongside infrastructure and resource cooperation. Companies investing in or partnering on China-linked projects should conduct project-by-project due diligence covering (i) conflict-zone risk, (ii) equity and profit-sharing structures, and (iii) local licensing and environmental-impact-assessment procedures.

Sources: The Diplomat (Feb 2025, Apr 2026), Geopolitical Monitor (Jun 2026), EGROW Foundation, Legal Service India (Jun 2026), Myanmar Digital News (Jun 2026), myanmar.com Chinese Investment Report (Mar 2026), ISP-Myanmar (Jan 2026 x2), Baidu Baike on China-Myanmar Trade, Trading Economics, Global Times

Legal Provisions Foreign Businesses in Yangon Should Watch

1. Land and Real Estate — Foreign Land Ownership Is Prohibited Outright

Transfer of Immovable Property Restriction Act (TIPRA), 1987

Under the 1987 Transfer of Immovable Property Restriction Act, foreign individuals and foreign companies are barred outright from owning land or buildings (immovable property) in Myanmar. While the 2017 Myanmar Companies Law allows a locally incorporated company with up to 35% foreign shareholding to be treated as a "Myanmar company," TIPRA itself has not been amended, and the prevailing practical view is that even such companies generally cannot own land. The one exception is condominiums: in buildings properly registered under the Condominium Law, foreigners may acquire up to 40% of total units — though buyers must always verify that a building marketed as a "condo" is in fact formally registered, since unregistered buildings cannot legally transfer units to foreign buyers regardless of how they are advertised.

For long-term business use of land, the Myanmar Investment Law (MIL, 2016) allows leases of up to 70 years (50+10+10) with permit or endorsement from the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC). Some foreign investors attempt to hold land through a Myanmar national as a nominee; this arrangement carries serious legal risk, as it has no legal enforceability and leaves the foreign party with no recourse if the nominee later asserts ownership.

2. Investment Licensing — Confirm Whether Your Sector Requires an MIC Permit or Endorsement

Myanmar Investment Law (2016); Myanmar Special Economic Zone Law

Businesses that are strategically important, capital-intensive, likely to have a significant environmental or community impact, or that use state-owned land or buildings require an MIC "permit" in advance; many other sectors need at least an "endorsement" to access tax incentives or long-term land leases. Acquiring equity or control in a company holding an MIC permit or endorsement may itself require separate MIC approval. Investments within special economic zones (Kyaukphyu, Dawei, Thilawa, etc.) are separately governed by the Myanmar Special Economic Zone Law.

3. Foreign Exchange and Remittance — Controlled Exchange Rates and Profit-Repatriation Limits Since 2022

Foreign Exchange Management Law; Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) notifications

The Central Bank introduced a market-linked reference exchange rate in 2019, but since April 2022 has effectively enforced a controlled rate. Transactions conducted outside formal bank-channel remittance and exchange procedures carry legal risk, and repatriating dividends or profits abroad requires proof of full tax payment plus CBM approval. As noted in earlier issues of this newsletter, the gap between the official reference rate and the market rate continues to widen, making it important to specify a clear settlement exchange-rate clause in contracts to prevent disputes.

4. Cybersecurity Law (2025) — Particular Caution for VPN Use and Digital Service Providers

Cybersecurity Law No. 1/2025 (in force from 30 July 2025)

Enacted in January 2025 and in force since 30 July 2025, the Cybersecurity Law applies to both domestic and foreign operators providing services to users in Myanmar. Anyone wishing to set up or provide a VPN must first obtain approval from the relevant ministry (Section 44); violations carry penalties of one to six months' imprisonment or a fine of MMK 1–10 million for individuals, and a minimum MMK 10 million fine for companies. Digital platform operators with more than 100,000 users must register under the Companies Law and obtain separate approval (Section 24), and must retain users' personal data and usage records for three years (Section 33). The law also has extraterritorial reach, meaning offences committed abroad by Myanmar citizens may still be subject to penalty.

5. Employment and Labour — Foreign Employees Need Both a Work Permit and a Visa

Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population; Foreigner Registration Certificate (FRC)

Foreign employees must obtain both a work permit from the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population and a visa or long-term stay permit through the MIC; those staying more than 90 days must also obtain a Foreigner Registration Certificate (FRC). Employers may not pay foreign employees less than local staff at the same grade, and must provide equal leave, overtime pay, social security and other labour-law entitlements. It is also worth noting, as a practical matter, that travel away from one's registered address for more than 24 hours may require prior notification.

6. Association Registration and the Unlawful Associations Act — Risk from Contact with Parties in Conflict Areas

2026 amended rules on registration of associations; Unlawful Associations Act

Amended association and NGO registration rules issued in 2026 strengthen anti-money-laundering (AML) and counter-terrorist-financing screening, requiring the registration board to review associations' financial statements and refer suspicious transactions to the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). Separately, the colonial-era Unlawful Associations Act criminalises contact with, or support for, organisations the government designates as "unlawful." In areas affected by ongoing conflict, a business partner or local counterparty may — even unintentionally — turn out to be linked to a resistance group or ethnic armed organisation (EAO), exposing the foreign business to legal risk as well. Companies operating in, or working with local partners in, conflict-affected areas should apply heightened KYC scrutiny to counterparties' beneficial ownership and background.

Lin Law Firm Note — The six areas above reflect the risk topics we are most frequently asked about in practice; how they apply in a given case will depend on sector, location and deal structure. For specific matters involving investment, real estate, licensing, labour or data compliance, please obtain legal advice in advance. (Enquiries: +95 9 449191234 / KakaoTalk ID benice4u)

Sources: Lexology (Q&A: Foreign Investment Issues, 2024), Multilaw Real Estate Guide Myanmar, Bamboo Routes (2026), US Department of State 2025 Investment Climate Statement, Tilleke & Gibbins / Allen & Gledhill / Baker McKenzie / Hogan Lovells / VDB Loi (Cybersecurity Law analyses, 2025), DICA Labour guide, Duane Morris & Selvam Myanmar Employment Guide, DFDL (association registration rules, 2026)

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