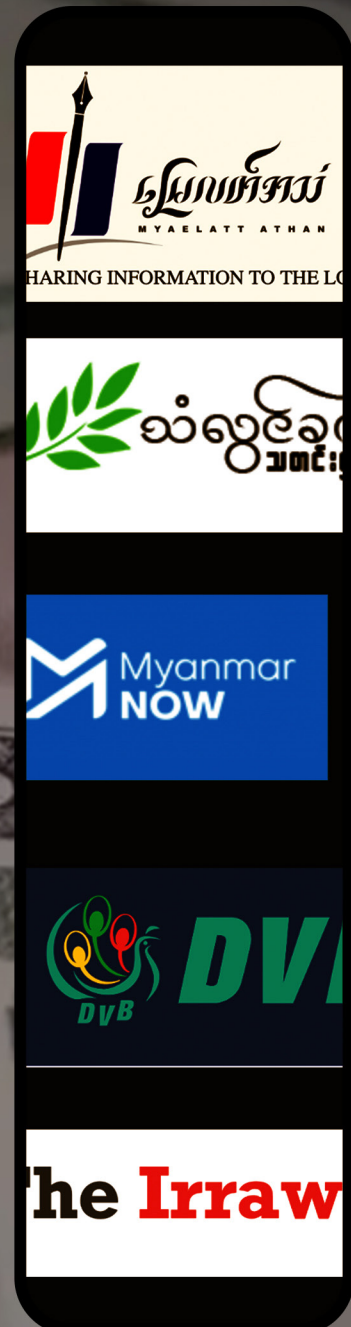




FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION  
ACTIVIST ORGANIZATION

JANUARY–MARCH 2025

# UPDATE ON JOURNALISM AND MEDIA SAFETY IN MYANMAR



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## Highlights

In the first quarter of 2025, two Myanmar journalists were arrested while two were released. A second conviction was handed down to a journalist who was already serving a sentence for terrorism. The life sentence of a documentary filmmaker was commuted to 15 years as part of a prisoner amnesty announced by Myanmar's military regime at the start of the year.

By the end of March 2025 – just as the country marked the fourth anniversary of the military coup of February 2021 – 60 journalists remained in jail.

Incidents reported in the first quarter also included the attempted assassination of a citizen journalist, as well as beatings and forced labour of a jailed photojournalist who, along with two other political prisoners, had told visiting junta-appointed officials about the abuses suffered by inmates in Insein prison in Yangon.

For Myanmar's media, the first quarter of 2025 also brought a major challenge – a cut in US government-sourced funding that is a lifeline for many independent news outlets. This is a consequence of the Trump administration's shutdown of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of its wide-ranging overhaul of US foreign assistance and huge cuts across the country's federal bureaucracy.

USAID is a major source of grants for many independent news outlets in exile, with some newsrooms relying on US grant funds for up to 45% of their budgets.

This end to US government-funded grants is a major blow on top of mix of challenges that Myanmar journalists face, such as threats to the physical and digital safety of journalists, difficulties with obtaining documents in order to stay in exile in Thailand and decreasing donor funds that were already forcing some newsrooms cut back on operations and salaries last year.

The cuts, which included approved funds for 2025, have resulted in major budget reductions in major Myanmar news outlets and threaten to shutter smaller independent news outlets. Their full effects are expected to be more evident in the coming months and years. The halt in US-sourced grants have also meant the dismantling of training programmes, including around reporting and safety, fact-checking and others.

US government-funded news outlets that cover Myanmar and have Burmese-language services were also shut down in the first quarter of 2025, following a decision by the Trump administration to close the US Agency for Global Media, the federal agency that oversees them. Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, which provided consistent coverage of Myanmar, have now been shuttered.

One more journalists' organisation, the Journalism Alliance Network, was formed in Myanmar's news community during the first quarter of 2025.



## Arrests and detention

Two journalists – one in Ayeyarwaddy and the other in Mandalay – were arrested during the first quarter of 2025.

Than Htike Myint, a former journalist with Myat Latt Athan, was arrested at his home in Myan Aung township in Hinthata district, Ayeyarwaddy, on 6 February 2025. He had returned to his hometown as his wife was due to give birth. After seven days of interrogation at the 51st Infantry battalion (Khalaya - 51), he was charged with terrorism under the [Section 52\(a\) of the Counter-terrorism Law](#) on 12 February 2025.

Than Htike Myint, also known as Aung Kaung Lin, had first been arrested in 2021 under Section 505A of the Myanmar Penal Code, which punishes incitement against the military regime and its officials, and was released in an amnesty the following year. His story shows how local journalists, who are known within their communities, are subjected to surveillance by authorities when they enter or leave their home areas.

Khaymani Win, a former journalist with Radio Free Asia (RFA), was arrested in Mandalay on 25 March 2025, according to ['The Mirror Daily'](#) newspaper run under the military. She was arrested after a woman whom she had an argument with on Facebook reported her as a journalist working for an overseas-based Myanmar news outlet. Her having been an RFA reporter may have been the reason for her arrest.

## Convictions

A journalist who was serving his prison sentence received a second conviction on a separate charge, while another detainee serving a life sentence saw her sentence reduced. Htet Aung, a journalist with the Rakhine-based Development Media Group, [was convicted](#) on 19 December for broadcasting without a licence under Section 96 of the Television and Radio Broadcasting Law. He was sentenced to five years in prison. (While this second conviction was handed down in December, it became public in January 2025.)

Htet Aung was already serving a five-year jail sentence with hard labour after he [was convicted](#) under Section 52(a) of the Counter-Terrorism Law on 28 June 2024. He was arrested in Sittwe, Rakhine State, on 29 October 2023 while covering an almsgiving event in the Thidingyut festival. His second conviction brings his total sentence to 10 years.

The Broadcasting Law used against Htet Aung has been amended twice by the SAC since the coup, first in [2021](#) and again in 2023. The [2021 amendment](#) introduced prison terms of six months to five years in addition to the fines originally provided for violations of the law, and allowed police to arrest violators without warrants. The 2023 amendments put the Television and Radio Broadcasting Council under junta control.

Meantime, documentary filmmaker Shin Daewe's sentence was reduced from life imprisonment to 15 years on 4 January, as part of commutations announced in a prisoner amnesty that the SAC issued for Myanmar's Independence Day. On 5 January, the junta [announced](#) that it had commuted the life sentences of 144 individuals to 15-year prison terms, in commemoration of Myanmar's 77th Independence Day the day before.

Shin Daewe had been sentenced to life imprisonment in January 2024, after being convicted by the Insein Special Prison Court for violating the Counter-terrorism Law (Sections 50 (j) and 54 (d)). She was arrested in October 2023 while picking up a video drone that her husband says she had ordered online to use in a documentary.

## Releases

Two journalists were released in the first quarter of 2025.

Kyaw Zayar, chief editor of Kanbawza Tai news agency, was released on the 2nd of January after finishing his sentence for incitement. He had been [in hiding](#) when he was arrested on 25 December 2022 in Kyaikpiankauk, Bago region, and his conviction was handed down on 9 January 2023. (Since the coup, four journalists from Kanbawza Tai have been arrested and sentenced to three years in prison under Section 505A. All have now been released.)

U Tun Win, former editor of Shwe Mandalay Weekly, was also freed in January as part of the SAC's amnesty for Independence Day. Arrested in July 2023, he had been convicted under Section 505A of the Penal Code.

## Other incidents

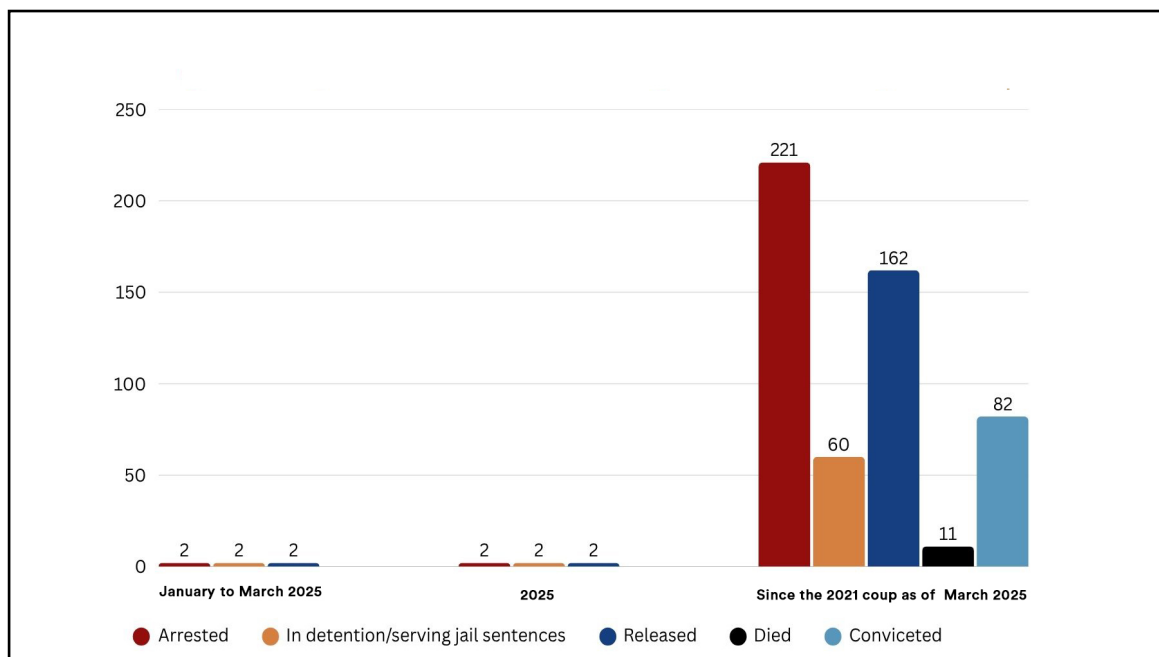
According to a local journalist's [Facebook post](#), Hpakan-based citizen journalist Tin Hlaing survived an assassination attempt around noon on 28 February 2025. A gunman entered Tin Hlaing's house and attempted to pull a gun from his bag, but the journalist is said to have fought back. The assailant then fled the scene.

### One more outlet loses its licence

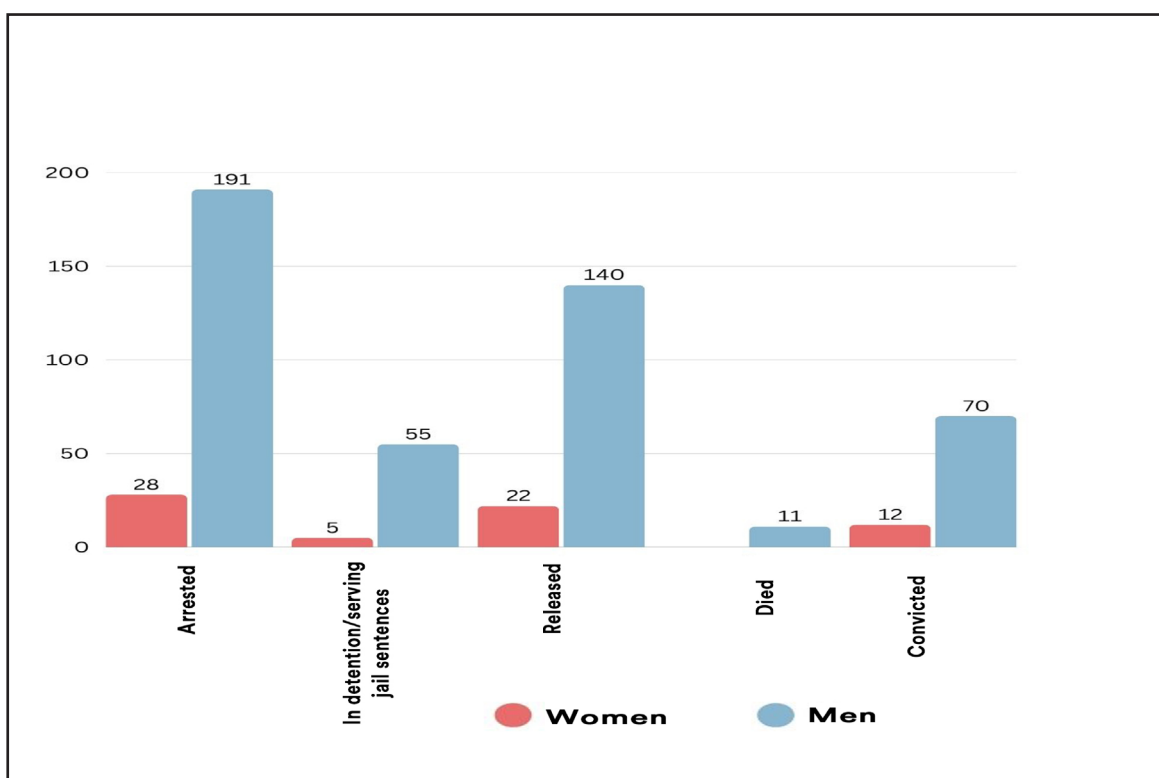
The news licence of the online outlet 'Myanmar News Week' was revoked in February for vinciting anti-military content on their Facebook page, local sources confirmed.

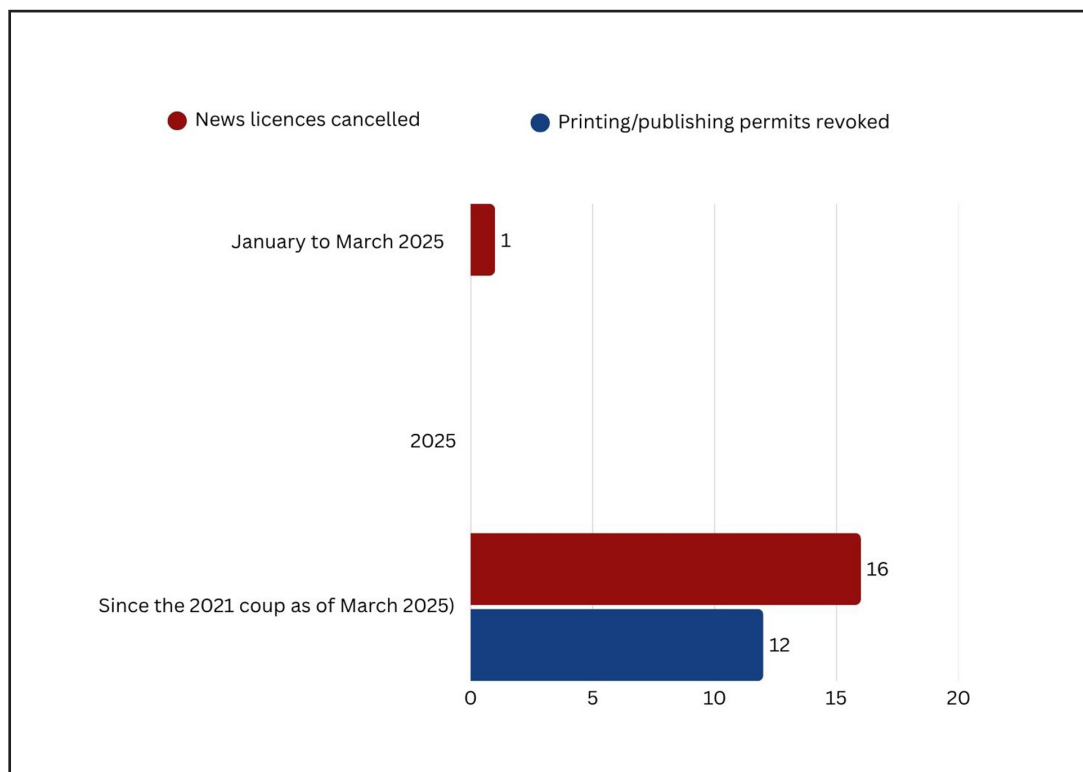
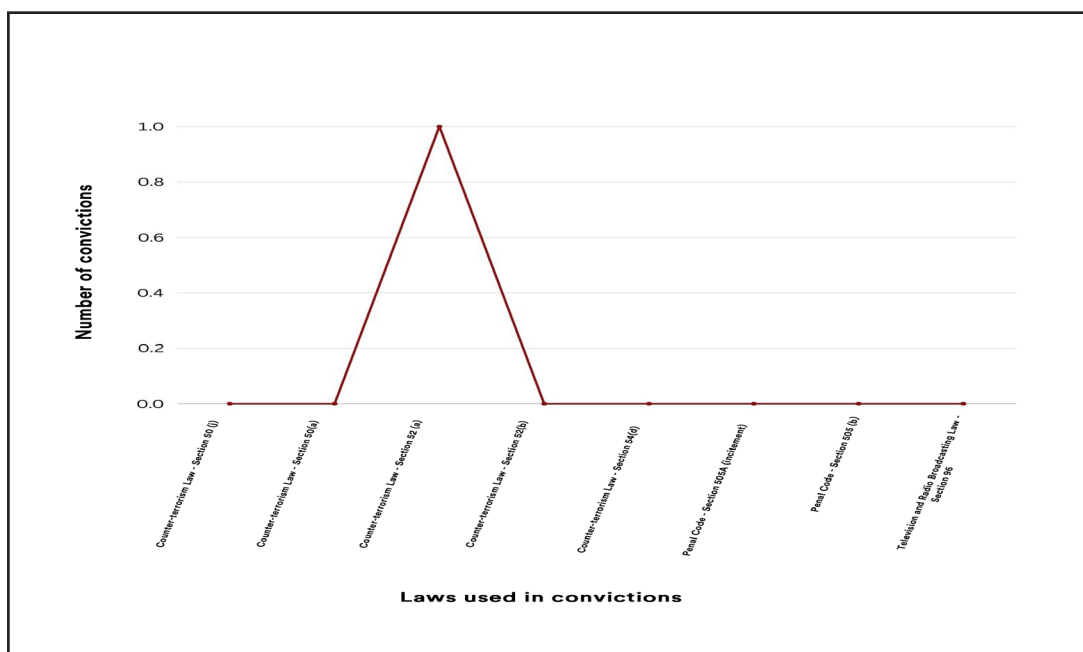
This brings to 16 the number of news media outlets whose licences have been revoked, in addition to 12 printing and publishing permits that the military regime has withdrawn since the coup.

**Table 1. Monitoring Media Repression in Myanmar**



**Table 2. Monitoring Media Repression in Myanmar**



**Table 3. Monitoring Media Repression in Myanmar****Table 4. Breakdown of Convictions of Journalists by Law, 2025**

*\*This table does not include the second conviction of Htet Aung, which was handed down in December 2024 but was reported and confirmed in January 2025. It will, however, be reflected as an update to the 2024 count (reported in the annual report for that year) and to the overall number of convictions of journalists.*

## Torture: The price of speaking up on prison abuses

'Myanmar Now' [revealed](#) that three detainees – its photojournalist Sai Zaw Theik, labour rights activist Thet Hnin Aung and political prisoner Naing Win – were tortured inside Insein prison in Yangon after disclosing the maltreatment of inmates by prison staff to the junta-appointed National Human Rights Commission in January 2025.

In a [23 February article](#) quoting "sources inside the prison", 'Myanmar Now' reported that the three prisoners "have been beaten and tortured day and night by prison authorities since January" in what is believed to be "a retaliatory response" after they reported prison abuses to rights commission who came on an inspection visit.

In the second week of January, these detainees were moved from regular prison quarters to the military intelligence and "punishment" wards inside Insein prison. This relocation signified a shift to intensified surveillance, harsher conditions and more brutal treatment. They were forced to carry out hard labour, given tasks such as cleaning toilets, carrying waste bins, hauling stones and digging earth. At night, they were left in open concrete areas and beaten, the news report said.

Myanmar Now's Sai Zaw Theik is [serving a 20-year prison sentence](#) for sedition, following his arrest while covering the impact of Cyclone Mocha in Sittwe, Rakhine State in May 2023.

## Independent media grapple with loss of US funding

The cutting off of grant funds from the United States has added to the challenges that Myanmar's independent media face after the 2021 coup - one that poses major risks for their survival in the long term.

This could have devastating ripple effects, silencing truth tellers and leaving the Myanmar public in an even deeper information void when reliable news, including from conflict zones, ethnic regions and borderlands, are needed more than ever. Disinformation and propaganda are also widely used by the SAC, not least given that the junta has [announced](#) that elections will be held in December 2025.

The impacts of the loss of US grant funding are significant because American funding accounts for a major chunk of donor resources, which have been a [lifeline](#) to Myanmar's independent media in exile.

Among their major donors was the [US Agency for International Development](#), whose



operations were frozen by the Trump administration as soon as it took office in January 2025. By the end of February, USAID's shutdown was [completed](#) as part of the new US administration's realignment of foreign assistance to its 'America First' policy and massive reconfiguration of the country's federal bureaucracy.

Major Myanmar media houses have reported losing about a third, or 30 to 35%, of their budgets as a result of the suspension and end of US government funding, according to a [brief](#) published by the Singapore-based ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in April. Taking a wider perspective, reliable analysts familiar with the Myanmar media estimate that US funding accounted for 40 to 45% of overall funding for the support and development of the country's media, ranging from those in exile to those working in liberated areas inside the country. Nearly all these media outlets have been affected by the loss in US funding.

"This situation is reminiscent of the panic following the 2021 military coup," said Toe Zaw Latt, secretary of the Independent Press Council Myanmar (IPCM). "Now it feels like a second wave of chaos, almost like a 'Trump military coup', creating another layer of instability."

"Many journalists remain determined to continue their work despite the hardships, which is deeply admirable. However, sustaining this in the long term will be extremely difficult, and the quality and quantity of news production are likely to suffer as a result, " he explained. (Read the full interview in the 'Voices' section below.)

Some impacts are already being felt in cutbacks in operations and reductions in news and newsroom staff, Myanmar media representatives shared in [a private discussion](#) with the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

"At least 10 other media outlets were at risk of closure by end-February; a media consortium that once had nine members has already lost three of them," said the [same brief](#) on the impact of US aid cuts on Myanmar media. "Ethnic media outlets targeted at communities such as the Chin and Karen are at severe risk of disappearing entirely, since they rely almost solely on US contributions."

More than 200 Myanmar media professionals have been affected by the stop in US grants, with half facing layoffs and others being asked to work for less pay, it added.

In March, the Trump administration terminated funding for the [US Agency for Global Media](#), an independent federal agency that oversaw "public service news networks" in "countries where the press is restricted". It oversaw Radio Free Asia and Voice of America, which cover Myanmar and have Burmese-language services and shortwave radio services that have been widely used by Myanmar audiences over decades.

These developments took place in a context where Myanmar media outlets, which had to leave the country after the coup, were already facing a decline in international donor support due to shifting global priorities. In 2024, several were already scaling back operations and undertaking

salary cuts ranging from 10% to 40%, laying off not only reporters and journalistic staff but administrative ones.

Myanmar's media also have limited options for raising commercial revenues such as advertising, given that the media market in Myanmar has collapsed under the military regime – although they have been pursuing efforts to monetize their presence on social media and other platforms.

The altered media landscape since the coup has turned Myanmar's media from a semi-commercial industry into one largely dependent on external support for survival, the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) has said. This heavy reliance on donor funding has made the sector highly vulnerable, a reality that the funding challenges in recent years has starkly exposed.

“The [media] executives say that international funding opportunities started decreasing in 2023, and that 2024 has proven to be extremely challenging; this is in large part due to the significant periods between one grant ending and a new one beginning, and uncertainty as to which outlets will receive new grants,” according to 'The Business of Independent Media in Post-Coup Myanmar: Experimenting with Business Models inside the Country and in Exile', which was published by MDIF in September 2024. "Another challenge is that available funds are mostly short-term and one-off, and often tied to content production," said the report, which analyzed insights from interviews with 40 senior media executives.

Research by the MDIF also showed that grants covered about half of the average media outlet's operating costs in 2021 and 2022. It found that national media depended on grants for up to 91.3% of their costs in 2021, while ethnic and regional outlets managed to sustain more of their operations through alternative non-social revenue streams.

Apart from USAID, the European Union and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency are among the major funders of Myanmar's media community. Their grants often aim to support independent journalism, improve media literacy, and strengthen the capacities of ethnic and regional news organisations. Along with human rights organisations, international donors provide emergency funding, operational grants, and support for relocating journalists to safer locations.

USAID often funded media development programmes, not just emergency grants. These aimed to build long-term capacity through training on investigative journalism, digital security, fact-checking and coverage of sensitive topics like human rights or disinformation.

Many [Myanmar journalists](#) work in hiding, from refugee camps, or in neighbouring countries like Thailand and India. They rely on donor funds not just for salaries, but for equipment, secure internet, travel costs, training and even personal safety.

In the light of concerns about diversifying revenues and surviving in the long term, Myanmar

news outlets have been reaching out to their audiences for through financial contributions and solidarity.

On 3 March, the Rakhine-based Development Media Group [called for public support](#) through financial contributions, engagement and solidarity, to sustain its operations amid growing challenges. These include rising operational costs and limited financial resources, which have placed DMG under considerable strain and threaten its long-term sustainability. DMG publishes content in Rakhine, Burmese and English to attract both local and international audiences.

### Another journalists' group formed

One more organisation of journalists was formed in the first quarter of 2025, bringing to five the number of such groups and networks set up since the 2021 coup.

The Journalism Alliance Network was launched by Human Color, CJ Platform and Thanlwin Khet news agency with the aim of strengthening independent journalism in Myanmar on 25 January. The network aims to enable the public to access news more quickly, to foster the emergence of well-qualified journalists, to explore independent and sustainable models of journalism, to further develop the digital news ecosystem and to collaborate with international media organisations.

The other existing media groups are the Independent Myanmar Journalists Association (created in June 2023), the Burma Media Consortium (June 2023), the IPCM (December 2023) and the Myanmar Journalist Club (August 2024).

In the circles of the junta-accredited media, meantime, the Myanmar Journalists Association established the [Mon State Journalists Association](#) on 11 March. This is part of its development of state-level journalist associations in different regions across the country.

## Voices

### Halt in US funding:

**'It feels like a second wave of chaos, almost like a Trump military coup'**

Toe Zaw Latt, secretary of the Independent Press Council Myanmar, shares his insights about what the end of US funding for the country's media means.

#### **What is the immediate impact of the cut in USAID funding on media organisations and their work?**

The financial impact varies. Organisations with multiple funding sources are only partially affected, although some of their programmes can no longer continue. Meanwhile, smaller outlets that relied entirely on funding from the NED ([National Endowment for Democracy](#), whose funds have been suspended since January 2025) or USAID are now facing the possibility of shutting down completely. The situation is broader than just these two groups. Major media platforms like VOA (which had an audience of about 19 million) and RFA (around 16 million listeners), both directly funded by the US government, have also been forced to suspend operations.

#### **Have journalists approached IPCM for assistance, and do you have the number of those impacted?**

IPCM has provided immediate support. Although we received 181 applications, we were only able to support 82 journalists. Roughly 25% of the workforce [in Myanmar media] has already been impacted, and it is estimated that this could reach up to 50% by August.

#### **What are the immediate difficulties for exiled journalists and media organisations that previously depended on US funding for legal processes such as visa applications?**

Many exiled journalists have had to halt their processes of extending or applying for legal documents, such as pink cards (for staying in Thailand), due to the funding cuts. Some who could previously support themselves through their journalism income and rent their own homes are now being forced to move in with friends or colleagues because they can no longer afford rent. They continue their journalistic work but are now living collectively [which has also resulted in overcrowded living situations].

This situation is reminiscent of the panic following the 2021 military coup. Now it feels like a second wave of chaos, almost like a "Trump military coup," creating another layer of instability.

Many journalists remain determined to continue their work despite the hardships, which is deeply admirable. However, sustaining this in the long term will be extremely difficult, and the quality and quantity of news production are likely to suffer as a result.

### **What would be possible solutions in the current media landscape?**

There are possible solutions that we are trying to implement. For example, as a trainer, I am currently providing new modules focused on sustainable business models. We are introducing concepts like Ukraine's [media] subscription project, seeking donations from overseas supporters and producing special content or investigative stories for digital platforms.

We are also exploring how to generate revenue from Facebook and YouTube. Facebook provided 2 billion US dollars in advertising revenue globally, and YouTube likely offers even more, yet Myanmar has barely received any share of it. Our goal is to transition from heavy donor reliance to self-reliance by tapping into digital streams. So, while the situation is difficult, there are still pathways forward, and we continue to push toward them.

### **What threats can arise if and when alternative funding sources try to fill the vacuum? There are concerns about China's influence in the media sector?**

Yes, absolutely. In March, the '[Forum on Myanmar Beyond 2025: Navigating Challenges and Opportunities in a Multipolar World](#)' was held in Nay Pyi Taw, organised by the Myanmar Narrative Think Tank under the Ministry of Information, with Min Aung Hlaing in attendance. It has been confirmed that this forum was sponsored by China, and the organisers were from China-funded media organisations.

They also convened a peace conference, followed by military events like Military Day (which is actually Revolution Day), and soon after, the earthquake occurred (on 28 March 2025). March was full of critical events. I would say that China's attempts to expand its influence in Myanmar's political landscape – directly and indirectly – have already extended into the media sector.

Additionally, Russia's involvement cannot be ignored. Russia is establishing cybercrime units in Inn Taing town and working on psychological warfare strategies ("psywar"). Without independent media and access to accurate information, there is a very high risk of the public being overwhelmed by propaganda and disinformation, much of it driven by Russia. Therefore, independent media are critical to counter these threats. However, the current funding cuts and the instability facing journalists severely undermine the public's access to reliable information, which ultimately is a major loss for the people of Myanmar.



### **How devastating and scary is the current situation?**

It is the worst I have seen in my 20 years of working in the media sector. We've gone through many challenges before, but this time the threats come from multiple angles. That said, we are not giving up. Many of us started from nothing once before, and we will continue to survive with determination. What we are facing now is a reflection of the broader backsliding of democracy, and unfortunately, the media sector is one of the hardest hit.

### **Can other Western democracies help fill the funding gap?**

Unfortunately, this year's funding allocations have already been finalized – for example, from the EU, UN, and SIDA. There might be opportunities next year. Meanwhile, if we pursue monetisation strategies, we must ensure the production of high-quality content, which will require some immediate support to bridge the gap. Ideally, we aim to become self-reliant within one to three years.

Some countries like Australia provide humanitarian aid, but not specifically for the media sector. So yes, we are actively lobbying other countries to find ways to fill the funding gap in the years ahead.

## About this brief

This is an update on the challenges and threats to press freedom and media independence in Myanmar, safety issues around journalists and individuals in the news profession, and relevant events and issues in the country's news and information environment since the military coup of 1 February 2021. This brief is produced using verified information, including the tracking of incidents and discussions with journalists and media professionals, to document and provide context for a better understanding of the country's news and information situation.

Some definitions

In the monitoring work for this series of updates, an incident is a verified event that involves action against a journalist due to his or her journalistic activities or background, such as arrest, detention, prosecution, death, torture and acts of violence, surveillance, harassment and/or threats.

Incidents include similar actions against other individuals working in independent newsrooms and news-related operations, such as news management and other administrative, creative and support personnel who are part of the production and distribution of journalistic products. They are called “media workers” in these monitoring updates.

Also included in incidents are actions taken against newsrooms, news organisations and their websites and online spaces, independent associations of professional journalists and press clubs. These include the cancellation of publishing licences, raids on news outlets' premises and their prosecution and the blocking of websites.

In this series of updates, a journalist is an individual who is engaged in gathering and reporting, taking photographs or video footage, editing or publishing and presenting news that has been produced using professional and independent journalistic standards and methods.

A journalist may be in news work as a livelihood, whether paid or not, in different types of media and platforms, and have different types of professional arrangements, such as being full-time staff, freelance, a stringer or occasional contributor.

Included in the journalists covered by the monitoring work are individuals who have been described as being former journalists or who have left their news organisations. This is for two reasons: first, being or having been a journalist in Myanmar by itself is a risk, and persons have been targeted or arrested because of a past affiliation with a news outlet; second, safety considerations can require an individual's description as a former journalist.

“Journalists” in this monitoring work likewise include citizen journalists, given that many news organisations in Myanmar work with them on a regular basis. In the Myanmar context, the term

“citizen journalist” typically refers to a person who contributes news – whether in the form of raw content, including photographs or video, or full stories. He or she may or may not be paid for contributions and may or may not have had some news training.

After the 2021 coup, news outlets began using material sent voluntarily by citizen journalists after restrictions and arrests made news-related activities dangerous for professional journalists.





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