

216

*Arrested
since coup*

31

*Still in
Detention*

11

*Died in
Custody*

86

*Convicted
since coup*



FIVE YEARS ON: THE SYSTEMATIC DISMANTLING OF MYANMAR'S MEDIA FREEDOM

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Summary and trends

The first part of this annual report for 2025 discusses events and issues around Myanmar's news and media environment in the fourth quarter of that year, followed by a review of 2025 as well as a wider look at trends in the context of the fifth anniversary of the military coup of February 2021.

In the fourth quarter of 2025, one journalist was arrested. One journalist was convicted under the Counter-Terrorism Law and sentenced to 10 years in prison, bringing her total prison sentence to 13 years. Seven journalists and media workers were released – six under amnesties declared by the military regime and one after completion of a prison sentence.

The totals of arrests, releases and convictions in 2025 are as follows: Three journalists were arrested, 14 were released and three were convicted under different security-related laws covering terrorism and incitement as well as the broadcasting law.

For Myanmar's journalists, 2025 brought continued repression of the news media by the military regime. Although the number of arrests of journalists has fallen in the years since the coup, there has been no let-up in the regime's use of tools of repression, such as prolonged interrogation, surveillance, lawsuits using security laws that entail long imprisonment and the strategic use of amnesties. Releases now typically occur after convicted journalists complete their jail sentences or during politically symbolic days, such as Independence Day or the new year.

The year 2025 also saw journalists feeling the impact of the country's civil war on their work. Journalists face airstrikes, artillery fire, landmines and targeted attacks. The landmine injury sustained by US journalist Colin McPhee in Chin State in November highlights the lethal risks of reporting in the absence of protection mechanisms.

Beyond this, journalists found themselves facing increased threats from ethnic armed organisations and revolutionary armed forces. Some issued rules to govern how journalists cover the areas they control, while others have abducted and harassed news professionals.

In 2025, one journalist was abducted and detained by the Arakan Army (AA) for over a month and another local journalist was abducted by a local armed group. Two journalists were abducted and arrested by non-military actors, including ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) and People's Defence Forces (PDFs), during the year.

The year 2025 saw the exiled media facing a major challenge for their survival and sustainability, following the shutdown of grant funding from the US government early in the year and Sweden's decision to end development assistance to Myanmar in 2026.

Funding cuts translate directly into newsroom closures, staff layoffs and reduced coverage. It has also pushed media houses to turn more toward online monetization as a survival strategy, one that brings with it a new set of emerging risks.

Journalists and the media were also affected by the military regime's restrictions ahead of its tightly controlled national election, which was held in December 2025 and January 2026 and widely condemned by international bodies and independent analysts as neither free nor fair.

Central to the military's management of the election process was its Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption and Destruction, which was enacted in July 202. It was used to criminalize dissent, silence journalists and intimidate artists, activists and citizens.

Five years after the coup, Myanmar journalists have organised themselves into various groups that provide support, carry out advocacy and push for professionalism within their ranks.

At the end of 2025, 31 journalists remained imprisoned. since the coup, at least 216 journalists have been arrested. Eleven journalists have died in custody, during military operations, or under other suspicious circumstances.

Fourth quarter of 2025

Arrests and detention

Ko Min Lwin, a journalist from People Spring news outlet, was arrested in Bago on 15 October 2025, according to a verified source.

He was detained during security checks held in the wake of a bomb explosion that occurred while he was travelling into the city to work on a blog. Authorities reportedly inspected mobile phones and identified him as a journalist, and he was subsequently taken into custody. Sources say Ko Min Lwin was subjected to physical abuse during questioning. His wife, who was detained alongside him, was released at around 2 a.m., but he remained in custody.

Conviction

Former journalist **Sut Ring Pan**, also known as Pu Noi Tsawms, was convicted under Section 50(j) of the Counter-Terrorism Law and sentenced to 10 years in prison by Yangon's Western District Court on 2 December. She was a freelance journalist when she was arrested for her news reporting. Her latest conviction brought her total sentence to 13 years, as she had earlier been given a three-year sentence for violating Section 505A of the Penal Code on 16 May 2025.

Releases

Seven journalists - five of whom had been convicted for incitement under Section 505A of the Penal Code – were released in the fourth quarter of 2025. Six of those released were freed under an amnesty by the military in November and December, and one was released after completing his sentence.

The two journalists below were released in the 26 November amnesty:

- **Nay Naw** (or Myo Naung Naung Zaw), a journalist from Karen Information Center who was released after more than three years in prison. Arrested in March 2022, he was serving a six-year sentence – two years for violating Section 505A of the Penal Code and four years under Section 52(b) of the Counter-Terrorism law.
- **Zaw Lin Htut** (also known as Phoe Thar) a freelance photojournalist who was released after this second detention. After his first arrest following an anti-coup protest in 2021, he was sentenced to three years in prison under Section 505A and released in May 2023. He was re-arrested on 19 September 2024 for participating in a second anti-dictatorship strike in Yangon.

Four journalists below were freed on 1 December:

- **Htet Htet Khine**, a presenter from BBC Media Action who was freed after more than four years in prison. Arrested in August 2021, she was convicted to six years' imprisonment after being found guilty of incitement under Section 505A of the Penal Code and for violating Section 17 (1) of the Unlawful Association Act, which penalizes membership or association with an unlawful association. She got three years' imprisonment under each of these charges.
- **Si Thu Aung Myint**, a freelance journalist who had been arrested with Htet Htet Khine. He was given a six-year sentence under Section 505A of the Penal Code and Section 124A of the Penal Code, which punishes attempts to bring "hatred or contempt" towards the government and the military.
- **Nyein Chan Wai**, a journalist from Bago Weekly Journal, who was serving a total sentence of 11 years in prison. After his arrest in May 2021, he was sentenced to three years under Section 505A of the Penal Code and eight years under Section 124C of the Counter-Terrorism Law.
- **Kyaymani Win**, a Radio Free Asia journalist who was arrested in March 2025 after a personal argument with another woman on Facebook. She had not been convicted of any crime.

Freed after completion of sentence on 27 November 2025:

- Aung Lwin (or Kan Paung Thar), a former columnist from Tanintharyi Journal, who had been convicted to five years in prison under Section 52 (b) of Counter-Terrorism law.

Arrests and abduction of journalists by ethnic armed organizations

In the last quarter of 2025, two local journalists were abducted and held by anti-military fighters Rakhine state and Mandalay region.

Mudra, a journalist with the Rakhine-based Border News Agency (BNA), was arrested at her home in Maungdaw by Arakan Army (AA) intelligence forces on 20 September 2025. She was released after a month's detention, on 22 October, without public explanation.

In the first week of October 2025, local journalist U Toe Gyi, from Upper Burma News Agency (UBNA), was abducted by People's Defence Forces in Madaya township, Mandalay. He was suspected of leaking military information.

U Toe Gyi reportedly runs a Telegram channel called “People’s Information Force”, where he documents unlawful repression by the military dictatorship in Madaya. He has also contributed ground reports to media outlets such as Mandalay Free Press and the Democratic Voice of Burma, according to UBNA.

“Are ground reporters no longer even allowed to report on battles, airstrikes, or civilian deaths? We have never faced this kind of incident before. What we want to say most strongly is that we do not want to see divisions between resistance forces and journalists,” an official from UBNA added.

UBNA has called for the immediate, safe release of U Toe Gyi. It also called on the groups holding him to disclose information about his whereabouts and physical condition, and asked all armed actors to protect and treat journalists in accordance with the rule of law and international human rights standards.

Mudra's detention marks the second known case of a journalist's detention by EAOs. The first occurred in 2024, when two journalists based in Hpakhant, Kachin State (Tar Lin Maung and Naung Yoe) were arrested by the Kachin Independence Army on 29 September 2024. They were freed on 27 October that year.

Clampdown on media during sham election

The control and repression of the news and information environment was a key feature of the Myanmar military's election process, which culminated in the holding of the national vote in three phases held on 28 December 2025, and on 11 and 27 January 2026. This was the first electoral exercise since the military ousted the civilian government led by the National League of Democracy in February 2021, just as the government was to start its second term.

Myanmar civil society, independent analysts and international groups rejected the 2025-2026 polls as a sham election designed to legitimize military rule by giving the military a civilian face. United Nations Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews described the process as “not a free, fair, nor legitimate election, by all measures”, characterizing it as a “theatrical performance” designed to deceive the international community while exerting immense pressure on the population to participate.

Few were surprised by the results of the vote, for which the military said there a 54.22% voter turnout. Final results showed a victory by the military-backed party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party, which got 339 of the total 586 seats in the national parliament. Twenty-five percent of seats (166) are reserved for the military. Together, these give the military and its allies control of the legislature.

In the weeks after the election, army chief Gen. Min Aung Hlaing signed a law setting up a new consultative body. Reports in junta-controlled media also said Parliament would convene in March to elect a president.

Junta's election law used to target media outlets

All forms of dissent, public criticism and peaceful assembly were outlawed during the election process.

At the heart of the junta's information strategy was the Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption and Destruction, enacted on 29 July 2025. It banned "any speech, organising, inciting, protesting, or distributing leaflets" deemed to obstruct, disrupt, or destroy any part of the electoral process. Penalties for violations were severe and disproportionate: three to 20 years' imprisonment or the death penalty.

Military authorities used the vague, broad language to criminalize legitimate expression, investigative journalism, political commentary and artistic expression. As of mid-January 2026, more than 200 people had been charged under election-related measures that criminalized protest or criticism of the polls.

Also charged with violating the election protection law was the Assistance Association for Myanmar-based Independent Journalists (AAMIJ) News, based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

On 6 November 2025, AAMIJ News published an investigative report on Facebook alleging that U Aung Soe, a candidate from the junta-aligned USDP who was contesting the Ahlone constituency in Yangon, was involved in drug trafficking and distribution.

Although the report discussed a matter of public interest, directly relevant to voter awareness and accountability, authorities opened a case against AAMIJ News at Ahlone Police Station under Section 24(a) of the Electoral Process Protection Law – a day after the report's publication.

The junta-backed media claims that the reporting "hindered" the candidate's election campaign – an example that highlights how the law was used to shield junta-backed candidates from scrutiny and silence investigative journalism during the electoral period.

Below are other examples of the repression of artists, activists and citizens:

- In September 2025, a junta-run court in Yangon handed down sentences of 42 to 49 years to three activists. Their offence was putting up anti-election posters featuring slogans and imagery criticizing the polls.
- On 27 October 2025, the junta announced the arrest of film director Mike Tee, actor Kyaw Win Htut and comedian Ohn Daing, accusing them of undermining the elections through social media posts. Junta-controlled media claimed the artists failed to contribute to the “success” of the election by criticizing those who cooperated with it.

Foreign journalists report surveillance and intimidation

International media were invited by the junta to cover its election. Myanmar's military-sanctioned Union Election Commission said 215 journalists from 61 international media outlets applied to cover the vote.

However, foreign journalists experienced strict surveillance and intimidation while they were on assignment in the country.

The Asia editor of the Australian Broadcasting Corp (ABC), Karishma Vyas, reported that she and her team were under constant monitoring in Mandalay. Armed police inspected and made copies of their passports at hotels, and they were followed for extended periods of up to 12 hours. "We quickly realized that as we were reporting on the regime, the regime's spies were reporting on us," she said in her video report, which had footage of a local man who had tailed them on his motorcycle the whole day. Accosted by the ABC team, he replied that “he was following them for their security.” Through an interpreter, she replied: "We appreciate his help, but it's uncomfortable to be followed."

In the ABC report, she said her team "became very concerned for the people we were interviewing". Indeed, many voters repeatedly refused interviews with foreign journalists, citing fear of repercussions.

Apart from targeting journalists and other individuals, the military also filed charges under the same election law against local People's Defence Forces and the Thaton district chair of the Karen National Union (KNU).

The case against the PDFs stems from their reported arrest of a member of the election commission in Salin township in Magway Region, on 31 October. On 3 November, local authorities charged members of these PDF forces of obstructing or disrupting the vote under Section 24(b) of the election protection law.

Pado Saw Myint, the chair of KNU Thaton district, Pado Saw Myint, was among the 22 individuals charged under Section 23(b) of the election law (on misleading the public) after issuing a 5 November statement calling for resistance against the military-organised election.

US journalist injured in Chin State

A freelance journalist from the United States, Colin McPhee, was injured after stepping on a landmine while reporting on fighting in Chin State, northern Myanmar in the third week of November 2025.

The incident occurred during post-battle operations in Tedim township, near the Myanmar-India border. He had entered Chin State with the assistance of PDF-Zoland, which is based in that state, toward the end of October. He sustained severe injuries to his feet and lost two toes, and was evacuated across the border to India's Mizoram state for medical treatment.

The incident highlights the extreme and multi-layered dangers facing independent journalists in Myanmar, where active conflict, landmine contamination and the absence of journalist protection mechanisms have made ground reporting extremely hazardous.

Myanmar has become one of the most dangerous countries in the world for independent journalism, with reporters facing indiscriminate violence from active hostilities, widespread use of landmines and unexploded ordnance, arbitrary arrest and prosecution by the military, threats, detention, or restrictions by non-state armed actors in an environment without functioning legal or institutional protections for the press.

The first journalist who was killed while reporting in the field was A Sai K (also known as Sai Win Aung), editor from Federal News Journal. He was killed in a junta military artillery attack while covering clashes in Lay Kay Kaw, southeastern Karen State in 2021. Freelance photojournalist Soe Naing, who succumbed to injuries sustained during interrogation on 14 December the same year, was the first to die while in the junta's custody.

Perspective: 2025

Two arrests of journalists were reported in 2025. Khaymani of Radio Free Asia was arrested in Mandalay on 25 March after a personal argument with a woman on Facebook escalated. A former journalist with Myat Latt Athan, Than Htike Myint (also known as Aung Kaung Lin) was arrested at his home in Myan Aung township on 6 February.

In 2025, 15 journalists and media workers were released either under a junta amnesty or after they completed their prison sentences.

Table 1. Monitoring Media Repression in Myanmar

	Oct - Dec 2025	2025	Since the 2021 coup as of Dec 2025		
Journalists and news workers			Total	Women	Men
Arrested	1	3	216	28	188
In detention/serving jail sentences	1	3	31	3	28
Released	7	14	185	25	160
Died			11		11
Convicted	1	3	86	14	72
News and other licences					
News licences cancelled		1	16		
Printing/publishing			12		

Please note that the figures have been revised from the third quarter of 2025 to this last quarter of 2025 following crossing checks and validation of data from the past five years.

There were seven convictions handed down on four journalists in 2025, all but one of them under security-related laws used by the military regime. Some journalists got additional convictions under different charges, resulting in longer overall prison sentences.

Five out of seven convictions came under the Counter-Terrorism Law, primarily Section 50(j), which punishes those who finance terrorism with life imprisonment to death, and Section 52(a), which penalizes involvement with a terrorist group.

This reflects how the military regime uses national security framing, rather than a regulatory or public order one, as an anchor of its media repression. Journalism is prosecuted not as a professional or civic activity, but as a form of terrorism-related conduct. While the earlier years after the coup saw the junta's widespread reliance on incitement and “false news” provisions against journalists, 2025 reflects a consolidation around the use of heavier terrorism charges against independent journalists.

The longest sentence handed down to a journalist during the year was 13 years, given to Sut Ring Pan.

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

Laws used in convictions	Number of convictions
Counter-terrorism Law Section 50 (j)	2
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	7

Building journalists' networks in the post-coup era

Five groups of independent Myanmar journalists are in place, after they were formed in the years since the 2021 coup.

The newest one to emerge is the Journalism Alliance Network (JAN), which was launched on 25 January 2025 with the aim of strengthening independent journalism in Myanmar. Its formation was a collaboration among Human Color, CJ Platform and Thanlwin Khet News Agency.

The other four groups formed earlier are: Independent Myanmar Journalists Association (created in June 2023), Burma Media Consortium (June 2023), Independent Press Council of Myanmar (December 2023) and Myanmar Journalist Club (August 2024).

Apart from formal networks and alliances, journalists in exile, such as those based in Mae Sot, Thailand, have also formed their own self-help groups. For instance, some groups provide food and basic supplies to journalists and their families, while groups of women journalists meet regularly, often on Sundays, to share advice and offer mutual support.

Funding crisis hits hard and deep

2025 was the most challenging year for independent media in terms of financial capacity.

Since the 2021 military coup, international donor funding has been critical to the survival of Myanmar's independent media. In 2021 and 2022, grants covered about half of average operating costs of media houses and up to 91.3 percent for some national outlets. Funding cuts, particularly the shutdown of USAID and US Agency for Global Media support in early 2025, have had serious impacts on information and news flows for Myanmar as well as on journalists' livelihoods and the viability of news outlets.

In March 2025, the Burmese-language services of Voice of America (19 million followers, set up in 1942) and Radio Free Asia (14 million Facebook followers, started in 1997), were suspended. Both were funded by the US Agency for Global Media. They also offered short-wave radio services.

Some smaller news outlets have since ceased operations, and several have reported layoffs, salary cuts and reductions in coverage and projects.

Some 200 exiled Myanmar journalists now face an uncertain future, according to one estimate. Many journalists working in exile or in hiding also rely on donor funding for salaries, equipment, secure communications and safety.

On top of the funding crunch from the halt in US development and foreign assistance funds, Sweden, another major donor to Myanmar media, announced in September that it would end all development aid to Myanmar by June 2026. The Swedish government said the decision stemmed from a shift in its priorities to Ukraine and the "progressively worsened" conditions for development work in Myanmar.

This halt in Swedish aid includes an estimated USD 2.65 million annually for media and human rights groups in Myanmar, according to Human Rights Myanmar.

The US and Swedish actions come at an already difficult time, five years after the military coup and amid a raging civil war.

Myanmar's independent media are also struggling with fewer options for viability, such as the collapse of the domestic and advertising market under military rule and increased operating costs and insecurity that have already driven many outlets to downsize, cut salaries or relocate abroad.

Despite the difficult environment around diminishing grant resources, many outlets continue to rely on short-term grants tied to specific content production rather than unrestricted, long-term operational funding.

All news outlets are looking for alternative income streams, with digital and social media monetization emerging as a prominent strategy. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube and TikTok are now central to news dissemination for audiences inside and outside Myanmar, offering potential revenue through ad sharing and payments tied to engagement.

However, these avenues have proven highly unpredictable and insufficient relative to operational needs. Restrictions on monetization for content targeting audiences inside Myanmar, along with changes in platform policies, weaken the revenue potential of these channels for the country's media. While social media monetization provides some financial relief and may bring in sizable online audiences, it remains far from a long-term, sustainable solution.

In fact, "monetization rates on both Facebook and YouTube are almost zero for Myanmar-based audiences," CJ Platform editor-in-chief Min Thu Win Htut said in an interview.

Structural challenges are inherent in platform-based monetization, including the algorithmic trap, as academic research has highlighted. The algorithmic prioritization of engagement-driven content can put serious news, investigative reporting or public-interest journalism at a disadvantage. This is because such material do not easily generate high views or clicks, even if they serve important democratic functions. As a result, media outlets become increasingly dependent on clicks, views and audience engagement to generate income, while this model fails to offer stable or long-term funding to support quality journalism.

This same trend has been seen in Myanmar's independent media, where many find themselves pressed to write news and frame headlines to user get engagement even if doing do flouts professional news methods.

"In order to attract reaction and engagement, some headlines we use are no longer aligned with journalistic principles. Even if a headline feels sensational or unethical, if we know the audience prefers it, we feel compelled to publish it," explained Min Thu Win Htut. "This harms journalism itself." (Read the full interview 'We are losing people's voices', in the 'Voices' section.)

The junta's parallel press

Since the coup, the military has been aggressively engineering the creation of a parallel media environment dominated by military-supported voices.

State-owned outlets such as MRTV, Myawaddy and 'The Global New Light of Myanmar' have been repurposed as propaganda tools, echoing military narratives while erasing or distorting accounts of civilian casualties, resistance activities and human rights abuses. These outlets frame the junta as the sole guarantor of stability and national unity, while labelling independent media, civil society actors and resistance groups as “terrorists” or foreign-backed agitators.

In the post-coup years, the junta has also been working on destroying institutions that should be supporting the news community. Throughout 2025, the military-backed Myanmar Press Council has continued efforts to gain legitimacy both domestically and within Southeast Asia. It organised several meetings with pro-military media outlets under the banner of media development. At the regional level, it entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Thai Press Council in August 2025 to promote cooperation between the media sectors of Myanmar and Thailand. However, the council has not undertaken initiatives to advocate for detained Myanmar journalists or Myanmar media whose licenses have been revoked.

The junta also has been supporting and promoting pro-military private media platforms, online influencers as well as Telegram and Facebook channels aligned with its interests. These actors often receive preferential access to information, protection from censorship and in some cases direct or indirect financial support through military-linked businesses, advertising or opaque funding streams. Pro-military commentators are frequently mobilized to attack independent journalists, spread disinformation and justify military violence, blurring the line between media, psychological operations and intimidation.

Digital repression has reinforced all these strategies. The junta has imposed internet shutdowns, blocked independent news websites and conducted surveillance of online activity, severely restricting the reach of independent reporting. In contrast, pro-military content is allowed to circulate freely and is often coordinated across platforms to dominate online discourse during key political or military moments. Disinformation campaigns are deployed to discredit independent journalists, including the spread of false accusations, doctored images and personal threats, further undermining trust in credible reporting.

Taken together, these measures demonstrate that media repression in Myanmar is not merely about silencing dissent but about replacing the professional news media. The junta's strategy seeks to hollow out independent journalism while filling the information space with militarized narratives that normalize authoritarian rule and violence.

Voices

'We are losing the people's true voice'

In this interview, Min Thu Win Htut, chief editor of [CJ Platform](#), talks about what it is like to sustain operations in a tough financial environment. He reflects on how news outlet's pursuit of online engagement can harm journalism, and says Myanmar's independent media faces even more challenges after the military-run election.

How has your organisation's funding been? To what extent is it dependent on international donor funding?

To date, we have never received a grant specifically meant to cover our core operational costs. In terms of how our CJ Platform operates: at the beginning of 2023, Internews provided us with a monthly payment of USD1,000 as honoraria for citizen journalists producing news content. This amount, however, was clearly insufficient to cover our operational needs. Prior to that, we relied heavily on donor funding and project-based grants. When there were many projects, we also conducted journalism training, which our CJ Platform took responsibility for organising. A portion of the income from those training was used to support internal operations.

We also used to receive story grants and occasional program-based grants to implement specific initiatives. These opportunities were relatively abundant before USAID suspended its funding. When USAID funding stopped, we also lost access to corporate grants that were co-funded through USAID. This created serious challenges. Since then, we have been forced to rely entirely on our own fundraising efforts to survive.

How have funding cuts affected staffing, operations and your editorial output?

Due to the funding cuts, we had to discontinue several programmes. For example, we previously ran weekly programmes focused on women's voices and public voices. These were very costly to produce, so we were forced to stop them.

We also had to lay off approximately half of our staff. Initially, many of them continued to help us voluntarily. However, in the long run, they could not sustain this due to family and livelihood responsibilities. Some took on manual labour, others sold food or snacks on the street and gradually, everyone had to move on in order to survive.

What sources of income does your organization currently rely on?

At present, we rely on a mix of limited online monetization and external contract work.

YouTube monetization has been largely ineffective. Despite having around 60,000 subscribers, our monthly income from YouTube is only about USD30-40 at most. This is because most of our audience is inside Myanmar, where internet shutdowns are widespread. As a result, monetization rates on both Facebook and YouTube are almost zero for Myanmar-based audiences.

Fortunately, starting in October 2025, we were approved for Facebook monetization. This income is currently just enough to cover basic expenses such as office rent and utilities (water and electricity).

Beyond that, we take on external contract work. For example, when partner organisations want to produce videos, we provide filming, video editing and voice-over services in exchange for fees. We also accept advertorial-style content selectively and conduct journalism training where possible. Due to staff shortages, each person in our organisation now carries at least three different job roles.

Do you think this model can support long-term sustainability?

No, this model is absolutely not sustainable in the long term. The fundamental problem is that platforms like Facebook and YouTube are not our own platforms. We can only earn income if they allow us to do so. The moment their policies change, our income can disappear overnight. And reliance on these platforms indirectly restricts our editorial independence and press freedom.

Can you explain how quality reduction and self-censorship occur?

Our press freedom and journalistic quality are both constrained because we are forced to prioritize audience preferences above all else. In order to attract reaction and engagement, some headlines we use are no longer aligned with journalistic principles. Even if a headline feels sensational or unethical, if we know the audience prefers it, we feel compelled to publish it. This harms journalism itself.

For example, from a journalistic perspective, a standard headline might read: 'Clashes occurred in X village; three junta soldiers were killed'. This is factual and sufficient. However, such headlines no longer attract audience attention. Instead, we feel pressured to exaggerate by adding personal or sensational details, such as: 'Junta column led by an officer who once mocked PDFs on TikTok ambushed; three killed'. This crosses into yellow journalism.

Another example is when we receive unverified claims, such as soldiers allegedly coming from a liquor shop. We do not know whether they were drinking or intoxicated. Yet, to attract engagement, headlines like 'Drunken junta troops ambushed after leaving liquor shop' are used, despite lacking verification and editorial relevance.

Producing high-quality journalism now comes with fear and anxiety, fear of losing engagement, fear of losing income.

Do you see audience contributions (subscriptions, memberships, donations) as a viable option for Myanmar media? Why or why not?

We do have subscription and membership plans. But banking barriers make this extremely difficult. Myanmar banks do not cooperate with us, and most of our audience is inside Myanmar. Many Myanmar nationals abroad, particularly in Thailand, are also afraid that making donations could put their bank accounts at risk due to local financial regulations.

Additionally, many people in the diaspora are struggling just to survive and support their families. In a revolutionary period like this, people understandably prioritize direct humanitarian or resistance-related causes over supporting media organizations. As a result, audience contributions account for less than 1% of our monthly operational costs.

How are security concerns and political risks like? (Thai financial policy or any?)

We are living under labour visas (in Thailand), and our bank accounts are subject to scrutiny at any time. If our income exceeds certain thresholds, accounts can be frozen or shut down.

Even receiving USD2,000–3,000 creates anxiety, not because it is a large amount, but because we fear our accounts could be flagged or closed.

What are the key factors that will determine whether independent media can survive in the next three to five years?

From late 2025 onwards, we have already begun to see independent media losing ground. In many ways, I feel that independent media has already lost the battle to provide accurate information to the public. On Facebook and TikTok, propaganda pages dominate. Disinformation spreads faster and more widely than factual reporting.

The military is leading fake news and disinformation. And for independent media like us, our information has just become weaker. It's faded.

A big reason for that is that we're constantly chasing what the audience wants. And in doing that, we've kind of broken the backbone of our own journalism. Once that happens, everything starts to blur. People don't really stop to think any more about which page is actual news, which one is a real media outlet, and which one is just propaganda. They just consume whatever shows up. And misinformation spreads very easily. That makes surviving as independent media even harder.

Before the end of 2026, it's very likely the military will go ahead and form a government after the election. When that happens, they'll probably start calling people back, trying to pull journalists back in. This isn't new – exiled media have faced this kind of pressure before. And honestly, I think a lot of people will go back, not because they want to, but because surviving in exile has become almost impossible.

The biggest issue is security. We ran away from Myanmar because of the military, but even here, we're not really safe. To stay legally, we have to renew our documents almost every year. And that costs more than 10,000 THai baht per person each time. We just can't afford that any more.

Some of my staff have to renew their documents within the next three months. They're already stressed out. And I don't know what to do for them. I really don't. I don't see any organisation stepping in to help with this. There's nowhere to turn.

So at this point, our personal safety is already under threat. And on top of that, there's daily survival. Back in Myanmar, most of us had our own homes, or at least family support. Even renting was much cheaper. Here, everything costs more and we don't have stable income. Because of that, we're already seeing people prepare to go back even though they know how dangerous it is.

In the end, only a very small number of people, the ones who are willing to suffer no matter what, will stay in exile. And just to be clear, I'm not saying this to ask the international community to support us. I'm just describing what I see happening.

Another thing that really worries me is China. There are a lot more Chinese grants now, and they're being offered very openly. In my case, someone from China even approached me on Facebook and asked what kind of news we could produce. We didn't even discuss money but our policy is clear, we don't take that kind of funding.

If we did accept it, honestly, life would be much easier. We'd at least be able to eat properly and live more comfortably. But we don't. We choose to hold the line. It's a hard decision, but it's an important one. It's like moving forward while carrying something very heavy on your back.

Looking ahead, I'm really worried. The training programme we're relying on will end in July. After that, there's no other income coming in. We'll have to survive on monetization alone. And that's not realistic.

The platforms don't pay much. Internet shutdowns in Myanmar are constant. Realistically, only about 500,000 people inside the country can actually access and consume news regularly and that number isn't growing. All Myanmar media outlets are fighting over the same small audience.

The platforms don't pay much. Internet shutdowns in Myanmar are constant. Realistically, only about 500,000 people inside the country can actually access and consume news regularly and that number isn't growing. All Myanmar media outlets are fighting over the same small audience.

In that situation, there's no way to grow – not in the audience, and not in income. A lot of media will shut down. The kind of journalism that really matters such as investigations, long-term reporting, public-interest work will slowly disappear. What will replace it is shallow, sensational content, just to get clicks.

There's something I personally really want to work on – election monitoring. We've been watching the election process closely. Early on, we even published reports. Even now, we're still thinking about who might come out of this election who these people are, whom they're connected to, what businesses they're involved in, what positions they might take. That kind of reporting is really important for the country. But we just can't do it anymore.

That kind of work takes time, focus, and people. If we could do it properly, it would be strong journalism that actually benefits the public. But instead, every single day, with very few staff, we're forced to push out news that we know people will click on not because we believe in it, but because that's how we survive.

Can you tell me about online scamming and your experience with this as a media outlet and as a journalist?

One of the most common advertising offers we receive is from online gambling operations. Accepting these would guarantee income, but we reject them on ethical grounds.

Beyond advertising, there are increasing attempts to exploit media platforms for scams and misinformation. Fake pages have been created using my name and our organisation's name to scam people by selling fake products or promoting fraudulent schemes

As our capacity weakens, it becomes easier for these actors to infiltrate our ecosystem. When people are hungry, ethical boundaries become harder to maintain, and this is the danger we are facing.

Anything that you would like to add?

Media quality has declined not only due to financial hardship, but also due to the erosion of journalistic skills. Many journalists now treat social media posts as news without verification.

As a result, genuine public voices and ground realities are fading from coverage. For example, severe water shortages in Yangon recently received almost no coverage from exiled media, despite being a major public hardship. If we want journalism in Myanmar to survive, we must reinvest in training citizen journalists and rebuilding core journalistic skills; otherwise, we risk losing the people's true voice entirely.

Reflections: Five years after the 2021 coup

'Many are now hesitant to enter the profession'

Interview with Myint Kyaw, experienced advisor and media expert

Tell us about the biggest changes in journalism and media freedom in 5 years.

Looking back over the past five years of Myanmar's media and press freedom landscape, the most visible patterns are arrests and killings. More than ten journalists have been killed – making this the worst period in a decade. Hundreds have been arrested. Many are now hesitant to enter the profession.

In the early period, journalists were mainly charged under Section 505 (of the Myanmar Penal Code). Later, more severe counter-terrorism charges carrying long prison sentences were used. There is no longer judicial independence. Writing critically about the military is sufficient grounds for conviction. This represents a grave threat.

Hundreds of journalists have fled abroad. Access to information has dramatically declined. Across sectors, institutions are no longer willing to speak to or be accountable to the media that makes accountability mechanisms weakened in the country. It has also become increasingly difficult to identify as a journalist. With limited ability to present multiple perspectives, the quality of reporting has declined.

Financial sustainability is fragile, and the profession itself is struggling to survive. Meanwhile, public news consumption patterns have deteriorated significantly.

'Cooperation among media organisations has increased'

Interview with Toe Zaw Latt, secretary of Independent Press Council of Myanmar

How much protection has been provided to journalists?

Since the Press Council was established in 2023, it has provided 72 cases of safety and protection support to journalists. In addition, 82 journalists have received emergency relief assistance. We are continuing efforts to provide further support this year. However, the number of applicants is very high and, due to limited funding, we are unable to support everyone. In some cases, we could only support three people per media outlet.

How much has been achieved in terms of ethics regulation?

The Code of Conduct has now been ratified for the second time. It was first introduced on World Press Freedom Day in 2024. Controversial or unclear points such as the definition of “public interest” were revised and clarified. Over 200 copies were printed in both Burmese and English.

In terms of stakeholder engagement, we have successfully worked with allies, including the NUG (National Unity Government) and NUCC (National Unity Consultative Council), to improve access to information. We also signed MOUs related to ethical standards with five or six ethnic organisations.

A complaint mechanism has also been established. If someone believes they have been harmed by a news report, they can file a complaint regarding the content, and the Press Council will handle the case.

What are the main challenges facing the Press Council?

The key challenges are safety and access to information, particularly in conflict areas. On one hand, there are serious security concerns; on the other, there is a responsibility to ensure accurate and ethical reporting.

Accessing information from local stakeholders has been difficult. In revolutionary-controlled areas, ensuring journalists can safely gather news remains a challenge. The Press Council has been working to secure formal and safe access to information, and this will continue to be a priority in the coming years.

How do you see the current situation?

The current challenges are significant, both for local and exiled media. In the past, media organisations could rely on domestic commercial income, but those operating in exile do not have that option. They are heavily dependent on donor funding and must stand on their own feet. Although efforts are being made to generate digital income, revenue remains very low and conditions are becoming increasingly difficult. Risks are also rising.

Myanmar ranks second in the world for the number of imprisoned journalists after China. More than ten journalists have been killed. The professional generation is being disrupted – experienced journalists are leaving, while very few new entrants are joining the field. With very limited resources, media workers are carrying unbalanced responsibilities. This is perhaps the most difficult aspect.

However, there is hope, despite facing unprecedented challenges. Cooperation among media organisations has increased. More recently, there has been greater content collaboration, shared resources and joint strategies. With stronger cooperation, there is confidence that these challenges can be overcome.

'Rebuilding teams repeatedly is exhausting'

Interview with Maw Oo Myar, an editor with 'Kantarawaddy Times'

What are the main challenges facing a local media outlet in the past five years?

The biggest challenge is security – on all fronts. There are risks for reporters gathering news on the ground, risks for staff publishing stories and risks for sources. It has been difficult to provide full protection to sources, which makes them hesitant to speak to us journalists.

Another major challenge is internet shutdowns. These cause significant reporting delays and make verification and communication extremely difficult not only publishing but also fact-checking and coordination.

Funding remains a major concern. In places like Karenni State, where the military and political situation is particularly complex, travel and operational costs for on-the-ground reporting are very high.

There is also a shortage of skilled human resources. Each year, new staff must be recruited and trained. This creates pressure and consumes time. Fewer people are willing to pursue journalism as a profession, and rebuilding teams repeatedly is exhausting.

What needs are you preparing for in 2026–2027?

There is a need to expand ground reporting in 2026, but there is currently no budget to cover those costs. Efforts are ongoing to secure funding, strengthen partnerships with allied organisations and explore ways to generate income online.

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.