STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR

JULY 2025 REPORT

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

I.	Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance	2
II.	Political Developments	2
Α.	Rohingya Refugee Crisis	2
В.	Corruption	3
C.	International Community / Sanctions	3
III.	Civil and Political Rights	
Α.		
В.		
IV.	Economic Development	
Α.		
В.		
С.		
V.	Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence	
A.		0 7

I. Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance

On July 1, Kayah resistance forces shot down a junta fighter jet during their offensive in Hpasawng town, Kayah State.¹ A total of 13 Myanmar junta aircraft have been shot down by resistance forces since the 2021 coup.²

Since July 8, around 150 junta troops have been allegedly torching villages in the Mandalay Region, displacing more than 20,000 residents from around 30 villages in Nyaung-U Township, which is home to the Bagan UNESCO world heritage site.³ These arson attacks allegedly took place when junta boss Min Aung Hlaing was reportedly planning a visit to the area.⁴

On July 17, a regime airstrike killed at least 20 people in villages along the Ayeyarwady riverbank in Wetlet Township, Sagaing Region.⁵ The airstrike took place as regime aircraft and vessels were reportedly heading to reinforce Bhamo in Kachin State.⁶

On July 19, resistance forces sank a junta supply boat carrying weapons and reinforcements during an attack on a junta flotilla on the Ayeyarwady River near Thabeikkyin Township, Mandalay Region, which is currently held by resistance forces.⁷

On July 30, the Myanmar military government introduced a new electoral law imposing severe penalties, including the death sentence, for actions deemed to disrupt the planned December election.⁸ The move, enacted five months before the scheduled poll, is reportedly seen by analysts as an attempt to crush dissent and intimidate the public amidst rising security concerns and a series of high-profile assassinations targeting military supporters.⁹ Critics argue that the law is designed to legitimize military rule under the guise of democratic reform, echoing past tactics used to suppress opposition to the regime.¹⁰

II. Political Developments

A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis

The extent of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ("UNHCR") funding shortfall was revealed in a report released on July 18, which said the UNHCR had so far received only 23% of this year's goal of \$10.6 billion, projecting an overall budget of only \$3.5 billion by the end of the year to meet the needs of 122 million people.¹¹ The crisis has been compounded by a major reduction in funding from the United States, which provided 40% – more than \$2 billion – of the agency's total donations last year.¹² More than 11 million refugees risk losing access to humanitarian aid owing to the funding crisis.¹³ In Bangladesh, education for some 230,000 refugee children is at risk of being suspended.¹⁴

On July 27, a fishing trawler carrying 20 Rohingya refugees landed on Saint Martin's Island's northern beach. Among the passengers were 16 men, three women, and a child. Border Guard Bangladesh ("BGB") officials said that the group could not be sent back due to rough conditions. A BGB officer said that the group will be repatriated as soon as the weather improves. As a result of the unrest in the Rakhine State between Myanmar's armed forces and

the Arakan Army ("AA"), an estimated 150,000 Rohingya have entered Bangladesh over the past 18 months, according to UNHCR.¹⁹

Human Rights Watch ("HRW") has accused the AA of committing grave abuses against the Rohingya population in western Myanmar's Rakhine State. ²⁰ In a statement released on July 28, the HRW said that after seizing territory in Rakhine State, the ethnic armed group has imposed movement restrictions, carried out looting, arbitrarily detained and mistreated civilians and committed unlawful forced labor, recruitment and other abuses against the Rohingya. ²¹ Elaine Pearson, HRW's Asia director said that the AA is carrying out "policies of oppression" against the Rohingya similar to the those long imposed by the Myanmar military in the state. ²² "The Arakan Army should end its discriminatory and abusive practices and comply with international law," she said. ²³

B. Corruption

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

C. International Community / Sanctions

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations ("ASEAN") stated on July 11 that an election in Myanmar is not a priority and instead emphasized that the immediate priority should be to cease all violence, enabling all parties to engage in dialogue.²⁴ Many international observers and human rights organizations view the proposed election as a sham aimed at legitimizing the Myanmar military regime's rule.²⁵ The ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights subsequently urged ASEAN to uphold its position, advocating for a refusal to legitimize the election and demanding an immediate ceasefire to facilitate genuine dialogue.²⁶

The European Commission announced, on July 22, a humanitarian aid allocation of €46 million to address the immediate needs of the most vulnerable populations in Myanmar. ²⁷ The funding aims to provide crucial support in areas affected by the ongoing crisis, including those impacted by natural disasters and conflict. ²⁸

On July 24, the United States Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control announced the removal of several individuals and companies from its Specially Designated Nationals list.²⁹ Among those delisted were KT Services & Logistics Company Limited and its chief executive officer Jonathan Myo Kyaw Thaung, Myanmar Chemical and Machinery Company Limited and its owner Aung Hlaing Oo, Suntac Technologies and its owner Sit Taing Aung, and Tin Latt Min, wife of sanctioned businessman Thein Win Zaw.³⁰ These entities and individuals had been previously sanctioned for their alleged ties to the Myanmar military and their alleged involvement in facilitating arms deals and leasing military-linked assets.³¹ The lifting of these sanctions followed a letter from Myanmar's junta chief, Min Aung Hlaing, to U.S. President Trump.³² The letter reportedly praised the Trump administration and was sent in response to a threat of tariffs from the U.S.³³ The move sparked criticism from human rights advocates and international observers.³⁴

On July 30, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, condemned the U.S. decision to withdraw sanctions.³⁵ He characterized the policy shift as a "shocking turn" and a "major step backward for international efforts to save lives by restricting

the murderous junta's access to weapons."³⁶ Andrews emphasized that companies directly involved in supplying weapons and military equipment to the Myanmar junta had facilitated the sale of aircraft, surveillance systems, naval guns, and technology for armored personnel carriers and tanks, and noted that sanctions had previously proven effective in reducing the volume of military imports by over 30% from 2023 to 2024.³⁷

Despite existing EU sanctions, on July 31, Conflict Armament Research reported that the Myanmar military is utilizing advanced European 'anti-jamming' technology in its uncrewed aerial vehicles ("UAVs").³⁸ The report highlights a trend of commercial entities, particularly those located on the China-Myanmar border, reportedly diverting these sensitive modules to the junta, circumventing bans on the export of arms and dual-use goods.³⁹ These modules significantly enhance the UAVs' capabilities against electronic countermeasures, enabling them to conduct attacks more effectively.⁴⁰

On July 31, following the Myanmar military junta's lifting of the state of emergency, Japan's Foreign Minister Iwaya Takeshi issued a statement urging Myanmar's military to "swiftly restore the country's democratic political system" and to take concrete actions, including immediately stopping violence and releasing detainees.⁴¹

In a separate humanitarian effort, Japan pledged an emergency grant of approximately US\$6 million in July to support those affected by the earthquake that struck Myanmar in March.⁴²

III. Civil and Political Rights

A. Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association

Myanmar has increased penalties for ballot-box-related violations five months ahead of the planned election. "Election sabotage" now carries 3-5 years in prison, "damaging ballot boxes, polling stations, or voting machines" carries 5-10 years in prison, and "any serious injury to voters, polling staff, candidates, or election officials" carries 10-20 years in prison. ⁴³ Any election offenses that result in the death of another can be punished with execution. ⁴⁴

On July 3, the *Irrawaddy* reported that the military regime sentenced an Indonesian influencer to seven years in prison for meeting with rebels in Myanmar.⁴⁵ The influencer was accused of entering Myanmar illegally and meeting with an armed rebel group categorized by the government as a banned organization.⁴⁶

B. Freedom of the Press and Censorship

On July 7, *Free Press Unlimited* reported that it has been providing support to Myanmar journalists in the wake of the March 28 earthquake.⁴⁷ Since the disaster, *Free Press Unlimited* has reportedly received a surge of requests from Myanmar journalists and media workers.⁴⁸ Through small grants, the organization distributes communications tools, power supplies and Starlink kits.⁴⁹ According to *Free Press Unlimited*, reporters and other media workers in Myanmar have limited access to functional internet connections; in addition to infrastructure breakdowns, the junta continues to deliberately restrict the internet, in and out of disaster zones.⁵⁰

After the earthquake, the military junta also announced that members of the foreign media were forbidden from entering Myanmar. ⁵¹

IV. <u>Economic Development</u>

A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment

The Central Bank of Myanmar has backlisted nearly 200 companies and their directors for violating foreign exchange regulations designed to line the regime's pockets with hard currency.⁵² Among those punished is a company linked to regime-aligned Kayin warlord Saw Chit Thu, who has been sanctioned by the U.S. for his involvement in cyber scams along the Thai border.⁵³

The Myanmar Investment Commission approved 35 new investment projects, which are expected to create over 9,000 jobs. According to a report by state-owned media, the projects include nine foreign investment projects in the industrial, oil and natural gas sectors, and 26 local investment projects in sectors such as hotels and tourism, services, electricity, agriculture, livestock, marine, construction and mining. 55

The Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations recently formed a task force to boost regional and international energy cooperation and investment. Electricity minister Nyan Tun and energy minister Ko Ko Lwin attended a meeting on July 23 in Naypyitaw while regional and state chief ministers joined online. Electricity and Energy Development Commission chairman Tin Aung San called for a "one-stop service" to simplify land access for energy projects and to reduce bureaucratic hurdles.

B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects

Myanmar's military regime formed the Myanmar Space Agency on June 1.⁵⁹ According to a gazette published by the regime, Min Aung Hlaing will personally vet and approve the experts to the appointed to the agency.⁶⁰ The agency's mandate includes storing and distributing satellite imagery; signing memoranda of understanding and agreements and cooperating with international organizations, universities, companies and individuals; launching government and privately owned satellites; and budgeting for technological expenses, equipment procurement, infrastructure development and administrative costs.⁶¹ However, only Russia is apparently currently cooperating with the regime on space technology.⁶²

Myanmar and Russia are reportedly working to establish a new trade corridor connecting Russia with Yangon Port through Mumbai Port in India. While details of the project have not been released, junta media reported that Myanmar Minister for Transport and Communications Mya Tun Oo and a Russian delegation led by Alexander Sergeevich Shatirov, director of the Roscongress Investment Fund, discussed importing high-quality fertilizers from Russia and expansion of bilateral e-commerce ventures at a meeting in Naypyitaw on July 14. The Irrawaddy reports that the planned corridor "reflects a broader effort by both nations to forge alternative trade partnerships amid tightening sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies."

The Myanmar military is reportedly increasing protection efforts of China's Belt & Road investments across the country in areas that have been lost to resistance forces in recent years. ⁶⁶ Rakhine State Chief Minister Htein Lin focused on key Chinese infrastructure projects during an inspection of Kyaukphyu Township, where clashes between junta forces and the Arakan Army have intensified in recent weeks. ⁶⁷ On July 16, he toured the US\$180-million gas-fired power plant in Kyaukphyu's planned special economic zone, a joint venture with Chinese state-owned firm PowerChina. ⁶⁸ The following day, he visited Maday Island, the starting point of oil and gas pipelines supplying landlocked Yunnan Province. ⁶⁹

The junta announced on July 26 that a Russian-based steel plant in southern Shan State will be fully operational by November 2026. Described by the regime as an "important venture," the No. 2 Steel Mill project in Pinpet near the southern Shan State capital of Taunggyi was shelved in 2017 by the now ousted National League for Democracy ("NLD") government over financial concerns. The steel mill is a joint iron exploitation-processing project between the military-owned Myanmar Economic Corporation and VO Tyazhpromexport, a subsidiary of Russian state corporation Rostec, which also supplies weapons and military vehicles to the regime.

C. Land Seizure

The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army's ("MNDAA") capture of Hsenwi in northern Shan State during Operation 1027 in 2023 triggered a wave of Chinese investment across northern Shan State. The In areas between Lashio and Kunlong under MNDAA control, local farmers are reportedly under pressure to lease their land to Chinese sugarcane investors, often at below-market rates, with threats of land seizure if they refuse. Locals say the rapid expansion of sugarcane plantations, encouraged by the MNDAA, has severely disrupted traditional grazing lands. Mhile the MNDAA has framed its policies as vital for post-war progress, critics have argued that the group now functions as a quasi-state landlord, trading access and land rights to foreign interests with little accountability.

V. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence

A. Ethnic Violence

Kayah resistance forces reportedly seized Infantry Battalions 134 and 135 in Hpasawng town on July 2 after more than a week of fighting.⁷⁷ The seizure allows the Kayah resistance force access to Hpasawng, Bawlakhe and Mese townships.⁷⁸

Starting July 10, clashes have reportedly intensified over a key naval outpost currently controlled by the junta. ⁷⁹ According to locals in the area, the AA attacked the outpost for at least six consecutive days. ⁸⁰

From July 11 to July 14, fierce clashes occurred in the Tanintharyi area as the Karen National Liberation Army pushed to seize the Myanmar junta's outpost at Nat Ein Taung.⁸¹

Kayin resistance forces seized the Ukayit Hta outpost held by the junta in Myawaddy Township on July 12, on the Myanmar-Thai border in Kayin State. ⁸² The seizure prompted around 100 junta soldiers to flee across the border to Ban Wale Tai village in Thailand. ⁸³

On July 15, the junta recaptured Nawnghkio, a town in northern Shan State, which the regime lost in July 2024 to the Ta'ang National Liberation Army ("TNLA"). He recapture marks the junta's second recent major gain in northern Shan, following its recapture of the capital, Lashio, in April. Resistance fighters report that the regime used aircraft, drones, missiles and heavy artillery to bomb the town into submission. The junta's victory was reportedly supported by Chinese pressure on the TNLA to halt their offensives.

On July 30, the regime reportedly carried out an airstrike on Kutkai town in northern Shan State, which is under the joint control of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the TNLA, killing seven civilians, including a child.⁸⁸ The regime allegedly targeted a hotel with two 250lbs bombs.⁸⁹ Two houses were damaged in the strike as well.⁹⁰

B. Peace Talks

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

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- ²⁶ *Id*.
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- ³⁴ *Id*.
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