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## UN DEVELOPMENT CHIEF ON THE ‘LIFE-THREATENING CONSEQUENCES’ OF FOREIGN AID CUTS



**Outgoing UNDP head: International development system faces a ‘tipping point’**

**Simon Mundy:** In your foreword to UNDP’s latest annual report, you wrote that you’re seeing a “retreat” around international development finance. How serious is this retreat and how serious could the implications be?

**Achim Steiner:** It’s very serious. What we are seeing right now is an unprecedented – both in terms of scale and, let’s say, short notice – withdrawal of tens of billions of dollars from a humanitarian and development ecosystem that has grown over many decades. You can begin to see that when you see our inability, for example, through [the World

Food Programme], to continue to provide the rations that are needed in refugee camps, whether it’s the Rohingya in Myanmar or many of the other refugee camps around the world. You can also see that in the way that the UN, at the moment, is not able to step up in Sudan, where millions of people are either internally displaced or have become refugees. It goes right through also to millions of people who depended on the international partnerships around the Global Fund and PEPFAR, the US-backed programme to support people with HIV/Aids. Literally overnight, clinics are closing, supply chains are disrupted, and people are not receiving antiretroviral treatments. So you are literally talking about life-threatening consequences, and on a scale that is affecting many parts of the globe. It’s not just about funding development or humanitarian support. It’s also a retreat –

and that is why I use that term very deliberately – from an understanding and a commitment to investing together in development in our age. You know, when we met in 2015 in the UN General Assembly and adopted the 2030 agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, that was not an act of faith. It was a declaration of mutual interdependence, recognising that we live in an age where the risks to our national security – but also our individual and human security – are increasingly going to be either mitigated, or continue to grow, based on our ability to work together. The pandemic was a very clarifying moment. If we had not been able to work together, despite the stumbling nature of that initial response, who knows whether we would have beaten Covid-19 as quickly as the world then did?

■ Source: ft.com

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Just because something has never been done, doesn’t mean it can’t be done.  
– Achim Steiner (Administrator – United Nations Development Programme)



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# MALAYSIA LEADS ASEAN IN NEW DIRECTION ON MYANMAR - DR. AZEEM IBRAHIM

With Malaysia assuming the chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 2025, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim is poised to steer the regional bloc toward a more assertive stance on Myanmar's ongoing crisis. Unlike previous chairs, Malaysia aims to prioritize accountability for the Myanmar junta's atrocities and reject the legitimacy of its planned elections, widely criticized as a sham.

This approach, while ambitious, faces significant challenges given ASEAN's history of ineffectiveness on Myanmar. The implications for the Rohingya and other minorities are profound and Anwar's personal interest in the issue adds a unique dimension to Malaysia's leadership. However, the likelihood of this approach being successful remains uncertain, constrained as it is by ASEAN's structural limitations and regional dynamics.

Malaysia's chairmanship, themed "Inclusivity and Sustainability," comes at a critical juncture. Myanmar's junta, led by Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, has plunged the country into chaos since the 2021 coup, displacing more than 3.3 million people and killing thousands, with ethnic

and religious minorities bearing the brunt of the violence.

ASEAN's response, primarily through the Five-Point Consensus adopted in April 2021, has been widely criticized as toothless, failing to curb the junta's aggression or advance inclusive dialogue. Malaysia, under Anwar's leadership, seeks to break this cycle by rejecting engagement with the junta, advocating for accountability and dismissing the junta's election plans as a ploy to entrench power.

Anwar's strategy includes several key elements. First, Malaysia has appointed a special envoy, Tan Sri Othman Hashim, to facilitate dialogue with all stakeholders, including the national unity government and ethnic groups, signaling a shift toward recognizing Myanmar's legitimate democratic forces.

Second, Malaysia is pushing for increased humanitarian aid to affected communities, particularly the Rohingya, and stronger coordination with international bodies like the International Criminal Court to address human rights abuses.

Finally, Anwar has called for ASEAN to cease all economic and diplomatic ties with the

junta, such as barring its representatives from ASEAN meetings and cutting off resources like aviation fuel that enable military operations.

While Malaysia's approach is principled, its success is far from assured. ASEAN's consensus-based decision-making model, which requires unanimity among its 10 member states, has historically paralyzed decisive action on Myanmar. Countries like Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, which maintain closer ties with the junta or prioritize economic relations with China, Myanmar's key ally, are likely to resist Malaysia's push for a hard-line stance. Previous chairs, such as Indonesia in 2023, attempted similar reforms but failed to overcome these divisions, resulting in the Five-Point Consensus' stagnation.

**“ Anwar's vocal advocacy for the Rohingya stems from a combination of personal conviction and strategic positioning. ”**

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim

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■ Source: arabnews.pk