

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR

MARCH 2026 REPORT

Summary. This report reviews the March 2026 developments relating to human rights in Myanmar.

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I. Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance

On March 2, the Myanmar regime granted amnesty to over 7,000 political prisoners.¹ These prisoners were convicted for either financing or sheltering a “terrorist” group.² Many of the groups designated as “terrorist” by the Myanmar regime are reportedly groups that have protested or challenged the military regime.³ Further, close to 12,500 people who have been charged with this offense will reportedly have their cases dropped.⁴

The Irrawaddy reported on March 4 that the Myanmar military seized Min Kone village, south of Tagaung on the Mandalay-Bhamo road from People’s Defense Forces.⁵ Tagaung is located on the Irrawaddy River at the northern tip of Mandalay Region, and is an important gateway to Sagaing Region and Kachin State, commanding a Chinese-backed nickel plant.⁶ On March 11, *The Irrawaddy* reported that the Myanmar military had also captured Tagaung.⁷

II. Political Developments

A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis

The Government of Japan renewed its commitment to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, pledging \$2.6 million in March for shelter materials, primary healthcare and clean cooking sets.⁸ In congested camps seasonally exposed to torrential rain, strong winds and drought, most Rohingya refugee shelters are built of bamboo and tarpaulin, and regularly require urgent repairs.⁹ Japan’s commitment covers essential repair materials for some 3,300 households, as well as the training and engagement of 300 shelter volunteers from the Rohingya community.¹⁰ It also strengthens health services through primary healthcare centers and health posts and engaging 162 refugees as community health workers.¹¹

The United Nations World Food Programme (“WFP”) is set to overhaul its food assistance system for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh starting April, aiming to ensure that every household receives a minimum level of food support despite mounting funding pressures.¹² The WFP said it will introduce a needs-based, tiered system that prioritizes the most vulnerable families while maintaining basic food assistance for all.¹³ Under the new approach, aid will be distributed based on levels of food insecurity identified through a 2025 survey, *Reuters* reported.¹⁴ Under the revised system, households will be grouped into three categories, extremely insecure, highly insecure, and food insecure, with monthly assistance set at \$12, \$10, and \$7 respectively in Cox’s Bazar.¹⁵ The most vulnerable groups, including households led by women, children, elderly individuals or persons with disabilities, will also receive additional fresh food vouchers to improve diet diversity.¹⁶

On March 25, Bangladeshi State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam reminded the UN that repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar is the only viable solution to the prolonged refugee crisis.¹⁷ In view of existing funding shortfalls, the State Minister called upon UNHCR to maintain its ongoing efforts to address the most pressing humanitarian needs, including food, medicine, water and sanitation and education under the Joint Response Plan.¹⁸ UNHCR Country Representative Ivo Frijsen expressed appreciation for Bangladesh’s

generosity in hosting a large number of Rohingya refugees over the years and reaffirmed UNHCR's steadfast commitment to supporting Bangladesh in this humanitarian crisis.¹⁹

Bangladesh's Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner, Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, welcomed a new humanitarian food assistance program funded by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, describing it as a vital contribution to sustaining Rohingya refugees and strengthening bilateral ties between Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia.²⁰ The program, launched in Cox's Bazar, will provide food assistance to approximately 60,000 vulnerable families, including 42,000 Rohingya refugees and 18,000 members of host communities.²¹

B. Corruption

Detained President Win Myint and State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi were formally charged on March 18 with five additional counts of corruption relating to the rental and purchase of a government helicopter for use during natural disasters and state emergencies.²² Prosecutors alleged that they each had misappropriated public funds in connection with the helicopter procurement.²³ Aung San Suu Kyi has already received a cumulative 26-year sentence across 14 prior charges, and Win Myint has previously been sentenced to five years in prison on three charges. Critics widely regard the prosecutions as instruments of political persecution.²⁴

On March 25, advocacy group Justice for Myanmar ("JFM") published findings that Min Aung Hlaing's family had acquired a luxury residence worth approximately US\$3 million in the Issara Residence Rama 9 development in Bangkok.²⁵ According to JFM, the purchase was made through proxies to evade both Thai property restrictions and international sanctions, with Myanmar military-linked arms broker Tun Min Latt named as facilitating the transaction.²⁶

On March 31, the military's parliamentary bloc elected former Prime Minister Nyo Saw as one of three vice presidents, positioning him as a candidate among which the presidential electoral college will select a president.²⁷ Coinciding with the announcement, *The Irrawaddy* republished a profile documenting Nyo Saw's long record of allegedly leveraging military procurement to enrich himself and senior generals.²⁸ As quartermaster general from 2014 to 2020, he oversaw a tendering process in which business owners were allegedly required to accept prices dictated by his directorate rather than compete openly, and reportedly amassed considerable personal wealth in the process.²⁹ He also oversaw the construction of Min Aung Hlaing's private hospital, Kan Thar Yar, which is formally registered as a business of the military-owned Myanmar Economic Corporation.³⁰ The European Union sanctioned him in December 2023 for his role in Myanmar's post-coup governance.³¹

C. International Community / Sanctions

On March 3, the Co-Regional Director for Amnesty International, Montse Ferrer, told the *Irrawaddy* that "Myanmar's fuel supplies ha[d] been dealt a double blow, after major carriers suspended operations in the Strait of Hormuz" as a result of the conflict between the United States and Iran.³² Amnesty International further warned that "the regime could not pivot back to Southeast Asia to secure fuel from previous suppliers in Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, China and Malaysia."³³ In addition to potentially disrupting the Myanmar regime's ability to import jet fuel, an anonymous military analyst further suggested that the "onslaught by U.S. and

Israeli forces [in Iran] would also degrade Tehran's ability to export arms," noting that the crisis in the Middle East "could cut off not only the supply of jet fuel by ghost ships but also the export of drones to the regime."³⁴

The United Kingdom announced on March 4 that an emergency brake "on visas has been imposed for the first time on nationals from 4 countries [including Myanmar] following a surge in asylum claims from legal routes."³⁵ The United Kingdom Home Office has ended sponsored study visas from Myanmar in a step it claims is to stop "visa abuse" to allow it to "maintain [its] ability and proud tradition of helping those genuinely in need."³⁶ These new measures are also reportedly intended to follow the Prime Minister's "decision to adopt a more hard-edged approach to diplomacy to ensure [the UK's] rules are always respected and the migration system is based on fairness."³⁷

Myanmar regime media reported on March 6 that Saudi Arabia had expressed interest in expanding investment, trade and border cooperation with Myanmar, including the energy sector.³⁸ This reporting followed a series of March 5 meetings between the Saudi Arabia ambassador to Myanmar, Maziad Mohammed M. Al-Howishan, and Min Aung Hlaing and Myanmar Foreign Minister Than Swe in Naypyitaw.³⁹

United Nations ("UN") Special Rapporteur on Rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, presented his final report to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 13. In his statement, he noted that the "current geopolitical climate is less than conducive to advancing human rights in Myanmar."⁴⁰ He further called on UN member countries to increase their efforts "to weaken the military junta's ability to sustain itself and its attacks on the people of Myanmar"; noting that he had seen signs that these actions had shown promise, but also "that the resolve of governments [to keep up the pressure was] waning."⁴¹ During the week of March 13, he also warned that Myanmar's rights and humanitarian situation risks getting "much worse" as global attention shifts to the war in Iran.⁴² In his interview with *AFP*, he noted that Myanmar had already seen a "significant decrease in humanitarian aid" during a time when the need for such aid "continue[s] to rise significantly."⁴³ Going further, he noted that the focus on Iran may lead to a situation where the crisis in Myanmar "becomes completely hidden from view. And support for the courageous people of Myanmar, who are risking life and limb daily . . . support for things like humanitarian aid, it's all going south."⁴⁴

On March 27, the UN's World Food Programme released data showing a "fragile recovery" from the earthquake that hit Myanmar last year.⁴⁵ According to the analysis, one in six households "continue to face moderate to severe food insecurity, whilst half of all families remain only marginally food secure."⁴⁶ The organization called for an additional \$150 million to assist the people of Myanmar and noted that the conflict in the Middle East is having a disruptive effect on transportation and fuel prices thus "pushing up the cost of moving food and agricultural goods, placing additional strain on households already struggling to afford essentials."⁴⁷

On March 31, the United Kingdom Human Rights Ambassador, Eleanor Sanders, gave a speech in Geneva regarding the situation in Myanmar. In her statement, she noted that "the human rights crisis in Myanmar remains one of the most severe and urgent situations on [the

United Nations’] agenda, and the international community cannot look away.”⁴⁸ She announced the United Kingdom’s support of draft resolution L.24/Rev.1, which she noted “rightly documents the full scale of atrocities committed by the Myanmar military since the 2021 coup” including “indiscriminate airstrikes, the burning of villages, mass displacement, arbitrary detention, torture, systematic sexual- and gender-based violence, and the ongoing persecution of ethnic and religious minorities.”⁴⁹ She also cast doubt on the validity of the recent elections, calling them the “military’s recent unilateral elections” and noting that large swaths of the country, “including many key political actors,” were excluded from the vote.⁵⁰

III. Civil and Political Rights

A. Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association

On March 5, Myanmar’s military regime introduced a nationwide mobile-device registration system reportedly in an effort to enhance its surveillance powers and restrict information flow.⁵¹ The Central Equipment Identity Register (“CEIR”) requires every mobile device’s unique IMEI number—rather than just the SIM card—to be registered before it can connect to a network in Myanmar.⁵² Linking IMEI numbers with SIM-card registration gives authorities the ability to map a user’s every movement.⁵³ According to digital-rights analyst Thit Nyan from the Myanmar Internet Project (“MIP”), “Because the SIM and IMEI are tied together, operators can also identify who called whom and at what time. And if the authorities want to, they can intercept and listen in.”⁵⁴ Rights groups warn that the new registration system, combined with digital ID initiatives and expanded interception capabilities, represents another step in the regime’s effort to build a comprehensive surveillance state.⁵⁵ The Myanmar regime characterizes the CEIR system as a standard measure to curb illegal imports and ensure tax compliance, but the MIP warns that it provides the state with the tools to precisely track user locations, remotely control devices, and target individuals for communication blocks.⁵⁶

The Myanmar regime passed a law on March 17 mandating new e-passports, a move that opposition groups warn is part of a broader effort to stifle freedom of movement and ramp up surveillance.⁵⁷ In establishing a central ten-member Issuance Board, which holds the ultimate power to approve or reject applications, critics say that the law could widen the scope for surveillance in the absence of effective data-protection laws, and enable further harassment and abuse.⁵⁸ The new law gives the Issuance Board the power to cancel existing passports and blacklist applicants if notified by “relevant ministries,” and provides that passports could be denied to anyone “who is considered to be undertaking subversive activities that undermine national security and the national interest.”⁵⁹ Legal experts say these provisions not only target known dissidents but give regime officials arbitrary rights to designate anyone, including political dissidents, as enemies of the state.⁶⁰

The Political Coordination Body (“PCB”), a group formed by diverse political forces inside Myanmar with the aim of promoting federal democracy, on March 31 called for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, including State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, as one of nine demands.⁶¹ Its demands came as the Min Aung Hlaing regime prepares to form a pseudo-civilian government following December-January elections. Min Aung Hlaing was elected as a vice-president by the Lower House, and is expected to assume the presidency, pending a parliamentary vote to select the president from

among three vice-presidents. The PCB also called for guarantees that citizens' rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression be upheld and urged armed groups to avoid forced conscription and military actions that harm civilians, including attacks on religious buildings, hospitals and schools.⁶²

B. Freedom of the Press and Censorship

On March 2, the Myanmar regime released four journalists as part of an amnesty of over 7,000 individuals who were convicted under the Counterterrorism Law.⁶³ The four journalists are Hmu Yadanar Khet Moh Moh Tun, Myat Kalay (Naing Win Tun), Than Htike Myint and Yan Naing Soe.⁶⁴ The journalists were serving sentences ranging from 5 to 13 years under the Counterterrorism Law, which the military regime amended and expanded after the 2021 coup.⁶⁵ Filmmaker Shin Daewe was also purportedly scheduled for release but remained in detention as of March 4.⁶⁶ Shawn Crispin of Committee to Protect Journalists urged the regime to release all journalists in detention, saying, "If military authorities want to signal a less repressive, more open era after elections, they should free all, not just a few, journalists held behind bars."⁶⁷

According to a report from Human Rights Myanmar and Independent Press Council Myanmar, the regime expanded internet censorship during the recent elections.⁶⁸ Researchers found that independent media outlets were blocked 93% of the time during the elections, compared to 79% before the elections.⁶⁹ Independent media outlets known for critical reporting were blocked, while media outlets that support the Myanmar regime were almost fully accessible.⁷⁰ The Myanmar regime also reportedly targeted social media sites during the election; Facebook was blocked 98% of the time, X, 88% of the time and Instagram, 81% of the time.⁷¹ The Myanmar regime has reportedly been blocking VPNs as well as VPN circumvention tools.⁷²

IV. Economic Development

A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment

The Central Bank of Myanmar ("CBM") reportedly intervened in the foreign exchange market throughout early to mid-March by selling millions of U.S. dollars to oil importing companies and injecting millions of Thai baht into the market.⁷³ These actions reportedly aim to stabilize the foreign exchange market and curb currency depreciation amid ongoing volatility.⁷⁴ To support this effort, CBM has also reportedly coordinated with law enforcement to address currency market manipulation and, since December 2023, allowed authorized private banks to conduct online foreign exchange trading freely at market-determined rates based on supply and demand.⁷⁵

The Myanmar Investment Commission ("MIC") announced that it will accept Chinese yuan in addition to U.S. dollars for foreign investment activities, according to a statement released on March 16.⁷⁶ Under the new arrangement, proposals and applications submitted to the MIC can now include foreign capital in either U.S. dollars or Chinese yuan.⁷⁷ All related

transfers and payments must be carried out through authorized dealer licensed banks that are permitted to handle foreign exchange transactions.⁷⁸

Myanmar's fuel prices surged in March following the introduction of a digital rationing system, sparking a backlash from motorists across the country.⁷⁹ The system—implemented across Yangon, Mandalay, Naypyitaw, and Taunggyi—scans car tax barcodes or motorcycle QR codes to enforce strict fuel quotas based on vehicle type.⁸⁰ The Myanmar regime also limited motorists to a maximum of two refueling trips per week and ordered all staff to work from home every Wednesday.⁸¹ The new weekly limit replaces the existing “odd-even” rationing system. The new restrictions followed U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran, which have disrupted oil shipments and driven up global fuel prices.

B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

C. Land Seizure

On March 29, Myanmar troops and police reportedly forcibly evicted over 80 residents from their homes in Nawngtawng Village.⁸² On March 30, in a related event, members of the military-aligned PA-O National Organization militia arrived in Nawngtawng and Nyaungpin villages in Hopong with bulldozers, reportedly intending to demolish local homes.⁸³ Protests began, and on the night of March 30, the Myanmar regime carried out a nighttime raid in which it reportedly broke down the doors of local homes and abducted 12 protestors.⁸⁴

V. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence

A. Ethnic Violence

Tensions between the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (“TNLA”) and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (“MNDAA”) escalated sharply around Kutkai in northern Shan State throughout March, with both sides reinforcing positions after the TNLA forced MNDAA troops out of Kutkai, a town the TNLA had administered since capturing it during Operation 1027 in January 2024.⁸⁵ The standoff intensified in mid-February when TNLA troops removed MNDAA-installed CCTV cameras along the Union Highway and stormed an MNDAA office, triggering tit-for-tat arrests of personnel and a total blockade by the MNDAA of cargo and fuel trucks traveling north toward Kutkai, causing fuel and food shortages and a sharp rise in commodity prices.⁸⁶ On March 14, the MNDAA launched a large-scale offensive against TNLA positions in Kutkai Township using drones and heavy artillery.⁸⁷ MNDAA forces also captured 47 TNLA soldiers and confiscated their weapons at the Muse (105) Mile and Kyinsankyawt border trade points on the China-Myanmar border.⁸⁸ By midnight on March 15, the TNLA withdrew from its last strategic position and Kutkai fell entirely under MNDAA control; the MNDAA simultaneously seized TNLA bases in Nant Hpat Kar village on the China-Myanmar trade route and reopened the Lashio-Muse highway, which had been blocked since mid-February.⁸⁹ Following two days of talks in Laukkai beginning March 17, the MNDAA and TNLA reached a ceasefire agreement; under the agreed terms, Kutkai was placed under

MNDAA administration, detained personnel and confiscated weapons were to be exchanged, and both sides affirmed their intention to maintain the Brotherhood Alliance.⁹⁰

On March 8, four Myanmar military jet fighters and four Y-12 aircraft reportedly carried out repeated bombing runs for more than three hours on an Arakan Army (“AA”)–run prisoner of war detention camp in the Dar Lat Chaung area of Ann Township, Rakhine State, killing 116 prisoners of war and detainees and injuring 32 others.⁹¹ Former regime Brigadier General Thaug Tun, who survived the strike, stated that the Myanmar military had conducted multiple reconnaissance flights over the facility in the preceding weeks and would have known its own troops were housed there; he and other survivors reported that AA prison officers broke open prison doors during the bombardment to evacuate prisoners.⁹² According to an analysis by the Rakhine-based *Development Media Group*, the Ann strike was the sixth aerial attack on AA-run detention facilities since 2024, bringing the cumulative toll of prisoners of war and family members killed in such strikes to at least 226.⁹³

On March 5, Myanmar military columns entered Yay Twin Kone village tract in Kyaukkyi Township, Nyaunglebin District, Bago Region, an area controlled by the Karen National Union (“KNU”) and reportedly detained around 160 civilians.⁹⁴ Two days later, on March 7, when Karen National Liberation Army (“KNLA”) forces engaged the Myanmar military forces, the military reportedly launched airstrikes using drones and jet fighters on the area, killing around 25 detained civilians.⁹⁵ Myanmar troops separately allegedly executed five local men aged 35 to 53, bringing the total civilian death toll to approximately 30, according to the KNU.⁹⁶

On March 10, Myanmar air force fighter jets reportedly carried out aerial attacks along the Irrawaddy River in Hsinhskan village tract of Bhamo Township, Kachin State—an area under Kachin Independence Army control since May 2024—killing more than 30 civilians and destroying five boats.⁹⁷ Residents described the jets opening fire on vessels and along the shore, igniting fuel tanks and triggering fires.⁹⁸

In late March, the AA escalated its assault on the Rakhine State capital of Sittwe, launching a coordinated attack on the Shwe Min Gan naval base on the Kaladan River on March 23, using heavy weapons and snipers from across the river.⁹⁹ Fighting on March 24 reportedly killed around 30 to 40 Myanmar soldiers, with further clashes erupting on March 27 as AA forces advanced to within approximately 500 feet of the naval installations.¹⁰⁰

B. Peace Talks

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

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