

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR

MAY 2026 REPORT

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

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I. Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance

Eleven fighters from resistance group Taungtha People's Defense Force ("PDF") were reportedly killed on May 4 by regime forces in Taungtha Township, Mandalay Region.¹ The government soldiers allegedly burned the PDF fighters along with their vehicle.²

Residents of Pakokku, Magwe Region reported that regime forces had blocked civilian access to food and medicines in the area on May 19.³ The government has reportedly blockaded the town entrance, making it impossible for civilians to transport food and medicine in or out of the town.⁴

On May 19, the Myanmar military and allied troops, including the Zomi Revolutionary Army, recaptured Tonzang, in northern Chin State, on the mountain road that leads to the Indian border.⁵ Fighting and airstrikes reportedly displaced civilians from Tonzang and surrounding villages, with many fleeing into the hills.⁶ The military also reportedly detained five displaced villagers from Lomzang village.⁷

II. Political Developments

A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis

In May, the United Nations and its partners, in close coordination with the Government of Bangladesh, appealed for USD 710.5 million to meet the most critical needs of Rohingya refugees in the Cox's Bazar camps and on Bhasan Char, as well as local host communities.⁸ The call comes amid growing global instability and rising humanitarian pressures, which have forced difficult prioritization and threatened essential services for vulnerable populations.⁹ The USD 710.5 million appeal, 26% lower than in 2025, covers only the minimum required to sustain lifesaving assistance.¹⁰ The appeal followed a four-day joint high-level donor mission, which included a two-day visit to Rohingya camps and host communities in Cox's Bazar, with participation from key partners: Australia, Canada, the European Union, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom.¹¹

The Minister of Home Affairs of Bangladesh, Salahuddin Ahmed, made urgent appeals to international donors to resume aid for more than 1.18 million Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, stating that there has been a drastic decline in global aid which is jeopardizing the welfare of one of the world's most vulnerable displaced communities.¹² In conversations held with UNHCR Country Representative Ivo Freijsen on May 5 and Australian High Commissioner Susan Ryle on May 6, Ahmed emphasized that there has been a 50% decrease in the budget allocated by the United States to help Rohingya refugees.¹³

UNHCR announced a EUR 2 million contribution from the Government of Finland to sustain life-saving assistance and protection for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.¹⁴ With this increased contribution, Finland enables UNHCR to fill critical gaps, including in underfunded areas such as skills development and resilience programming.¹⁵ "As the Rohingya response enters a fragile phase – marked by declining funding, worsening camp conditions, rising

protection risks, and continued instability in Myanmar – Finland’s stepped-up commitment shows great generosity,” said Ivo Freijsen, UNHCR Representative in Bangladesh.¹⁶

A coalition of Bangladeshi NGOs recently expressed opposition to the construction of permanent-structure shelters in Rohingya refugee camps.¹⁷ Member Secretary Zahangir Alam alleged that UNHCR, through BRAC and Infinix, had started constructing permanent-structure shelters in camps without consulting local authorities, elected representatives or political leaders.¹⁸ He warned that the development of durable infrastructure inside camps was creating resentment among local residents and could encourage additional refugee arrivals into Bangladesh.¹⁹

At the end of a two-day visit to Rohingya refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar, IOM Global Goodwill Ambassador Dimash Qudaibergen encouraged the international community to continue strengthening support for more than one million Rohingya refugees living in one of the world’s largest refugee settlements.²⁰ “The world must not forget the humanitarian needs of the Rohingya people. Behind every number is a story of resilience, hope, and survival,” he said.²¹

B. Corruption

The Irrawaddy published a detailed analysis on May 27 of how two members of Min Aung Hlaing’s inner family circle have allegedly leveraged state power for private gain.²² His daughter Khin Thiri Thet Mon acquired a stake in Shwe Byain Phyu, the company that absorbed Telenor Myanmar’s operations and rebranded as ATOM, in a move that reportedly gave the family access to subscriber data for approximately 18 million users; she has since built a vertically integrated EV business encompassing vehicle imports, charging stations and telecom tower construction through Pinnacle Asia.²³ His wife, Kyu Kyu Hla, who was sanctioned by the United States, the European Union and Canada, is described as a central figure in the family’s patronage network, including facilitating heavily subsidized military land transfers to personal associates, and as having played a behind-the-scenes role in government-linked arms broker Tun Min Latt’s 2024 acquittal by a Thai court.²⁴ *Bloomberg* reported in April 2026 that the regime had engaged Roger Stone, a longtime ally of U.S. President Trump, at US\$50,000 per month through the DCI Group, a Washington lobbying firm that had separately contracted with the regime for US\$3 million, reportedly to improve Myanmar’s standing with the Trump administration.²⁵

On May 29, *The Irrawaddy* reported that the regime formally enforced a scheme requiring owners of vehicles over 20 years old, or those deemed unfit for use, to surrender them in exchange for permission to import a replacement EV.²⁶ The EV market is reportedly dominated by Min Aung Hlaing’s son Aung Pyae Sone, the exclusive importer of Chinese BYD vehicles, and his daughter Khin Thiri Thet Mon’s NPK Motors.²⁷ The government has also exempted EVs from its fuel-rationing restrictions, allegedly creating additional financial pressure on motorists to transition to electric vehicles.²⁸ Critics widely described the scheme as designed principally to generate revenue for the family’s EV businesses at public expense.²⁹

C. International Community / Sanctions

On May 6, the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, which is comprised of former foreign ministers and former United Nations experts, urged the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (“ASEAN”) leaders to abandon the Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar and adopt new measures at the 48th ASEAN Summit.³⁰ In a joint statement, the group warned that the regime “was exploiting ASEAN’s restraint while escalating atrocities against civilians” and described the recent election as a “calculated half-measure[s] designed to secure international legitimacy without genuine concessions.”³¹

The ASEAN secretary-general announced on May 7 that the ASEAN foreign ministers had agreed to a virtual meeting with Myanmar.³² Since 2021, Myanmar’s leadership has been barred from top ASEAN meetings and is now reportedly interested in normalizing ties with the ASEAN nations.³³ The meeting follows a May 4 statement from Thailand’s foreign minister indicating that he planned to invite his Myanmar counterpart to meet top regional diplomats, aiming to build consensus within the ASEAN bloc for greater engagement with the new regime.³⁴

On May 8, ASEAN met in the Philippines to discuss issues affecting the region, including the situation in Myanmar following the launch of the new military-backed government.³⁵ According to the post-meeting statement, the ASEAN leaders intend to stand committed to the Five-Point Consensus agreed with the military government in 2021.³⁶

India launched its ninth UN Peacekeeping Officer Course for Myanmar servicemen on May 11.³⁷ The training program was reportedly set to run until May 22, and the launch ceremony was attended by India’s Ambassador Abhay Thakur, defense attachés, Indian instructors and the Myanmar trainees.³⁸ This latest program was the second UN Peacekeeping course held in Myanmar since the 2021 military coup that India has hosted, and saw thirty officers from the army, navy and air force studying UN peacekeeping ethics, civilian and child protection, military-civilian cooperation, patrolling, convoy security, company base construction and Blue Helmet exercises.³⁹

Malaysian foreign minister, Mohamad Hasan, visited Myanmar on May 19 to meet with his regime-appointed counterpart. According to Hasan, “he told the Myanmar side to stop the violence and atrocities against its people” and noted that he felt that the “country appears to be more open to talks with the opposition.”⁴⁰

On May 21, the United Nations announced that the European Union had made an additional EUR 8,000,000 contribution to the United Nations World Food Programme to address the “sharp rise in food and fuel prices [throughout Myanmar], driven by the Middle East crisis.”⁴¹ In the announcement, the UN noted that one in four people in Myanmar – 12.4 million – are acutely food insecure, while 3.7 million remain displaced by ongoing conflict.⁴²

III. Civil and Political Rights

A. Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association

The regime granted amnesty to four prominent artists to mark the Full Moon Day of Kason.⁴³ The four artists – film directors Thet Lwin (also known as Zambu Htun Thet Lwin) and Aung Chan Lu, comedian Ohn Daing, and actor Kyaw Win Htut – had been serving maximum seven-year sentences under the Election Protection Law for criticizing the military’s electoral processes and its propaganda relating to them.⁴⁴ Thet Lwin and Aung Chan Lu were originally sentenced for using “Love” and “Haha” emoji reactions on social media posts critical of the regime.⁴⁵ The release comes as part of a wider amnesty involving more than 1,500 prisoners, though human rights observers maintain that the list consists almost entirely of common criminals, with virtually no political prisoners included on the list.⁴⁶ Film director Mike Tee was not included in the amnesty; he has remained imprisoned since his November 2025 arrest for allegedly criticizing the government’s election propaganda film, *Khit Thamine Ko Done Saing Myi Thu Myar*.⁴⁷

On May 19, the Athan Freedom of Expression Activist Organization released a new report on how the regime is handling free expression, including revelations that 215 individuals were detained across Myanmar between July 2025 and March 2026 for exercising their right to voice political opinions or critique the polls.⁴⁸ To legally justify the widespread silencing of political dissent, the military regime reportedly relied heavily on its “Law on the Protection of Multi-Party Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption and Destruction.”⁴⁹ The 215 detainees included 120 ordinary civilians, 52 politicians and a number of prominent activists and cultural figures.⁵⁰ The judiciary handed out multi-year prison sentences with hard labor to both public figures and ordinary citizens.⁵¹ The prosecutions counted nine youths, including three young people jailed for possessing anti-election literature and two others who were allegedly forcibly funneled into the military’s ongoing national conscription drive.⁵² The report concludes that these legal mechanisms were disconnected from legitimate public safety.⁵³

B. Freedom of the Press and Censorship

On April 29, *Reporters Without Borders* (“RSF”) published its World Press Freedom Index, giving Myanmar a score of 166/180.⁵⁴ Myanmar remains in the “red zone” of the Index for its alleged ongoing persecution of the media.⁵⁵ According to RSF, General Min Aung Hlaing, “openly promotes a policy of terror towards journalists who do not toe the junta’s line.”⁵⁶ At least 39 journalists and two media workers reportedly remain in detention in Myanmar.⁵⁷ On May 3, Independent Press Council Myanmar released a statement for World Press Freedom Day, also warning of the ongoing deterioration of press freedom.⁵⁸ The Council voiced opposition to the government’s revocation of media licenses and urged the authorities to release all arbitrarily detained journalists.⁵⁹

The regime revoked the publishing licenses of three local media outlets, *Myaelatt Athan*, *Red News Agency* and *Asia Citizens*, on May 11, effectively banning them.⁶⁰ The Information Ministry claimed the targeted media outlets violated § 8(b) of the Printing and Publishing Enterprise Law, which proscribes the publication of content deemed harmful to national security, the rule of law and public peace.⁶¹ Ko Ye Thwin Hein, who founded *Myaelatt Athan*, said, “It’s

not a surprise that we have been banned. It's the habit of the dictators; they will never accept independent media."⁶² The new government has banned a total of six media outlets since it came into power in April.⁶³

The Myanmar Press Council called a meeting with media outlets on May 15 to request tighter scrutiny of reporting that China has been erecting border fences inside Myanmar.⁶⁴ The Press Council expressed concern for Myanmar's relations with China as the reason for the meeting and request.⁶⁵

A May 27 *Human Rights Myanmar* report alleges that major digital platforms impeded Myanmar's independent media during the elections between December 2025 and January 2026.⁶⁶ Media outlets have reportedly increasingly relied on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok since the 2021 coup and amid the government's alleged efforts to destroy the local media ecosystem.⁶⁷ Digital platforms have purportedly deleted media content, using opaque, automated moderation systems with ineffective appeals mechanisms.⁶⁸ 76% of the surveyed outlets reported the deletion of photographs and 59% reported the deletion of video content.⁶⁹ "By deleting our conflict coverage, the platforms are penalizing the witness and helping the murderer hide the evidence," one editor told researchers.⁷⁰ Also, according to the report, many independent outlets are unable to receive platform monetization revenue because they cannot meet the technology companies' corporate registration requirements.⁷¹

IV. Economic Development

A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment

More than 1,000 workers in Yangon's Shwepyithar Township will reportedly lose their jobs when Kings Rich Fashion, a supplier to H&M, closes at the end of June.⁷² Management cites a decline in global orders, but workers say the shutdown reflects Myanmar's broader economic downturn since the 2021 military coup.⁷³ The closure comes amid reported widespread labor unrest, layoffs and wage disputes across Yangon's industrial zones.⁷⁴ Labor advocates warn that employers are exploiting the economic crisis to suppress organizing, leaving garment workers, many already struggling to cover basic living costs, with little protection or recourse.⁷⁵

Chinese Ambassador Ma Jia held talks with Myanmar Vice President Nyo Saw on May 19 following Beijing's renewed pledge of economic and diplomatic support for the military-led regime.⁷⁶ Discussions focused on accelerating the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor ("CMEC"), part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, with Myanmar pledging to safeguard Chinese projects, boost trade and investment, and cooperate on border security and crackdowns on online scams.⁷⁷ The meetings also involved other senior officials and underscored strengthening bilateral ties.⁷⁸ Later in the month, on May 28, officials from Myanmar and China signed the Agreement of Cooperation on Projects of the Lancang–Mekong Cooperation Special Fund (2026), which the Ministry of the President's Office of Myanmar says has been key in implementing development projects in the country.⁷⁹ Despite these commitments, key CMEC areas reportedly remain affected by conflict, with strategic regions and trade routes controlled by ethnic armed groups, including the Arakan Army and MNDAA.⁸⁰ Although some ceasefires

have been reached under Chinese pressure, analysts warn that without a lasting political settlement, instability could persist, threatening both infrastructure projects and broader economic ambitions.⁸¹

B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects

On May 5, Myanmar's military regained control of the Mandalay–Myitkyina Highway, reopening it for civilian use 15 months after the military launched its counteroffensive in Mandalay's Singu.⁸² According to state-owned media, access to the corridor had been temporarily blocked as PDF groups seized control of certain villages and towns.⁸³ The highway is a key route connecting central Myanmar to the north, facilitating travel, improving the flow of goods, supporting access to education and more.⁸⁴ Recapture of the Mandalay–Myitkyina Highway is strategically important for the military, as it reportedly uses this route to transport troops and supplies to the Northern Command's base in Kachin State.⁸⁵

Myanmar state media reported new national solar projects in May, including a Thazi 40-megawatt plant and a Thabyaywa 40-megawatt facility, and officials have said that hydropower development, including stalled mega-dam projects, is vital to achieving electricity access nationwide by 2030.⁸⁶

On May 27, state-owned media reported that the Development Affairs Committee of the Kayah State government allocated more than 300 million kyats from its budget for the 2026-27 financial year towards infrastructure projects, including power supply and road construction. The Committee is inviting domestic companies and entrepreneurs to submit proposals until June 5.⁸⁷

On May 31, Min Aung Hlaing delivered a speech at the Myanmar–India Trade and Investment Conclave in New Delhi, highlighting Myanmar's plans for sustainable development in cooperation with partner countries, like India.⁸⁸ India currently has 39 investment projects in Myanmar, with key initiatives to open the ASEAN–India economic corridor and facilitate bilateral trade including the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway.⁸⁹

C. Land Seizure

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

V. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence

A. Ethnic Violence

On May 5, the Myanmar military regime seized full control of the Mandalay–Myitkyina Highway, a strategic corridor running through Sagaing Region into Kachin State, after a 15-month counteroffensive.⁹⁰ Control of the highway allows the regime to reinforce positions around Bhamo and potentially cut off routes to Kachin Independence Army (“KIA”) headquarters in Laiza.⁹¹ Following the recapture, regime convoys supplied reinforcements at Katha, Indaw and Maw Luu, prompting renewed clashes with the KIA and allied resistance

groups, who ambushed reinforcements and attacked military positions along the road.⁹² Most civilians reportedly fled Maw Luu as soldiers poured in, joining residents of at least 20 nearby villages who escaped to Kachin State.⁹³ Both the Myanmar military and resistance forces separately announced the road's closure.⁹⁴

On May 11 and 12, Myanmar military warplanes reportedly conducted at least eleven airstrikes on Mindat and surrounding areas in southern Chin State, an area administered by the Chin People's Union and Chin People's Army ("CPU/CPA"), killing four people including at least one prisoner of war and destroying fifteen civilian homes and ten government buildings; residents sheltered in bunkers throughout the day.⁹⁵ On the night of May 12, two Myanmar fighter jets and a Y-12 transport aircraft allegedly struck the Hotel Zone in Kanpetlet, a town south of Mindat also under CPU/CPA control, with the fighters striking three times and the Y-12 dropping approximately nine bombs, including cluster munitions.⁹⁶ Myanmar military forces have also reportedly positioned approximately 500 troops and seventeen vehicles at Laung Shey in Saw Township and a separate reinforcement force at Kan Gyi village in Magway Region, roughly ten miles from Mindat, ahead of what revolutionary military sources suggested likely signals an upcoming ground offensive in southern Chin State.⁹⁷ Between May 13 and May 22 the regime allegedly carried out at least twenty-five further airstrikes across Mindat, Kanpetlet and the third CPU/CPA-held town of Matupi, destroying homes, shops and government offices.⁹⁸ On the night of May 19, two airstrikes on Matupi reportedly killed a four-day-old infant, whose death was attributed by local sources to shock and blast vibrations rather than direct impact.⁹⁹ On May 26, the Myanmar military reportedly dispatched a fleet of seven jet fighters and a Y-12 transport aircraft reconfigured as a bomber to conduct a heavy coordinated assault on Matupi beginning around 10:00 a.m., with local sources reporting that the bombing targeted areas previously used by the military and that no casualties had been reported at the time.¹⁰⁰ Between May 1 and May 21, airstrikes across Chin State killed eleven civilians and wounded ten others according to the research institute *Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica*, and the ground offensive has reportedly triggered the displacement of an estimated ten thousand people from Kyaukhtu and Saw townships.¹⁰¹

In Rakhine State, the Myanmar military reportedly continued its campaign of airstrikes on Arakan Army ("AA")-controlled civilian areas throughout May. On May 7, Myanmar aircraft bombed villages and detention sites in Minbya and Kyauktaw Townships, killing three civilians, including a child, and injuring nearly ten others, according to the AA.¹⁰² On May 21, two fighter jets allegedly carried out approximately ten bombing runs over Kyeintali in southern Rakhine State, injuring nine civilians and damaging homes.¹⁰³ On the same day in Ramree Township, suicide drones reportedly struck a monastery, injuring a monk and a novice.¹⁰⁴ Ongoing fighting near the Taung Maw Oo naval base in Kyaukphyu Township reportedly displaced more than seven thousand additional civilians in late May; with earlier displacement figures combined, approximately fifty thousand people are estimated to be displaced in the area with urgent need for food and shelter before the monsoon season.¹⁰⁵ On the morning of May 28, two fighter jets and two Y-12 aircraft reportedly bombed a road repair site on the Pine Nae Taung-Maw Oo road between Ramree and Kyaukphyu Townships in two waves, dropping nearly thirty bombs.¹⁰⁶ A backhoe driver from Gyi Phyu Taung village in Ma Ei Township was killed and seven others were injured.¹⁰⁷

On May 21, three gyrocopters reportedly dropped bombs on two villages in Thayetchaung Township, Tanintharyi Region; a bomb struck a house in the southern part of Uttuu village, killing three civilians and seriously injuring at least four others.¹⁰⁸ On May 24, a jet fighter allegedly bombed civilian homes in the Kyaikdon area of Karen National Union Brigade 6 territory in Kayin State, killing three women and seriously injuring two others including a sixteen-year-old girl; several houses and a vehicle were also destroyed.¹⁰⁹ In a separate attack around the same time in Le Mu Lah Township, Karen National Union Brigade 4 territory, Myanmar military aircraft reportedly dropped two 500-pound bombs on Hpar Kwin village, damaging a preschool building.¹¹⁰

In the early hours of May 20, Myanmar troops and allied Shanni Nationalities Army militia forces allegedly set fire to Hmaw Wan Lay village in Hpakant Township, Kachin State, destroying approximately sixty homes.¹¹¹ Before torching the village, the troops allegedly beat and interrogated approximately twenty residents who had remained behind to guard their property, and confiscated jade stones and cut jade pieces belonging to civilian residents.¹¹² The arson followed a May 19 drone attack by KIA and allied PDF forces that reportedly killed four Myanmar military soldiers.¹¹³ On May 30, three civilians in Lone Khin village, Hpakant Township, were reportedly killed by Myanmar military forces after being accused of having butchered and sold a cow that had been shot by soldiers.¹¹⁴

B. Peace Talks

On May 28, *the Irrawaddy* reported that Indonesia planned to hold informal talks concerning Myanmar, including meetings with representatives of political groups, ethnic armed organizations and the regime with the aim of peacefully resolving ongoing internal conflicts.¹¹⁵

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