



Reporting from the Darkness: Journalism and Media in Myanmar

2023 Q4 and Annual Report

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Summary and trends

This annual report for 2023 covers some of the main developments, trends and highlights relating to the safety of Myanmar journalists, as well as the news environment under the military regime. The first part of the report summarises events and issues in the fourth quarter of 2023.

As the coup of 1 February 2021 reaches its third anniversary, Myanmar's military junta, called the State Administration Council (SAC), and its security apparatus continue to repress independent media and other forms of open public discussion. Journalists inside Myanmar, including citizen journalists, operate in an environment where independent news work has become a difficult, dangerous and life-threatening profession.

Over the last three years, the SAC has set up a system of restrictions on media, speech and expression, including through judicial persecution through the use of the "law", closure of media outlets and other publishing outlets, various forms of harassment (including online) by its proxies and supporters. At the same time, it allows pro-junta media outfits to operate in the country.

As part of its efforts to restrict and control spaces for news, information and public discussion and promote its agenda, the SAC uses internet restrictions and shutdowns, which often take place in regions of active conflict with anti-junta resistance forces.

Arrests, prosecutions, and convictions persisted through 2023, though these incidents were fewer in number compared to the previous two years. The year saw the longest combined prison sentence handed down since the coup – 20 years for Myanmar Now's Sai Zaw Theik.

In 2023, a total of 13 journalists and news workers were arrested, including five in the last quarter of the year. Six journalists were sentenced under security-related laws. Seventeen were released during the year.

As of end-December 2023, 64 journalists and news professionals remained behind bars. Majority of them are male and are reporters or photojournalists.

Six journalists have died since the 2021 coup. These include one who died while in military custody, two in conflict-related incidents and three journalists, believed to be associated with supporters of the military, who were killed by unidentified armed groups in 2023.

Since the coup, 202 journalists and news workers have been arrested, 67 convicted, and 138 released by the junta, according to media monitoring data since the coup.

In 2023, the SAC introduced amendments to two laws and further restricted the environment around news, freedom of speech and expression – the Printing and Publishing Enterprises Law and Television and Radio Broadcasting Law.

A major trend during the year was the escalation and expansion of armed conflict in Myanmar, one that affects the space for independent news work at a time of lesser international attention to the country's crisis.

Conflict, which now affects most of the country, has added to the huge safety risks for journalists and news sources, the collapse of internet services and communication, and is a main factor shaping how news desks manage how get and report news from within Myanmar. Fact-checking and verification have become more challenging, due to news sources' fear of repercussions, journalists' limited mobility, and lack of access to responses from official sources. (In 2023, Myanmar's score was 10 out of 100 or 'not free' in Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net index](#).)

In an environment where being a journalist is a risk to one's life and that of one's relatives and friends, and where relying on news work for a living is a challenge, the news community inside Myanmar has become much smaller since the coup.

From the often-cited figure of 4,000 Myanmar journalists at the time of the 2021 coup, this number is now 1,000 or fewer, estimates a Myanmar editor based in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai. He adds that among this total, around 300 are in exile.

All the major news outlets, and many more smaller ones, have relocated to third countries, mainly Thailand, while working with contributors and citizen journalists inside Myanmar.

While they are physically safer outside Myanmar, news professionals worry about being able to continue to rely on journalism as a source of livelihood. Many face challenges with the documentation needed to stay in Thailand, for instance. Their future prospects are related as

well to the survival of their news organisations, which are dependent on development aid and grant funding at a time of competing aid priorities stemming from other conflicts in the world.

The Chiang Mai-based editor said: "Security was the biggest challenging risk for us in 2021 and 2022, but now it is more financial. This, he says, "is our biggest threat and concern" for the future. (Refer to the 'Voices' section for interviews with these two editors.)

The year 2023 also saw the emergence of at least three initiatives from independent Myanmar journalists to organise themselves with the aims of promoting professionalism and mutual support, as well as improving collaboration - the Burma Media Consortium, the Independent Press Council Myanmar, and the Independent Myanmar Journalists Association.

Fourth quarter of 2023

Arrests and detention

Four male journalists and a security guard working for news organisation were arrested in different parts of Myanmar from October to December 2023, reflecting the continuing pattern of arrests of journalists and news workers since the February 2021 coup. One female documentary filmmaker was also arrested during this quarter.

Among the four arrested journalists was Htet Aung, a reporter for the Rakhine-based Development Media Group. He was [arrested](#) on 29 October while covering an almsgiving event in the Thidingyut festival in Sittwe, the capital of western Rakhine state.

Security forces from military security affairs, soldiers, and police forced him to show them the location of the Development Media Group office, then raided the newsroom. They sealed off the news agency's office after seizing several cameras and laptops, and arrested its night guard, Soe Win Aung. Other news staffers went into hiding after their colleagues' arrest.

Two days after his arrest, Htet Aung was [charged](#) with violating Section 65 of the [Telecommunications Law](#), which punishes “extorting, coercing, restraining wrongfully, defaming, disturbing, causing undue influence or threatening any person using a telecommunications network.”

This arrest and raid took place at a time when news work was becoming more difficult in the context of rising tensions, especially in the latter part of 2023, between the Arakan Army, an ethnic Rakhine armed organisation, and the Myanmar armed forces. Hostilities between the two [resumed](#) on 13 November, marking the collapse of an informal ceasefire established in November 2022.

Even before fighting resumed, journalists in the state were being subjected to more security checks while traveling. Rakhine regional authorities had also circulated a list of individuals, including journalists, wanted for a mix of security-related crimes.

Independent reporting has long been a challenge in the restive state even before the coup - for instance around issues such as the plight of the minority Rohingya. Restrictions on access to

Rakhine after the devastation brought by Cyclone Mocha in May 2023 continue, including on independent reporting there.

For example, Myanmar Now photojournalist Sai Zaw Theik was arrested in May for going to cover the cyclone disaster in Rakhine. He was convicted more than three months later with the heaviest sentence for a journalist so far - 20 years with hard labour for violations of four security-related laws.

On 13 November, a reporter working in southern Shan state was arrested, according to reliable sources. For security reasons because he remains in detention, his identity is not being disclosed in this report.

On 11 December, Dawei Watch journalists Myo Myint Oo and Aung San Oo were arrested in their homes in Myeik, Tanintharyi region in the country's south. According to their families, the military said that the two were arrested for their [reporting](#), and that their laptops and phones confiscated.

They faced several counts of terrorism under the [Counter-terrorism Law](#). Each of them faces one count each under the law's Sections 52 (a) and (b), which address organising, taking part in terrorism and harbouring terrorists. Myo Myint Oo faced a third count for financing terrorism (Section 50 (j)).

On 15 October, documentary filmmaker [Shin Daewe](#) – who is a former journalist – was arrested in Yangon's North Okkalapa township after collecting an aerial drone that she had purchased online to use in filming. Drone possession is prohibited in Myanmar.

Police then took her to an unidentified location and held her there for nearly two weeks before transferring her to Insein prison, her husband, Ko Oo, [was quoted](#) as telling media. He described signs that she had been beaten, such as stitches on her head and welts on her arms. (In January 2024, she was sentenced to life in prison after being found guilty of violating the Counter-Terrorism Law. Details will be in the report for the first quarter of 2024.)

There were no convictions reported in the last quarter of 2023.

Deaths

On 14 October 2023, Khin Maung Oo, a journalist who used to be with Eternally Peace News Network, was [arrested](#) and later reported by local media to be have been killed by members of an unknown armed organisation in Mohnyin township, northern Kachin state.

Eternally Peace News Network is owned by the New Democratic Army - Kachin, an armed group that agreed to a ceasefire with the military junta back in 2009. Khin Maung Oo's death was confirmed by local sources, but it remains unclear who or which group was responsible for his death.

In its report on the incident, the Kachin-based regional media outlet 74 Media [quoted](#) the editor of Eternally Peace news as saying that Khin Maung Oo was no longer a staffer there at the time of his death.

Revocation of Mekong News' licence

The media licence of Mekong News was revoked by the SAC's Ministry of Information on 24 December 2023.

The ministry [announced](#) that Mekong News "does not comply" with Section 8 (subsection b) of [the Printing and Publishing Enterprise Law](#), which bars the publication of material that affects national security, rule of law, community peace and tranquility, among others. It is the only news outlet whose licence was cancelled in 2023.

Mekong News, which was established in 2019 in eastern Shan state, continues to operate from outside Myanmar.

Perspective: 2023 and the situation since 2021

Through 2023, 13 journalists and news workers were arrested in Myanmar. Nearly 93 percent of these journalists were men. Majority, or 73 percent, were reporters and photojournalists, followed by 13 percent who were editors and another 13 percent who were publishers or co-founders.

A total of 17 journalists were released during the year, typically in amnesties announced by the SAC during public holidays like Thingyan or the Myanmar new year, Independence Day and Buddhist holidays and festivals.

At yearend, 64 journalists and news workers – 82% of whom are male – remained in detention or were serving prison sentences.

At the end of 2023, the longest-detained journalist is Han Thar Nyein, co-founder of Kamayut Media, who was arrested with editor-in-chief Nathan Maung about a month after the coup, on 9 March 2021. Han Thar Nyein has now spent more than 1,000 days in prison.

The two journalists were arrested after eight truckloads of security forces raided the Kamayut Media office and searched the premises for two hours.

Nathan Maung is serving a combined sentence of seven years. Five years are for violating Section 33 (A) of the Electronic Transactions Law, which "criminalises receiving, sending or distributing electronic information which harms national security, community peace, solidarity, the economy or culture", and two years are for violating Section 505A of the Myanmar Penal Code, which punishes the dissemination of "false news" against the junta.

Since the coup, 202 journalists and news persons have been arrested, 67 convicted and 138 released.

Six journalists have died, as of end-2023. This number comprises Soe Naing, who died in military custody in December 2021, two – A Sai Kay and Pu Tuidim – who were killed in military attacks and incidents around armed conflict, and three others who are believed to be associated with pro-military supporters. These three journalists are Than Tun Aung and Khin Maung Oo in Kachin, and Min Thu Hlaing in Karen state, all of whom are reported to have been killed by unidentified armed groups in 2023.

Monitoring media repression in Myanmar

	2023		Since the 2021 coup until December 2023		
	Oct-Dec	Jan-Dec	Total	Women	Men
Journalists and news workers					
Arrested	5	13	202	29	173
In detention/serving jail sentences		64	64	6	58
Released		17	138	23	115
Died	1	3	6	-	6
Convicted	-	6	67	12	55
News and other licences					
News licences cancelled	1	2	15		
Printing/publishing permits revoked			9		

Nine convictions were handed down to six journalists in 2023, some of whom faced multiple charges and convictions. Since the coup, 67 journalists have been convicted for various charges and under different laws, with the overwhelming majority of them prosecuted under security-related laws.

To date, Myanmar Now's Sai Zaw Theik has received the longest combined prison term of 20 years. In September, he was convicted for incitement under Section 505A of the Penal Code, , Section 124A of the Penal Code on [sedition](#), Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law on criminal defamation, and Section 27 of the [Natural Disaster Law](#) for misinformation around natural disasters.

The second longest sentence, [15 years](#) in total on two counts of terrorism, went to Myo San Soe, a freelancer who has reported for the Ayeyarwaddy Times, Burma News International and Delta News Agency. [Arrested](#) in Pyapon township, Ayeyarwaddy region on 29 August 2021,

he was sentenced to 10 years under Section 50(j) of the Counter- Terrorism Law and five years under Section 52(a) of the same law.

The next harshest sentence was that of Hmue Yadanar Khet Mot Mot Tun, a journalist from Myanmar Pressphoto Agency. On 26 May, she was [sentenced](#) to a total of 13 years in prison. Ten years of the sentence was for violating Section 50 (j) of the Counter-Terrorism Law and 3 years, for violating Section 505A of the Penal Code.

The convictions handed down in 2023 fall under five laws, which are analysed below.

Convictions of incitement under Section 505A of the Penal Code accounted for slightly over half of the total convictions in 2023. Sedition, under Section 124A of the Code, was next with two convictions out of the total nine.

Breakdown of Convictions of Journalists by Law, 2023

Laws used in convictions	Number of convictions
Counter-terrorism Law	1
Natural Disaster Management Law	1
Penal Code – Section 124A (sedition)	2
Penal Code - Section 505A (incitement)	4
Telecommunications Law	1
Total	9

Note: The 9 convictions were handed down to 6 journalists.

Combined prison sentences of journalists, 2023

Length of sentences	Number of convicted journalists
0-3 years	3
4-10 years	1
11-15 years	1
15-20 years	1

The licence of one news organisation, Mekong News, was revoked in 2023, coming more than a year after the cancellation of the Irrawaddy's permit in October 2022. Since the coup, the SAC has issued cancellations of 15 news licences and 9 printing and publishing permits.

Highlights of the Myanmar news situation in 2023 include the impact of widespread armed conflict on news, as well as media outlets' efforts at better viability and sustainability. Different groups of Myanmar journalists and newsrooms also launched initiatives and projects aimed at contributing to media independence, professionalism and greater collaboration.

Security challenges for journalists, including citizen journalists working on the ground in Myanmar, have become worse as armed conflict now affects majority (some say over 90 percent) of the country's 330 townships. Among these are regions like central Sagaing, which did not see armed insurgencies in decades past.

Some journalists continue to work in secret inside the country. But for many, heightened conflict situations are making them feel even more vulnerable when obtaining and verifying news. They need to deal with the military, resistance groups and ethnic armed organisations to get and verify information - and this makes it harder to hide their identities. Some journalists choose to leave the country due to safety reasons, but this leaves their immediate family members in an insecure situation. Others have stopped reporting, or have shifted to other ways of making a living inside the country.

In the later part of 2023, Myanmar made international headlines due to the launch in October of a massive armed operation ([Operation 1027](#)) in northern Shan state led by the Three Brotherhood Alliance. The alliance, composed of the Arakan Army, Ta'ang National Liberation Army, and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, reported successes such as the seizure of junta-held towns and the surrender of soldiers and officers.

More information from conflicts and support for safer news work are needed in Myanmar's conflict and crisis. But its media community is feeling the impact of more limited funding support from external sources at a time of more conflicts and humanitarian crises in the world.

At the same time, the collapse of junta control over 'liberated' areas has provided some more freedom of movement for local journalists.

While Myanmar media focus heavily on daily coverage around conflict and armed battles, the chief editor of an exiled news outlet in Thailand says that newsdesks need to cover other issues important for Myanmar's people, such as their economic woes, education and other daily issues.

The challenges of underground journalism work inside the country, which range from safety to livelihood concerns, have been leading journalists to leave the profession since the 2021 coup. The Myanmar chief editor in Chiang Mai, Thailand estimates that there are now 1,000 journalists or "even less than that" today, compared to 4,000 at the time of the coup. Of these, he says, around 300 are working in exile.

Many, including entire newsrooms, have moved to [report from abroad](#) since the coup. All the major news outlets, and many more smaller ones, have relocated to third countries, mainly Thailand, while working with contributors and citizen journalists inside the country.

At the same time, the Thailand-based editor points out that there are now more independent news outlets of different types. This is because it is relatively easy and without cost to set up a social-media based news page, he explains.

In 2023, Myanmar's journalists and news outlets set up new initiatives and groups aimed at promoting professional and independent journalism, as well as greater news collaboration.

The [Independent Myanmar Journalists Association](#) was founded in June 2023 to support journalists, by providing safety support, raising awareness, creating collaborative mechanisms and doing advocacy for policies and laws.

In December 2023, the Independent Press Council Myanmar was [established](#) at a conference in Thailand, attended by 77 journalists and representatives from 38 independent media outlets inside and outside Myanmar. The press council aims to promote media freedom and professionalism, and improve protection for journalists. Myanmar had a press council before the coup, but it has since become part of the SAC's information apparatus.

Created in June, the Burma Media Consortium groups nine media agencies with the aim of disseminating "impartial and independent news", recognising and promoting the country's ethnic diversity and building the skills of journalists and news organisations, its statement said. The consortium members' stories are shared on the group's [Facebook page](#) and Telegram channel.

Security and safety issues dominated the concerns of Myanmar's media soon after the coup. While these concerns persist, journalists and newsrooms have also been trying to find ways to become more stable and survive in the longer term.

"Security was the biggest challenging risk for us in 2021 and 2022, but now it is more financial," the Chiang Mai-based editor explained. "It is our biggest threat and concern for the coming years. This is the same for most Myanmar media organisations." The chief editor of another news outlet added: "There are two big challenges: financial or income, and security."

The junta's methods of media repression

In 2023, the junta continued to use a mix of strategies to control the public information sphere and manipulate the news environment. It enacted amendments to laws that tighten its control of news and information spaces, and used internet restrictions and shutdowns. While clamping down on and targetting independent media, the SAC has been encouraging and supporting pro-junta media outlets.

The military regime had started amending several laws, such as those on incitement, sedition and treason, soon after the 2021 coup to put in place legal tools to use against its opponents. Laws that directly affect news have also been amended and more are underway, such as a cyber security law proposed in 2022.

In 2023, the SAC introduced amendments to the Printing and Publishing Enterprises Law and the Television and Radio Broadcasting Law.

The amendments to the [Printing and Publishing Enterprises Law](#), which requires printers and publishers, including news agencies, to register with the information ministry, makes it easier to revoke or suspend a licence and requires publishers to send copies of publications to the ministry. The information minister now has the authority to ban publications through a notice in the Official Gazette. If a police notice against a publication is issued, it can be confiscated.

Issued by the SAC on 6 March, these changes "weaken the already inadequate safeguards contained in the PPEL to protect the printing, publishing and news industries from abuses of power," the Canada-based Centre for Law and Democracy [said](#) in its analysis.

On 16 November, the SAC [enacted](#) a second round of amendments to the [Television and Radio Broadcasting Law](#) that removes independent oversight of the industry and authorises the regime to appoint members to the National Broadcasting Council. Previously, the law had defined the council as “autonomous and independent from government authorities, members of the judiciary, and persons engaged in broadcasting services.”

This change comes after the junta's [an earlier amendment](#) of this law on 1 November 2021, which expanded the definition of "broadcasting", added prison sentences for a number of actions and lengthened such sentences.

"The current amendments utterly deprive the Act of any democratic legitimacy and further expand the already very extensive control of the military over the [media inside Myanmar](#)," Toby Mendel, executive director of Centre for Law and Democracy, wrote in a brief.

Widespread internet blackouts are being [weaponized](#) by the junta, making verification of reports of incidents like airstrikes and arson more difficult. (In such situations, national and international media [rely on citizen journalists](#) who send information, photographs and videos from their phones, often receiving little to no compensation.)

The junta also tries to harass and discredit the media in different ways.

For example, its Ministry of Information [announced](#) on 9 July that it would take legal action against independent (and now exiled) news organisations Mizzima Television and Democratic Voice of Burma Television (DVB TV), for overdue transmission fees incurred before the military coup.

Typically, the military-controlled media discredit the independent news outlets and portrays them as an enemy of the nation. Journalists who have fled the country are depicted as traitors, and independent media are portrayed as extremists. Media outlets are [accused](#) of intentionally publishing false reports to incite racial and armed conflict.

In December, the 'Rakhine Daily' Facebook page (run by the Arakan State military council) reported that the council was making a [list of citizens](#) who have posted on their walls, shared, copied or commented and on stories published by local media outlets, and that action would be taken against them.

SAC-approved media outlets have also been looking to hire journalists to work for them, or start new ones with funding and support from the regime.

Journalists with pro-junta publications, including new ones, need to [register](#) with the SAC's information department. It has not been uncommon for individuals who pass the military's background checks to soon be seen with new cars, and moving into protected neighbourhoods. Global New Light of Myanmar, a media outlet controlled by SAC, and the Russian state-funded news agency Sputnik signed an [agreement on information-sharing](#) in September 2023. "Through cooperation with the international news agency, Myanmar journalists will have a chance to study news writing, editing and photography techniques," the Global New Light of Myanmar said.

Voices

"Despite my concern for my security, I can't help doing this"

Below is a conversation with the editor of a major Myanmar news outlet. He served a two-year jail sentence for incitement under Section 505A of the Penal Code.

After your release, did you go back to news work, and why?

I have decided in my mind that journalism is my passion, and I will work there no matter what the circumstances are. Despite my concern for my security, I can't help doing this. As I value this job, I started working back as soon as I was released.

How has being in jail affected you as a person and as a journalist?

I got respect for my job in jail. Other prisoners recognised me because they understood the value of the media and journalists. I appreciate that. At the same time, there were concerns among prison authorities about who I am, a journalist. They were afraid of me revealing in the media the situation in prison. So when I got there, I was warned not to write or say anything about the situation inside. For example, if the media covered the prison situation, I was called [in] by the authorities [on suspicion that he had given out information].

Did you get any threats, or were you monitored, after your release?

I got to see some people who are related to the SAC after I was released, as they wanted to check on me. They warned me not to work as a journalist especially for Mizzima, Myanmar Now, Khit Thit and said that it could be dangerous to do so, and advised me to work in international media like BBC, VOA, or SAC-funded media organisations [instead]. I felt threatened to some extent.

What's the security risk you face at the moment?

To be honest, I think the security risk is now more on my family members rather than me.

How dangerous is it to report inside Myanmar these days?

It is okay for those who are working for military-affiliated organisations and pro-military news agencies. But it is very dangerous for those who are working for independent media that are

exploring human rights violations committed by the military. It is a risk to life, anything can happen to them. They can be arrested anytime, anywhere inside the country, and this is a pervasive risk, not only for one journalist but also his or her network and co-workers.

Looking ahead, what are the biggest challenges that you face as a journalist?

There are two big challenges: financial or income, and security. Even for those who are in Mae Sot, Thailand, it is not safe. Spies from the junta are around. No matter inside [the country] or outside, it is not easy for livelihood as commodity prices are rising. Some are not making adequate income, while the media organisations are facing insufficiency in funding.

Armed resistance has been spreading, especially in 2023. Looking to 2024 and another coup anniversary, how does the situation around the safety of journalists look to you?

On the one hand, in SAC-controlled areas like big cities, there is no safety for media workers and journalists – for instance in the case of Ko Sai Zaw Theik who was arrested in Rakhine while travelling to cover Cyclone Mocha news. On the other hand, as the battle and war extend, this has created some liberated areas controlled by EAOs (ethnic armed organisations) or PDFs (people's defence forces), where journalists could have more access on the ground, and there can be opportunities for journalists.

Another challenge in 2024 is the flow of journalists from inside to outside the country will lead to more difficulties to sustain media work in third countries, due to financial or professional reasons.

What gives you hope about Myanmar journalism?

We have had similar experiences before like the 8888 (students' uprising on 8 August 1988) and the 2007 Saffron Revolution (led by Buddhist monks), and journalists have been always targeted by the military by killing and torturing them. This time, journalists still play an important role. Given the situation, it is really challenging to sustain journalistic work. So we will have to work on recovering what we had before, balancing both the quality and quantity of [news in] the media industry.

"Financial issues are our biggest threat and concern for the upcoming years"

Reporting in exile is something that Myanmar's media are all too familiar with. But on the third anniversary of the February 2021 coup, its exiled news outlets, even the bigger ones, worry about their short-term and long-term prospects, the editor-in-chief of an exiled media organisation in Chiang Mai, Thailand, says in the conversation below, held in December 2023.

What's the financial situation of your news organisation now? How do you manage, and what about the media's reliance on grants and international media funding?

Since February 1, when the coup took place, no commercial income has come anymore because the military will punish them (advertisers) if they advertise their products with us. So there is zero income from those channels, and our entire commercial system has broken down.

The funding support from international organisations does not even cover 50 percent of our operation costs and activities. Financially, we are very much struggling. Now, we don't have 60 percent of the cash flow to give as salaries to our staff for January. Despite some verbal agreements with some international donors, the money is not there yet. So the financial situation is very unstable.

There were around 4,000 journalists and reporters before the coup, but now, the number is 1,000 or it can be even less than that. Among these, there are around 300 journalists reporting in exile.

Unfortunately, Myanmar became second to Ukraine war in terms of international attention. Most of the aid and assistance shifted there, and now to the Israel-Hamas crisis. So international support for us has become more difficult in quantity and quality.

What we are facing now is that despite the fact that the number of journalists and reporters decreased, the number of media outlets and organisations has increased. Today, if you have a Facebook account, you can have a media outlet with a couple of people. So rather than become a journalist, I may [instead] want to become a founder or CEO of a media outlet.

We may have around 100 media organisations both inside and in exile. Before the coup, there were around 80 but some like 7-Day Media stopped, and there are many that have become a

proxy to support the military as well. So in general, the number of journalists is getting less and less, but the number of media outlets is increasing. That's our Myanmar media situation.

Before the coup, we could transform into a business model-based independent media organisation, but now all of this has stopped, and we have to rely on grants and funding from international media organisations. Other media organisations are also in the same situation.

The situation is very uncertain regarding finances and others, so what's your plan for managing challenges and difficulties?

We have so much experience in managing the situation in times of crisis. So although there is no funding available for us, we will still continue to doing this. If we only look for money, we can do other work [instead], and my point here is we are not working for the money but for our passion. We do this because we want to do it. . . .

But if we are to receive 50 percent of our 2024 financial plan, we know how to effectively run with that 50 percent to present and investigate news. Even if we do not get that 50 percent, we still know how to get our news published, for instance, by writing a blog.

What about news coverage?

It is important that we do not only overemphasise the ongoing conflict and fighting across the country. I understand that we need reporters and journalists more than ever, as the fighting is active in around 316 out of 336 total townships in Myanmar. Imagine the number of journalists to report on these. But there are issues such as social problems and economic crises that are also worth paying attention to.

One of the weaknesses of Myanmar media is that it only pays attention to reports on ongoing fighting and conflict. This is a problem as well because if we only focus on conflicts, we don't know other problems, such as economics, education, and potential solutions to these conflicts and issues. We don't know where our future is heading.

What will happen in a few years in the Myanmar media industry, based on your current assessment?

I honestly don't even know what will happen in 2024. We don't know, despite some trends or calculation. There is some concern for us regarding salaries for the whole year, and we have to

predict and plan for this. We pay not less than, at least the minimum wages of the respective areas where our journalists are based. We pay quite a decent amount. But the thing is the problem of financial security and sustainability.

Security was the biggest challenging risk for us in 2021 and 2022, but now it is more financial. It is our biggest threat and concern for the coming years. This is the same for most Myanmar media organisations.

How do you view your work, health, and social activities in exile?

You know what? I have lived this type of life before, and when I returned to Yangon from exile before, I did not feel any significant change in my lifestyle. The only one thing was I could go where I wanted to go and wander around, that's all.

But yes, if somebody asked me if I wanted to return to my home community, I would immediately say 'yes' because of the attachment and the sense of belonging that I have there. It's that simple (laughing). Once, my brother asked me if I could return, and I replied that I would return to Myanmar immediately if I could. Then he told me that I could still be in danger and be threatened by *Phyusawhti* (ပျူစောထီး or military-supported militias) even after the military junta collapses. But yes, I definitely understand the risk, but I still want to return to Myanmar.

In my own individual struggle [in exile], I can manage. But yes, there are some emotional impacts due to the stress and news from inside the country, as I deal with news daily. For example, the news of the (July 2022) execution of Ko Jimmy and Ko Zeya Thaw had so much emotional effect on me. Apart from that, I can manage in my way, but not every journalist and reporter is in a similar situation. I understand that others are struggling a lot, both physically and psychologically.

(The above interviews were translated from Burmese, and have been edited lightly for brevity and clarity.)

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 "news 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.

“Journalist” in this monitoring work likewise includes 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.

