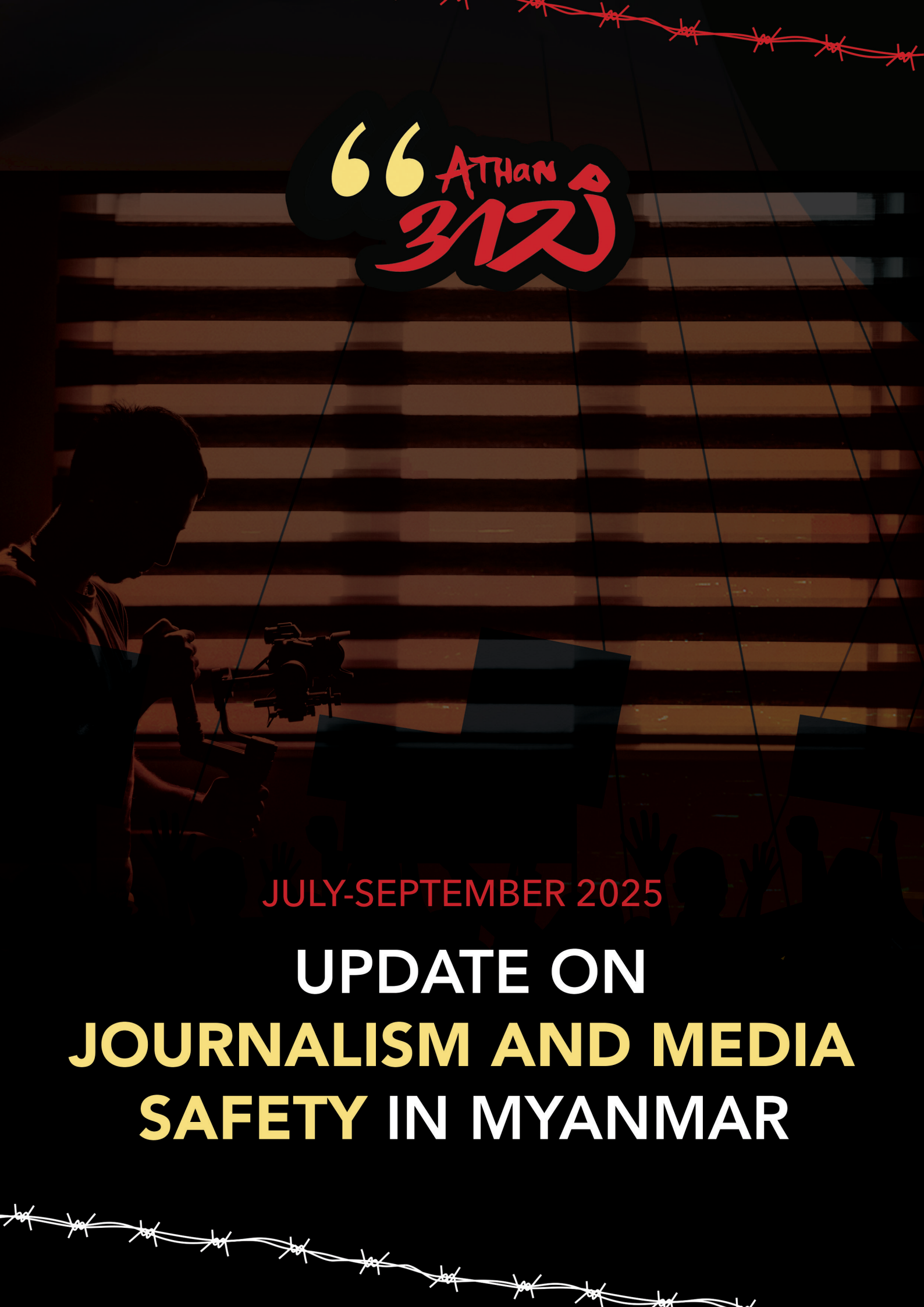




“ATHAN
312”

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2025

UPDATE ON
JOURNALISM AND MEDIA
SAFETY IN MYANMAR

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Exiled journalists:

Many are also feeling mentally exhausted

The junta's election:

Journalists are basically walking on a knife's edge

Highlights

No new arrests and convictions of Myanmar journalists were reported in the third quarter of 2025. But during this period, three journalists were released from prison.

At the end of September 2025, 56 journalists and media workers were still in jail. Since the 2021 coup, 223 journalists have been arrested under Myanmar's military regime. There have been 11 deaths of journalists reported under various circumstances since the coup.

Already feeling the effects of the halt in funding from the shutdown of the US Agency for International Development and huge cutbacks in US development assistance since early 2025, Myanmar's media community received more unfavourable news. In September, the Swedish government announced that the country would phase out all development cooperation with Myanmar by 30 June 2026. This end to Swedish aid will impact Myanmar's independent media and human rights groups, which together are estimated to be receiving 2.65 million US dollars annually. "Myanmar is the third-largest recipient of Swedish media aid globally," Human Rights Myanmar said.

With the general election organised by the military due to start in December, the junta introduced a new Election Protection Law that imposes harsh penalties, including the death penalty, for vaguely defined "disruptive" acts. It effectively criminalizes dissent and critical journalism. It has already been used to imprison online critics and charge opposition leaders and media outlets, including Khit Thit media.

Journalists continue to face growing risks from ethnic armed groups that take issue with their work. In September, the Arakan Army, which controls most of north-western Rakhine state, detained a female reporter for over a month. In the same month, another armed group, the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) in northern Shan state, protested to the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) about its news coverage and said its work contained "false reports", among others.

Exiled journalists in Mae Sot, Thailand, face worsening insecurity, financial hardship and distrust from resistance groups, even as they create small support networks and projects to sustain each other amid donor cutbacks and renewed border clashes.

Arrests and convictions

There were not no reported arrests and convictions of Myanmar journalists between July to September 2025.

Releases

Three journalists, all convicted under security-related laws, were released from prison.

Two journalists from the Yangon-based Thingangyun Post – Wai Lin Yu and Htet Htet Aung – were released from prison on 18 July 2025, after they completed their sentences. Arrested in September 2021, they were convicted in December 2021 under the Explosive Substances Act of 1908 (Section 5, which penalizes the making or possession of explosives) and the Counter-Terrorism Law. Than Soe Aung, a DVB citizen journalist who had been arrested in March 2022 in Namhsan, Shan state, was released on 23 September. He had been convicted under the Counter-terrorism Law and sentenced to five years in prison.

Table 1. Monitoring Media Repression in Myanmar

	July to September 2025	2025	Since the 2021 coup as of September 2025)		
Journalists and news workers			Total	Woman	Men
Arrested	-	2	223	29	191
In detention/ serving jail sentences	-	2	56	6	50
Released	3	8	169	23	146
Died	-	-	11	-	11
Convicted	-	3	85	13	72
News and other licences					

	July to September 2025	2025	Since the 2021 coup as of September 2025)		
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Released	3	8	169	23	146
Died	-	-	11	-	11
Convicted	-	3	85	13	72
News licences cancelled		1	16		
In detention/serving jail sentences	-	-	12		

Table 2. Breakdown of Convictions of Journalists by Law, 2025

Laws used in convictions	Number of convictions
Counter-terrorism Law Section 50 (j)	1
Counter-terrorism Law Section 50 (a)	-
Counter-terrorism Law Section 52 (a)	3
Counter-terrorism Law Section 52 (b)	-
Counter-terrorism Law Section 54 (d)	-
Penal Code - Section 505A (incitement)	1
Penal Code - Section 505 (b)	-
Television and Radio Broadcasting Law Section 96	1
Total	6

End of Swedish aid deals another blow to media

Coming months after the halt in grants from the United States and the shutdown of USAID after the Trump Administration came into office in January 2025, Sweden's decision to end all development assistance to Myanmar by mid-2026 brings yet another challenge to Myanmar's media. Its humanitarian assistance to Myanmar, however, is not affected by this halt.

Swedish aid to Myanmar, mainly through its aid agency, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, will mean a loss of 2.4 million dollars a year for the media and 255,000 dollars for human rights organisations, according to Human Rights Myanmar. "Myanmar is the third-largest recipient of Swedish media aid globally," it said in a statement.

Announced on 11 September, the decision reflects a reallocation of Sweden's priorities to supporting Ukraine and its own security requirements, at a time when Europe is shouldering more of its own defence and security needs, as well as what the Swedish government says is the deterioration of conditions for aid work in Myanmar since the 2021 coup.

Human Rights Myanmar described Sweden's pullout as a "profound blow to Myanmar's civil society, human rights defenders and independent media, severing a final and critical lifeline of support in the face of a brutal military regime".

"The back-to-back withdrawal of Sweden and the US, two of Myanmar's significant donors in the democracy and governance space, triggers more than a financial shortfall," it said in a statement. "It also sends a demoralizing political signal to civil society, journalists, and human rights defenders on the front lines. It suggests that long-term, principled support for their struggle is unreliable, subject to the shifting political priorities of donor capitals rather than the escalating needs on the ground. This erosion of solidarity is a more damaging consequence than the loss of funding alone."

Human Rights Myanmar also criticizes Stockholm's unilateral and abrupt withdrawal, saying that its conduct disregards international standards for conflict-sensitive aid transitions.

Myanmar has provided 176 million dollars in development aid for Myanmar since the coup, including 41 million dollars in 2024, the rights advocacy group says, citing its own analysis.

Forty-two percent of Swedish development aid goes to emergency response, 10% to conflict resolution and 8% goes to democratic participation and civil society. Of the funds under the democratic participation category, 6.3% goes to media programmes and 0.6% to human rights monitoring, Human Rights Myanmar says.

Election law - the latest tool to clamp down on news and free expression

In the third quarter of 2025, Myanmar's military regime put in place a new election law that adds to the many restrictions on journalism and the information environment. This is part of its preparations for the first phase of a general election to be held on 28 December, which the military is holding to consolidate its power through a 'mandate' obtained through an election widely understood to lack credibility, legality and legitimacy.

On 29 July, the State Administration Council promulgated the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption and Destruction, which bans "any speech, organising, inciting, protesting or distributing leaflets in order to destroy a part of the electoral process". Penalties for violating this law range from three years' imprisonment to the death penalty.

Of particular concern is a section that criminalizes any act of "writing to cause the failure of the election", which carries jail sentences ranging from three to seven years and fines. This effectively targets journalists and civil society members who report critically on the electoral process or advocate for boycotts.

Media freedom observers note that the law's sweeping provisions are designed to suppress dissent and silence critical reporting, further constraining the already embattled information environment.

The law also establishes a 14-member Central Committee for Security Supervision, led by the Minister of Home Affairs and Deputy Minister of Defence. One of the committee's core duties is to "monitor, gather information on, and guide actions against the activities of domestic, foreign, and international organisations that could undermine security during the election period".

Table 3. Major features of the election law and penalties

Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption and Destruction (SAC Law No. 48/2025)	
Prohibited action	Penalties
Threatening, obstructing, or disrupting candidates during campaigning	Prison sentence of 3 years to life imprisonment
Destroying election commission offices, polling stations, ballot boxes, or related materials via mass assembly	Prison sentence of up to life imprisonment
Threatening, obstructing, or causing severe injury to voters, polling staff, or election commission members	Prison sentence of 3 years to life imprisonment
Speaking, organising, inciting, demonstrating, or writing to cause the failure of the election	Imprisonment of 3 to 7 years, plus fines

Source: Election Disturbance Protection Law

The military council has already begun using the new election law to prosecute critics and opponents.

On 9 September 2025, the Taunggyi Township Court sentenced Ko Nay Thway, a 36-year-old resident of Ayethaya town, to seven years in prison under Section 23(a) of the law for criticizing the election in a Facebook post. His case exemplifies the junta's zero-tolerance approach toward online dissent.

According to the news published by Mekong News, Ko Nay Thway was arrested by the Aye Thaya Police Station on 25 August for posting a message on his Facebook page, which uses the name "Lasho Baegyí". His post read: "You keep telling people to go vote — who do you think you are? If you've got any guts, take a good look. If you want votes from the people, think about how you can actually benefit them. Don't expect to get anything from the people for free without doing anything useful."

Moreover, the military junta has used the same law to file criminal cases against an independent news organisation – Khit Thit media – as well as multiple opposition and resistance groups, accusing them of attempting to disrupt the upcoming electoral process. These groups include Karen National Union (KNU) Chairman Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win and 12 other KNU leaders, 17 mem-

bers of the Government of Chinland and the Arakan Army. (On 28 August, the Myanmar junta officially declared the KNU a “terrorist” organisation.)

The Canada-based Center for Law and Democracy issued a note outlining international standards for free and fair elections, urging media and observers to assess the electoral process against global benchmarks.

Concern over EAOs’ unease, hostility toward journalists

Three incidents in the third quarter of 2025 reflect tensions in the interaction between ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) and the Myanmar news community, as well as different views of the role of journalism. They highlight the precarious position of independent media, which must navigate an information environment marked not only by continued repression by the military junta but pressure – and displeasure – from EAOs.

On 20 September, 31-year-old journalist Ma Mudar, who works for the local Border News Agency, was taken from her home in Maungdaw town in Rakhine State by intelligence officers with the Arakan Army, the armed group that controls most of the state. No public explanation of the reason behind her arrest was made. She was released on 22 October after 22 days in detention.

Responding to the incident, the Independent Myanmar Journalists Association had called on the Arakan Army to respect international laws protecting journalists, recognize the vital role of the media in democratic society and release Ma Mudar without delay. Two weeks after her arrest, several women’s organisations – Myanmar Women in Media (MWiM), Burmese Women’s Union (BWU) and Sisters 2 Sisters – released a joint statement urging the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army to immediately release her.

On 23 September, the Committee to Protect Journalists issued a statement calling for Ma Mudar’s release and urged the Arakan Army to allow all journalists in Rakhine State to report freely.

This incident underscores how some ethnic armed organisations increasingly view independent journalists as security threats rather than as professionals doing their work.

Ma Mudar’s detention is the second incident where a journalist was held by non-state armed groups. In September 2024, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) arrested two journalists – Tar Lin Maung from the Red News Agency and freelance reporter Naung Yoe – and held them incommunicado for approximately one month before releasing them.

In August, Kachin Independence Army (KIA) leader Bogyoke Gunmaw Sumlut posted on Facebook screenshots of exchange of notes and replies that were part of his interview with a local journalist with the BBC. He made these public in an apparent attempt to challenge the BBC's presentation of this interview in an article entitled "The KIA said that if the military genuinely wants peace talks, they should come to meet in Myitkyina." The article was interpreted by some to suggest that the KIA was initiating peace talks, which the KIA disputed.

One among the several screenshots included in the Facebook post was later taken down – but the local BBC journalist's name and profile had already been exposed. This incident had safety implications because the BBC report did not carry his byline. In addition, the KIA leader has a wide following of 243,000 people on Facebook. There have been discussions about the risks that the KIA leader exposed the journalist to. Some asked if he was aware of the implications of such public posts or understood the media's role in conflict situations.

On 15 September, the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army, one of the most active EAOs in northern Shan State, protested to the Democratic Voice of Burma about its coverage of it.

In a one-page letter, the PSLF/TNLA complained that some DVB news reports were disconnected from the situation on the ground, and requested that it correct mistakes, obtain confirmation for news related to PSLF/TNLA. The PSLF/TNLA cited three DVB reports it claimed were inaccurate – including those saying that the group had arrested individuals without Shan State identification in Kyaukme, ordered People's Defence Forces (PDFs) to withdraw in Naungcho, and attacked a Shan State Progress Party base in Kyaukme township.

The PSLF/TNLA's letter reflected an attempt to control the narrative in Myanmar's conflict-affected regions, where access to firsthand information is often restricted and where verification remains hazardous. The risks brought about by misinformation as well as the sensitivity of reporting on EAOs have been growing, especially in the context of intensifying armed conflict (military airstrikes killed civilians in several townships in Shan state in August 2025) and the continuous bombing in EAO-controlled territories.

Voices

Exiled journalists: ‘Many are also feeling mentally exhausted’

A journalist talks about how news professionals in this Thai border town are trying to look after themselves at a time when colleagues are losing jobs, stressed by uncertainty or had to give up plans to go back to Myanmar.

Like Chiang Mai, Mae Sot is home to many exiled journalists, but life there is quite different. Sitting right on the Thai-Myanmar border, it is close to areas controlled by ethnic armed groups. Many more journalists in Mae Sot lack stay documents, live in informal settings and face insecurity from Thai security crackdowns and cross-border surveillance. They tend to have less support and opportunities than those based in Chiang Mai.

How are journalists in Mae Sot managing their work these days?

Some female journalists in Mae Sot have started meeting up casually every Sunday – just whoever’s free that week. They’ve only managed to meet twice in September so far, but even with fewer people showing up than expected, they still talk about story ideas and share updates from their work.

When did these meetups start, and what’s the purpose?

The idea came from wanting to support each other – sharing advice, talking through work problems, and helping out where they can. There’s no big formal plan behind it. They’re just trying to stay connected. Also, a few senior journalists in Mae Sot have been organising small get-togethers with others who were recently released from prison to share experiences and give some encouragement.

On top of that, the group of senior journalists started a small community project called ‘No division between their fight and ours – we are all journalists’. Since February 2025, they’ve been giving out basic food and daily supplies to struggling reporters, especially after USAID funding was cut off.

What’s happening with journalists trying to go back to Myanmar?

Some reporters who had planned to move back – or had already gone back to places like Lay Kay Kaw (across the border in Myawaddy), had to return to Mae Sot around the end of September when the fighting flared up again. Those who were preparing to go back have now paused their plans. The clashes are still intense, and people in Mae Sot say they can even feel their houses shake from the explosions across the border.

What kind of problems are journalists facing right now?

It's getting tough. Some resistance groups have started to distrust local journalists, thinking that certain news reports might be leaking security information. Because of that, a few reporters have received serious threats and warnings. On top of safety concerns, many are also feeling mentally exhausted – questioning if they did something wrong or if their reporting caused any harm.

Any other incidents happening lately?

Yeah, there was one in September – people with pink cards and Thai CI (certificate of identity) cards were stopped and checked. If their documents were verified, their photos were taken and they were given 1,000 baht (by those who inspected their identification papers). Thai authorities think the people doing this were from the Karen Border Guard Force and are now investigating. Apparently, two people involved were journalists — not field reporters though, more like podcast readers or narrators.

The junta's election: 'Journalists are basically walking on a knife's edge'

A journalist in Myanmar describes the mood on the eve of the general election in December 2025. Only military-sanctioned parties have been allowed to complete in the poll, which will be held in phases since the junta does not have full control of the country. The first phase will be carried out in 103 of Myanmar's 330 townships in December, and in another 100 townships on 11 January 2026.

What kind of preparations are the military council making on the ground for the upcoming election?

Recently, we've started seeing signs of how they're getting ready – which parties will contest, the list of candidates, and even which parties have been disqualified. At this point, we can only reach out to official contacts for information. Everything's being done quietly and discreetly. Even workshops are held behind closed doors, and sometimes press opportunities get cancelled at the last minute. Compared to 2015 or 2020 (when elections were held, under very different circumstances), things are much tighter now. Reporting

this time is going to be extremely sensitive. Even the candidates themselves are hesitant to talk – that says a lot about the situation.

What would the rationale be in covering this sham election?

We can't just ignore it. We have to cover it. Inside the country, people really don't have much of a choice – the military took over, and now they control everything. Whether people like this election or not, it's something they'll have to live with. For those inside Myanmar, this information is essential. So we still have to report – who's doing what, what's being planned, and what could happen next. But the

risks are huge. It's nothing like past elections. It's going to be extremely restrictive. Journalists are basically walking on a knife's edge.

From a media perspective, how do you see the SAC's election law?

Well, they already took legal action against someone in Taunggyi as an example. But honestly, there's nothing in the constitution that supports that. They just made it up to tighten control – there's no clear logic or legal basis behind it. For journalists, even gathering basic information has become dangerous. People can't freely speak or criticize at public events anymore. Everything's tightly controlled. And the whole process – it's far from transparent.

What's the situation like for journalists who will cover the elections in conflict zones or ethnic areas?

The pressure will definitely increase. Journalists could easily be labeled as enemies. The armed

forces and the reporters don't share the same perspective, so there will be tension. Maybe in major cities it'll be a bit easier, but in smaller towns or border areas, the risks are much higher.

Are there any groups that are helping journalists during this election period?

There used to be in the past, like in 2015/2020. But not this time. Journalists just have to manage everything on their own.

Any final thoughts you would like to add?

Journalists inside the country are becoming more and more isolated. In the past, it was only dangerous when reporting in remote or conflict areas. But this time, even in the big cities, the risks will be high. We're hearing rumors that ordinary civilians – people with no link to security – are being armed and told to keep watch. If that's true, then the situation could get really bad for reporters on the ground.

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.



JULY-SEPTEMBER 2025

UPDATE ON JOURNALISM AND MEDIA SAFETY IN MYANMAR

