Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies

SHORT PAPER

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The Power of Artificial Intelligence in Reforming Public Services: The Case of Consular Services

1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an integral part of everyday life, influencing everything from daily routines to complex professional tasks. As AI continues to shape modern society, it is increasingly important to consider how this technology can be applied within public and private workplace environments. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) describes AI as systems capable of processing input data to produce outputs such as predictions, recommendations, or decisions that affect both physical and digital settings (Peixoto et al., 2024). In academic discourse, AI is viewed as an advanced information-processing technology capable of generating language, analysing data, and solving problems when guided by human instructions and structured datasets.

Many scholars suggest that AI will significantly transform the functioning of public institutions. Specifically, the role of AI in reforming sectors such as education, healthcare, transportation, and consular services including biometric visa processing, passport issuance, and data management which deserves careful examination. These sectors are essential to effective governance and citizen engagement, making them ideal candidates for technological innovation.

This article examines the potential of AI to reform public services, with a specific focus on consular affairs. The analysis is guided by Susan Strange's (1994) concept of structural power, particularly the knowledge and technology structure. This framework emphasises how knowledge is created, controlled, and communicated, and how technological advancement shapes what societies accept as authoritative information. In the contemporary global system, states increasingly exert influence through knowledge

production and technological innovation. Consequently, AI has the potential to reshape state institutions and redefine the interaction between governments and citizens.

2. Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study

While Myanmar possesses significant natural and human capital, the public sector faces substantial challenges in managing large-scale data and delivering tailored services to its citizens. Traditional administrative methods remain predominantly manual, leading to systemic inefficiencies, processing delays, and an increasingly heavy workload for diplomatic missions. Consequently, this study aims to evaluate how AI can modernise routine consular operations. By reducing the reliance on conventional paperwork and enhancing data management, AI offers a strategic pathway to safeguard the interests of Myanmar nationals abroad and improve the overall efficacy of state functions in a digital age.

3. What Are Consular Services?

Consular services refer to the official functions carried out by a state to protect and assist its citizens in foreign countries. According to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963), these functions include safeguarding the interests of nationals abroad, promoting commercial and cultural relations, issuing passports and travel documents, providing visas to foreign nationals, and assisting citizens in legal or emergency situations.

These services serve as a critical link between individuals and their home governments during legal disputes, medical emergencies, or crises. Furthermore, effective consular services contribute to positive bilateral relations by facilitating mobility and cooperation. Consular officers are responsible for ensuring compliance with immigration laws, certifying documents, and offering guidance on citizenship and identity matters.

4. How AI Technology Enhances Daily Routines in Consular Sectors

AI enhances consular activities by making routine work faster and more accurate. Recent developments in AI and Robotic Process Automation (RPA) allow systems to quickly scan, organise, and summarise application documents while identifying missing information to reduce errors.

Rather than replacing officers, AI supports them by handling data extraction, fraud detection, and regulatory checks. This allows diplomats to focus on informed decision-making and direct engagement. For example, the U.S. State Department uses AI and Natural Language Processing (NLP) to modernise data collection and prioritise cases, allowing for more human-centred decisions.

Furthermore, several countries have already integrated these tools. For instance, Canada uses AI to support immigration and refugee application processing. Australia utilises an AI virtual assistant, "Sophie," to provide tailored guidance on travel regulations and emergency situations (Australian Government, 2021). The United Kingdom launched a pilot triage system in 2023 to assess and route written enquiries from nationals overseas, prioritising urgent cases automatically (UK FCDO, 2023). India employs chatbot technology through the "Madad" portal for grievance redress service (Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2020). Estonia leads with government chatbots that reduce administrative workloads and support data-driven policy planning (Estonian Government, 2022).

5. Opportunities and Challenges

The integration of AI within the public sector presents a dual landscape of opportunity and risk. On one hand, it offers seamless service delivery and reduced bureaucratic overhead (Estonian Government, 2022). On the other hand, these advancements require robust safeguards against cybersecurity threats, data breaches, and the spread of disinformation.

Furthermore, a primary obstacle for developing states remains the "human capital gap" which is the shortage of technical experts capable of maintaining these systems (Peixoto et al., 2024). Additionally, the "digital divide" must be considered to ensure that citizens without advanced technological access are not excluded from essential services (Georgieva, 2024).

6. Multilateral and Bilateral AI Initiatives

According to UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021), member states are encouraged to apply ethical provisions in conformity with their governing structures. In 2022, the UN endorsed principles for the ethical use of AI to ensure human

rights are protected throughout the AI life cycle. Bilaterally, major cooperation frameworks such as US-India, EU-India, and China's AI partnerships are shaping the global standards for how this technology is governed (PA Times, 2024).

7. Recommendations

To better support Myanmar citizens abroad and align with international diplomatic standards, the Ministry should prioritise several key reforms. First, a comprehensive digital transition is essential, involving the creation of a unified online portal like creating chatbot for data collection, passport and Certificate of Identity (C of I) applications, integrated with electronic payment systems and QR-code verification to enhance security and efficiency.

Second, consular protection must be strengthened by establishing a dedicated 24/7 emergency hotline and deploying mobile consular units to reach citizens in countries with large Myanmar diaspora populations, such as Thailand, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, the UAE, and Japan.

Third, communication should be simplified by using clear infographics and leveraging active social media platforms like Telegram and Facebook to disseminate urgent updates.

Finally, institutional capacity building is vital, providing junior officers with specialised training on the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and AI ethics will ensure consistent and professional service across all global missions. The use of AI tools by diplomats in the professional workplace can significantly reduce workloads and enhance the effectiveness of the decision-making process.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the reform of consular services through Artificial Intelligence is no longer a matter of choice but a necessity for modern diplomacy. By embracing the "knowledge and technology structure" described by Susan Strange (1994), Myanmar can transform its administrative challenges into strategic strengths. While the transition requires careful attention to cybersecurity and ethical standards, the potential for AI to enhance citizen welfare and state efficiency is immense. Implementing these digital reforms will

ensure that Myanmar's consular services remain resilient, responsive, and relevant in an increasingly interconnected global environment.

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