

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR

FEBRUARY 2025 REPORT

Summary. This report reviews the February 2025 developments relating to human rights in Myanmar.

I.	Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance.....	2
II.	Political Developments.....	3
A.	Rohingya Refugee Crisis.....	3
B.	Corruption.....	4
C.	International Community / Sanctions.....	4
III.	Civil and Political Rights.....	5
A.	Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association.....	5
B.	Freedom of the Press and Censorship.....	5
IV.	Economic Development.....	6
A.	Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment.....	6
B.	Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects.....	6
C.	Land Seizure.....	7
V.	Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence.....	7
A.	Ethnic Violence.....	7
B.	Peace Talks.....	8

I. Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance

According to the *Irrawaddy*, the regime carried out airstrikes in 40 towns across Myanmar in January, killing over 170 people.¹ Most of the victims of the airstrikes were civilians, as the regime reportedly deliberately targeted towns and villages, displacement camps, schools, hospitals and detention centers housing prisoners of war.² Geographically, the main targets were territories held by ethnic rebel groups like the Arakan Army (“AA”), Kachin Independence Army (“KIA”), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and Ta’ang National Liberation Army (“TNLA”) in Rakhine, Kachin, Shan and Kayin states as well as resistance-held areas in Mandalay, Sagaing and Magway in central Myanmar.³

The *Irrawaddy* reports that records from ethnic armed organizations and military experts indicate that the military regime is using thermobaric bombs, which are more destructive than conventional high-explosive bombs.⁴ According to the sources, these bombs, also known as aerosol bombs, have been used in Shan State, Chin State, Kachin State and Sagaing Region.⁵ A thermobaric bomb consists of a fuel container with two separate explosive charges. When it hits its target, the first explosive charge blows open the container and widely disperses the fuel mixture as an aerosol. A second charge then detonates this aerosol, resulting in a huge fireball, a massive blast wave and a vacuum that sucks up all surrounding oxygen. Even if people are not directly hit by the explosion, they may still die from suffocation as the bombs suck up surrounding oxygen, said a weapons analyst.⁶ The shockwaves can damage victims’ hearing and lungs, and even if a bomb does not explode, the fuel can be poisonous, according to a report by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency.⁷

The resistance People’s Defense Force (“PDF”) No. 1 Military Region killed at least 22 junta troops and captured eight others in an ambush in Mandalay Region’s Natogyi Township on January 30.⁸ Combined PDF forces and local resistance groups launched the Myingyan District Special Operation, the first of its kind in the plains region, late last year. Its goal is to liberate all four townships in the district—Myingyan, Taung Tha, Natogyi, and Nganzun—from junta troops and allied militias.⁹

On January 31, Myanmar junta airstrikes bombed a displacement camp and clinic in Kale Township, Sagaing Region, reportedly killing eight civilians, including four children, and wounding at least 15 others.¹⁰ Nearly 400 Kyaukse and Inkyun villagers displaced by fighting in 2021 were sheltering at the camp in Kokko village school in southern Kale.¹¹ A rescue worker said, “The regime deliberately targeted the school. Some of the injuries required amputations.”¹² The regime has cut off phone and internet access to villages in Kale Township, making it difficult to obtain information and maintain communications.¹³

Four people have died amid an acute shortage of food and medicines due to a month-long junta blockade of the Sagaing Region town of Wetlet, which is surrounded by resistance strongholds.¹⁴ Around 150 junta personnel—including 50 soldiers, local police, junta-aligned militias and civil servants given military training—are deployed to cut the town off from surrounding villages that are controlled by anti-regime forces, according to Wetlet Township PDF.¹⁵ Fuel prices have soared to 18,000 kyats per liter, compared to a market price of just over 3,000 kyats in Yangon.¹⁶ Rice costs around 15,000 kyats per pyi (2.4 kg) and cooking oil around 40,000 kyats per viss (around 1.7 L).¹⁷ Patients with chronic conditions like cancer, heart

disease, high blood pressure and diabetes are suffering from shortages of medicines and are unable to leave the town for treatment, resulting in at least four deaths from cancer and heart disease, according to local sources.¹⁸

On February 10, the junta killed at least five civilians and injured 19 others after launching an airstrike in Mandalay's Mogoke Township, which is currently under the TNLA's control.¹⁹ The junta reportedly dropped 20 bombs in the western part of the township.²⁰

From February 10 to 19, junta airstrikes, including fighter jets, Y12 airplanes, helicopters and motorized paragliders carrying out attacks on various targets, including schools, hospitals, displacement camps and religious sites, killed at least 53 civilians.²¹ Junta air and artillery strikes killed at least 17 civilians, including children and internally displaced people, in Monywa, Chaung-U and Salingyi townships in Sagaing Region on February 12 and 13, according to anti-regime groups and locals.²²

On February 25, the junta carried out an airstrike on a wedding reception in Sone Kone village in Myaing Township, killing at least 14 civilians and injuring dozens more.²³ The junta aircraft dropped two 500-lb bombs on the reception area.²⁴

II. Political Developments

A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis

U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to freeze most foreign aid brought healthcare services to a halt in camps housing Rohingya refugees, forcing seriously ill residents to turn to alternative facilities for treatment.²⁵ U.S. aid had previously helped fund services like those provided by the International Rescue Committee ("IRC") to tens of thousands of refugees living in camps such as those on the border between Thailand and Myanmar.²⁶ An IRC spokesperson told *Reuters* that members of the refugee community had "self-organized" to ensure critical services for their communities as the effort was "transitioned" to Thai authorities.²⁷ The loss of U.S. aid has left Thai officials and refugee groups scrambling to fill the gap, while state-run hospitals provide care for refugees.²⁸ Beyond the immediate response, Thai government hospitals may not be able to deal with the long-term burden of refugee healthcare, said Kannapong Phiphatmontrikun, the head of the Tha Song Yang district.²⁹ He called for budget support from other governments or institutions, or even the Thai government, to help the hospital and staff directly tackle the situation in the camps.³⁰

On February 4, Ambassador Stillhart, head of Switzerland's Humanitarian Aid Division, informed senior officials of the Bangladeshi government of the Swiss Parliament's approval of the International Cooperation Strategy 2025–2028, which requires substantial budget cuts.³¹ As a result, he said, the ongoing bilateral development cooperation program with Bangladesh will gradually phase out by the end of 2028, but he reiterated Switzerland's continued support for Bangladesh in addressing the Rohingya refugee crisis.³²

On February 20, Italy renewed its commitment to the one million Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh.³³ With a contribution of €3 million, Italy will assist UNHCR, the UN

Refugee Agency, and WFP, the United Nations World Food Program, to sustain their critical humanitarian assistance in the refugee camps.³⁴

On February 25, Japan and UNHCR signed a partnership agreement to improve living conditions, strengthen primary healthcare and empower Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.³⁵ The contribution of US\$1.6 million will support the construction of safer shelters in the Cox's Bazar camps, the provision of essential medicines and medical supplies and the engagement of refugees as community health workers.³⁶ It will also support the self-reliance of refugees in Cox's Bazar and on Bhasan Char through opportunities for self-reliance.³⁷

B. Corruption

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

C. International Community / Sanctions

On February 4, U.S. President Trump signed an executive order extending Washington's national emergency declaration over Myanmar for one more year.³⁸ In the executive order, the U.S. President said the situation in Myanmar "continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."³⁹

International human rights group Human Rights Myanmar announced on February 6 that the freezing of USAID operations for Myanmar had blocked over US\$39 million in funding for human rights, pro-democracy and independent media projects over the next three years.⁴⁰ The group further stated that the funding freeze had "severely impacted vital programs with organizations already operating on limited budgets" and that "[w]ithout urgent intervention, many organizations may not survive."⁴¹

Also on February 6, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Asian Network for Free Elections and Club de Madrid released a joint statement dismissing "any junta-led election as an attempt to entrench military rule rather than restore democracy."⁴² The groups further said that there is "no possibility that an election held under Myanmar's current conditions will be in line with international standards on democratic elections or commitments for electoral integrity."⁴³

The head of a Thai parliamentary committee that oversees border affairs and refugee camp officials said on February 8 that the "suspension by the United States of refugee admissions ha[d] halted a resettlement deal the U.S. struck with Thailand last year to take in thousands of Myanmar families."⁴⁴ The United States had agreed to start taking in some of the refugees that are presently in refugee camps in Thailand, but this program was suspended by President Trump on January 20.⁴⁵

III. Civil and Political Rights

A. Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association

Certain Rohingya prisoners have recently been freed from Myanmar prisons. However, some Myanmar fear that the Rohingya have been freed only so that they can be impressed into junta forces.⁴⁶

Activists estimate that 237 people were kidnapped by the junta from seven townships in Mandalay during the month of January.⁴⁷ The junta “mainly targeted ordinary people on their way to or from work.”⁴⁸ Among those detained were also resistance fighters and unregistered guests.⁴⁹ Others were arrested for having a VPN on their cell phone or having content critical of the regime on their phone.⁵⁰ Kidnappings also took place in Bagan.⁵¹ There, the junta targeted refugees who fled from the western bank of the Irrawaddy River.⁵² The civilians who were kidnapped were mainly those who left homes without documents like a citizenship ID and a household registration certificate.⁵³ The junta has also been using unmarked, private cars and plainclothes soldiers to kidnap and arrest pedestrians who “cannot satisfactorily explain their presence in a particular place between sunset and sunrise.”⁵⁴

Forced conscription reportedly no longer ends after a two-year term.⁵⁵ Instead, the junta is now indefinitely recalling conscripts “whenever necessary.”⁵⁶ Conscripts are also granted less freedom of movement.⁵⁷ Conscripts who have passed medical exams and are awaiting training cannot leave the country without permission from the central conscription body.⁵⁸ Myanmar has also closed a loophole whereby men used to be able to avoid service by becoming a monk.⁵⁹ Now, only those who have taken permanent vows to become monks are able to avoid conscription.⁶⁰

B. Freedom of the Press and Censorship

According to *Access Now*’s latest report, Myanmar is the worst country on Earth for internet shutdowns.⁶¹ Myanmar has been among the world’s worst countries for digital rights since the 2021 military coup.⁶² During 2024, the 85 internet shutdowns in the country often coincided with documented military junta human rights abuses and airstrikes on civilians.⁶³ Along with jailing journalists, revoking media licenses, and banning websites and mobile apps, the junta reportedly uses internet blocks to censor media and control the flow of information.⁶⁴ Internet shutdowns have spurred a recent resurgence in radio communications in Myanmar because of its affordability and accessibility.⁶⁵

The Trump administration’s decision to freeze foreign aid reportedly directly endangers around 300 Myanmar journalists living in exile in Mae Sot.⁶⁶ Independent Burmese news outlets, including *The Irrawaddy*, received USAID funding via Internews, a media nonprofit.⁶⁷ Aung Zaw, editor-in-chief of *The Irrawaddy*, said, of the foreign aid freeze, “I think the regime and its associates are gleefully happy to have heard this news.”⁶⁸ Some exiled journalists continue reporting, knowing they will not be paid, according to a Mae Sot journalist.⁶⁹

On February 24, *Myanmar Now* reported that photojournalist Sai Zaw Thaike and two other political prisoners have been subjected to beatings and torture at Yangon’s Insein Prison.⁷⁰

In January, the men reported abuses at Insein to the junta-controlled Myanmar National Human Rights Commission.⁷¹ In retaliation, prison staff have allegedly physically beaten, tortured and harassed Sai Zaw Thaike and his associates.⁷² Sai Zaw Thaike was arrested in 2023 while reporting on the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha, and sentenced to 20 years with hard labor by a military court.⁷³

IV. Economic Development

A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment

Singapore remains the top investor in Myanmar despite growing calls from human rights groups to block the flow of funds, arms, and jet fuel to the regime.⁷⁴ Singaporean businesses invested US\$456 million in projects in Myanmar last year, according to the junta-controlled Directorate of Investment and Company Administration.⁷⁵ Among 53 countries or regions that put money into Myanmar, the largest investors were Singapore, China, and Thailand as of the end of 2024.⁷⁶ The sectors with the most investment are energy, oil and gas, and manufacturing.⁷⁷

PTT Oil and Retail Business Plc (“OR”), Thailand’s largest oil trader by volume, is reportedly preparing to suspend refined oil exports to Myanmar in line with Thailand’s policy to hamper criminal gangs active in Myanmar.⁷⁸ OR exports 15-20 million liters of gasoline and diesel per month to Myanmar.⁷⁹ Thailand’s National Security Counsel resolved on February 4 to work with businesses to halt oil exports and telecommunications services to areas under suspicion, according to media reports.⁸⁰ Electricity supplies were cut on February 5 to five areas where Chinese-run scam gangs are active.⁸¹

Myanmar’s junta is seeking help from its neighbors to switch to solar energy as its energy crisis worsens.⁸² On February 10, Electricity Minister Nyan Tun said China will help fund four solar power projects, and the regime has also sought India’s help electrifying some government offices with solar power.⁸³ Nyan Tun said agreements had been signed for China to invest 1 billion yuan in building four solar energy projects in Yangon, Mandalay, and Naypyitaw with a combined capacity of 190 MW.⁸⁴ The regime is also asking India to install solar power systems at the junta’s central training center and the Department of Electric Power Planning in Naypyitaw under a small development project worth up to US\$2 million.⁸⁵

B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects

Russia is further pursuing its strategic interests in and military and economic cooperation with Myanmar, as evidenced by the Myanmar head of military government official’s visit to Russia for talks with Russian President Putin.⁸⁶ Russia and Myanmar also held joint military drills and signed a pact on developing nuclear power in Myanmar.⁸⁷ In addition, Myanmar’s government has committed to provide workers to go to Russia to fill labor force gaps in key sectors.⁸⁸ Three years after its invasion of Ukraine, Russia is facing severe labor shortages and needs some 400,000 workers, including for its manufacturing, construction, agricultural and livestock sectors.⁸⁹

The deepening of strategic and economic partnership between Russia and Myanmar follows a recent meeting between the Myanmar regime and Russian economic delegation and the

signing of multiple mutual cooperation agreements, including Russia's investment in the Dawei Special Economic Zone and in Myanmar's electricity generation and fertilizer, petroleum and petrochemical production.⁹⁰ The delegations also discussed ongoing and future cooperation on hydro, wind, solar and thermal energy projects in Myanmar, which has suffered from frequent power outages since the military coup.⁹¹

Peninsula Hotels has abandoned a stalled US\$130 million project in Yangon, saying it has no future in Myanmar.⁹² The project was to have been a joint venture with detained Myanmar tycoon Serge Pun's Yoma Group.⁹³ The planned 88-room hotel in central Yangon was part of an effort to redevelop the colonial-era Myanmar Railway headquarters.⁹⁴ Construction began in 2017 and was originally slated for completion in 2022 but halted four months after the February 2021 coup.⁹⁵ Peninsula Hotels wrote off the entire book value of the project, citing a bleak outlook four years after the coup, according to a profit warning posted on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.⁹⁶

C. Land Seizure

As of February 28, the AA has returned thousands of acres of farmland in the freed areas of Rakhine State to the original farmer proprietors, which were once commandeered and rented out by the Myanmar military.⁹⁷ A source affiliated with the AA said that after the AA gained control over certain townships in Rakhine State, agricultural lands located beyond military zones in these areas were given back to their original owners.⁹⁸ "Since the era of the State Law and Order Restoration Council ("SLORC"), many farmers' properties in Arakan State have been seized. Certain lands were situated in military zones, yet the military also forcibly appropriated agricultural lands beyond these zones, converting them into tenant farms. The current State Administration Council government has maintained the practice of turning farmers into tenants. When the AA seized control of the area, the confiscated farmlands located outside the military zones were given back to their legitimate owners. Farmers can now tend to their own fields without incurring any charges," the source clarified.⁹⁹ Since the SLORC period, the Myanmar military has confiscated extensive areas of agricultural land in Rakhine State to create military zones and bases.¹⁰⁰ It also aggressively seized agricultural land beyond these regions, turning it into tenant farms.¹⁰¹

V. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence

A. Ethnic Violence

According to research group Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica, ethnic armed groups in Myanmar liberated six townships and captured a junta regional command headquarters in December.¹⁰² The AA seized four townships – Maungdaw, Ann, Gwa and Taungup – in Rakhine State.¹⁰³ The AA also defeated and occupied the Western Military Command, located in Ann town.¹⁰⁴ The AA has liberated 14 out of 17 Rakhine State's townships, along with Paletwa Township in neighboring Chin State, since launching its western Myanmar offensive in November 2023.¹⁰⁵ December also saw the Chin Brotherhood – an alliance of six ethnic Chin resistance groups and PDFs from Magway and Sagaing Regions – liberate Mindat and Kanpetlet townships in southern Chin State.¹⁰⁶

The AA reports that it seized a junta defensive position in Ngape Township, Magway Region during the first weekend of February, killing several dozen soldiers.¹⁰⁷ At least three local resistance groups are reportedly attacking junta reinforcements along the Ann-Padan road in Ngape Township.¹⁰⁸ The groups are also blocking and attacking regime forces as they flee the AA's offensive.¹⁰⁹

The AA also exchanged artillery fire with the Myanmar military in Sittwe Township, Rakhine State on February 7.¹¹⁰ Sittwe, the state's capital and seat of junta administration, is the only town in northern Rakhine still controlled by the regime.¹¹¹

On February 2, the KIA captured a junta position in Bhamo, where the KIA has been fighting for two months.¹¹² Former junta captain and current defector Zin Yaw reported that the captured position was one of the junta's strongest positions in Bhamo.¹¹³ Further, on February 18, the KIA and allied forces seized the junta's infantry battalion 236 in Bhamo Township, Kachin State.¹¹⁴

Resistance fighters led by the Karen National Liberation Army seized the junta's strategic Mae Pale base in Mon State's Belin Township on February 2.¹¹⁵

The Karenni Nationalities Defense Force ambushed junta forces on February 4-5 trying to retake Moby town in Pekon Township, southern Shan State.¹¹⁶ The junta responded with airstrikes, according to residents.¹¹⁷

Anti-regime resistance groups have captured the Myanmar military's Kann Parr Ni base, located at the entrance to pro-regime militia-controlled territory in southern Kale Township, Sagaing Region, according to the Chin Defense Force, which coordinated the attack.¹¹⁸ Situated along the Kale-Gangaw Road on the southern bank of the Manipur River, the military base—manned by regime forces and pro-junta Pyu Saw Htee militia groups—serves as a strategic gateway connecting southern Kale Township in Sagaing Region to northern Gangaw Township in Magway Region.¹¹⁹

B. Peace Talks

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations ("ASEAN")'s Special Envoy to Myanmar, Othman Hashim, visited Naypyidaw on February 6–8, but the junta media did not cover the peace mediator's visit.¹²⁰ *The Irrawaddy* reports that the departure from the junta's usual promotion of such visits came at the request of the envoy, who also declined to meet with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing for unknown reasons, instead meeting with junta Foreign Minister Than Swe.¹²¹ The Special Envoy then traveled to Bangkok on February 8 for talks with the National Unity Government and the K2C group comprising the Karen National Union, Chin National Front, and Karenni National Progressive Party.¹²² The meeting reportedly focused on the cessation of violence, delivery of international humanitarian assistance and inclusive dialogue among stakeholders.¹²³

On February 9, Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, an Indian humanitarian and global peace envoy, met with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing.¹²⁴ According to *The Irrawaddy*, junta-controlled newspapers reported that the two discussed "the junta's efforts for peace and development in

Myanmar, the guru's efforts for peace around the world, Shankar's potential role in restoring peace and stability in Myanmar and junta efforts toward holding a free and fair election."¹²⁵ Shankar separately met with Yar Pyae, the junta's Minister of Border Affairs and chairman of the National Solidarity and Peace Negotiation Committee, to discuss their respective peace efforts in Myanmar and internationally, and plans for delivery of humanitarian assistance to Myanmar.¹²⁶

On February 19, the TNLA stated that no agreement had been reached during peace talks with a junta delegation led by Ko Ko Oo, the regime's Special Operations leader, that had begun on February 16 in Kunming, China.¹²⁷ According to *The Irrawaddy*, the TNLA proposed a halt to the fighting to permit civilians to receive food, clothes and medical supplies, but the Chinese special envoy concluded the discussion due to the complexity of the negotiations and recommended that both sides prepare new proposals for a follow-up meeting.¹²⁸

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- ¹⁴ The Irrawaddy, February 4, 2025: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/sagaings-wetlet-starves-amid-junta-blockade.html>.
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- ²⁹ *Id.*
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- ³³ Relief Web, February 25, 2025: <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/italy-contributes-eu3-million-support-rohingya-refugees-bangladesh-enbn>.
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- ³⁵ Relief Web, February 25, 2025: <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/japan-and-unhcr-sign-usd-16-million-agreement-strengthen-humanitarian-services-rohingya-refugees-enbn>.
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