

Reasons why the US lifted sanctions on Myanmar



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It slipped in quietly. No grand announcement, no televised press conference. Just a routine notice from the US Treasury: several Myanmar-linked individuals—business elites connected to the military junta—have been removed from the sanctions list. That’s it. No real explanation. For anyone who’s been following US policy since Myanmar’s 2021 coup, this looked off. Human rights groups were quick to call it “shocking” and “deeply troubling.” And fair enough—on the surface, it seems like the US just eased up on a regime responsible for mass violence and democratic backsliding. But here’s the thing: this move has very little to do with Myanmar’s domestic politics. It’s not about democracy or human rights. It’s about other geostrategic and geopolitical actors like China. It’s about rare earths. It’s about geography. And it’s about time.

Let’s back up a bit. The sanctions weren’t lifted in a vacuum. Two weeks earlier, Myanmar’s top general, Min Aung Hlaing, sent a letter to US President Donald Trump. In it, he praised Trump’s leadership, floated tariff reductions, and, importantly, asked for sanctions relief. The wording was deliberately flattering, almost performative. But also pragmatic. Myanmar wants access to US markets. It needs economic oxygen. And it knows how to talk to a White House that thinks in deals. Shortly after, the US Treasury removed several junta-linked names: businesspeople operating in defence logistics, tech, and supply chains. Some had

only been sanctioned recently. Again, no formal reason was offered. But nothing in geopolitics happens in a vacuum.

Myanmar’s value to the US isn’t rooted in ideology. It’s logistics, minerals, and map lines. Look at where it sits, wedged between Bangladesh, India, China, and the Bay of Bengal. It’s a perfect fulcrum point in what’s become the most contested strategic region today: the Indo-Pacific. From the US perspective, this isn’t just about what Myanmar is. It’s about what China is doing inside Myanmar. And the picture isn’t simple. Beijing has, for years, been investing in infrastructure, buying access, and forging relationships with both the military and insurgent ethnic groups in Myanmar. This includes groups that control key territories filled with rare earth minerals. That part is important. Rare earths are the raw ingredients in nearly every modern technology: batteries, jets, radar systems, smartphones, the whole stack. Right now, China processes more than 90 percent of global supply. Myanmar’s mines, most of which are barely regulated, are one of the few alternatives. But China is already embedded there too, refining the ore across the border and flooding global markets.

For the US, that’s a nightmare scenario. It means China not only dominates the processing game but is also securing the upstream supply chain. So if Washington wants to reduce dependency, it can’t just keep shouting from a distance. It needs to

be inside the room. That room, like it or not, includes people with close ties to the military.

Strategically, this starts to make sense. US grand strategy, as discussed by Hal Brands in *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump*, rarely prioritises ideals over positioning. It’s often reactive, improvisational, and focused on regaining leverage. Robert Kaplan’s *The Revenge of*

provides the grim rationale: in a zero-sum world, you engage where your rivals thrive, even if it means dealing with actors you’d otherwise shun. Michael Klare’s *The Race for What’s Left* adds the final piece: resources define 21st-century power. Controlling or disrupting rare earth supply chains is no longer just an economic concern; it’s a national security concern.

And still, even beyond the resource game,

this region from becoming a Chinese naval corridor is a high priority, even if it means taking uncomfortable steps. Another layer is regional diplomacy. Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka are watching. All of them are trying to balance relations with Beijing and Washington. The US, by engaging Myanmar, even symbolically, may be signalling that it can be pragmatic, offering carrots, not just sticks.

There’s also the issue of influence down the road. The Myanmar junta is under pressure, economically, militarily, and diplomatically. Ethnic armed groups are gaining ground. The economy is a mess. If things fall apart, and they very well might, the US will want contacts inside the country who aren’t just civil society activists or dissidents in exile. It’ll need people who know how things work on the ground, even if those people have, until now, been on the other side of the ledger. Lifting sanctions might be less about rewarding anyone, and more about rebalancing options. In diplomatic terms, this is keeping the door ajar without committing to a full pivot.

Of course, none of this will sit well with rights groups or Myanmar’s pro-democracy forces. It sends a confusing message: that the junta’s crimes can be overlooked if the timing suits. That may be true, but it’s also consistent with how international politics often works. Morality, unfortunately, is a variable, not a constant, especially when strategic minerals, shipping lanes, and regional influence are in play.

So here we are. The US lifted sanctions on some military-linked figures. It didn’t do it out of friendship. It did it to stay in the game—to push back, however subtly, against China’s tightening grip on Southeast Asia’s most strategic fault line. It’s messy, uncomfortable, and maybe even risky. But in the long run, it might be the only way to get a seat at a table that’s already being set, without Washington.



Myanmar’s value to the US isn’t rooted in ideology—it’s logistics, minerals, and map lines. FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Geography helps explain why Myanmar matters regardless of its internal politics, because where it sits matters. Chokepoints like the Bay of Bengal are too important to leave open to adversaries. John Mearsheimer’s structural realism, outlined in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*,

there are other layers. One is maritime control. China has been busy building its “String of Pearls”—a network of ports and naval facilities stretching from mainland China to the Horn of Africa. Myanmar’s coast, particularly the Kyaukpyu port, is a jewel in that string. For Washington, preventing

Addressing the crisis of child malnutrition



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Even after more than five decades of independence, Bangladesh grapples with the alarming reality of widespread child malnutrition. Nearly one in four children in the country is stunted, meaning their height is far below the standard for their age. Twenty-two percent are underweight, while 11 percent suffer from wasting, which is a form of acute malnutrition. One in 10 newborns has low birth weight, undermining their long-term physical health and cognitive development.

Adding to this grim picture is the lack of healthy dietary practices. Over half of all the children in Bangladesh are deprived of exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life, and 72 percent receive inadequate complementary foods. Only one in every five children enjoys a diverse diet, while the rest rely on one or two types of food daily, which is insufficient to meet even their basic nutritional requirements. This nutritional deprivation severely impairs children’s physical and mental development, resulting in poor educational outcomes, diminished productivity in adulthood, and greater vulnerability to illness. The cumulative economic loss is staggering—about \$1 billion annually—a significant drag on national progress.

This crisis is not only a health sector issue. Child malnutrition is a multidimensional, cross-sectoral challenge. Addressing it requires strategic coordination among local government, civil society, and the private sector. These three key stakeholders must work together to pave a sustainable path forward.

Child nutrition begins in the womb and remains critical through the first two years of life. Proper nutrition during pregnancy determines a child’s birth weight, growth, and immunity. Exclusive breastfeeding for six months provides essential nutrients and immune protection. After six months, children need age-appropriate complementary foods alongside continued breastfeeding up to two years or more.

To ensure healthy development, children’s diets must include adequate calories, protein, vitamins, and minerals. Clean water, safe sanitation, immunisation, and personal hygiene are equally essential. These measures support nutrient absorption and protect against infection. Well-nourished children contribute more productively to society as

adults. Investment in nutrition, therefore, is an investment in the future.

The roots of child malnutrition are deep and varied. Inadequate and undiversified food intake is a primary cause. Many children rely on staple carbohydrates like rice, with little or no protein or micronutrient-rich food. Lack of proper breastfeeding practices, either due to misinformation or sociocultural barriers, further compounds the problem.

Repeated occurrences of diarrhoea, pneumonia, and parasitic infections reduce nutrient absorption and appetite. Contaminated food and water, poor hygiene, and unsafe living conditions accelerate nutrient loss. Maternal undernutrition, both

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during pregnancy and lactation, leads to low birth weight and poor milk production, directly affecting child health.

Lack of knowledge among caregivers regarding feeding practices, widespread poverty, food insecurity, and social or gender discrimination also restrict children’s access to nutritious food. Together, these factors not only undermine individual potential but also erode the foundation of national development.

Local government institutions, including union parishads, upazila parishads, and municipalities, are uniquely positioned to lead nutrition efforts at the grassroots level. They can promote community awareness, monitor food safety, support school-based nutrition education, encourage

good agricultural practices, and expand immunisation coverage.

Yet, despite their strategic role, these institutions rarely allocate a budget for nutrition, particularly child nutrition. Government budget formats do not even list it as a category. The Right2Grow project, implemented in 40 unions across four coastal districts, demonstrates that targeted budget allocations and implementation can drive real progress in nutrition outcomes.

Civil society organisations and NGOs are vital partners in raising awareness, promoting breastfeeding, delivering nutrition to vulnerable populations, and supporting health workers. They can foster community engagement through participatory approaches and advocate for child nutrition at local and national levels.

One major barrier is political influence. For civil society to play an effective role, its work must remain impartial and driven by evidence, not agendas. Moreover, securing sustainable public financing for nutrition requires strong political commitment. Civil society must therefore lead robust advocacy to push child nutrition up the priority list of local and national governments.

Another critical role is budget tracking and monitoring. But insufficient access to data often hampers these efforts, threatening transparency and accountability in nutrition-related expenditures.

The private sector, too, has a transformative role to play. From producing and marketing safe and nutritious foods to funding school feeding programmes through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, businesses can influence both supply and demand. They can support awareness campaigns, partner with the government and NGOs to produce low-cost, nutrient-dense foods, and invest in research and development of fortified staples—such as rice, lentils, flour, and edible oils—as well as micronutrient-enriched biscuits and seeds. Strengthening supply chains and training local entrepreneurs to deliver nutrition solutions to remote communities are additional avenues for engagement.

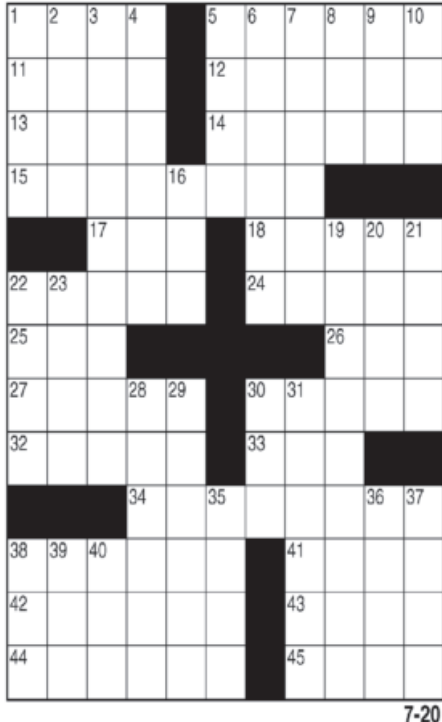
Through public-private partnerships, the private sector can also contribute to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and nutrition education, as well as introduce sustainable technologies that make healthy choices more accessible.

Child nutrition is not merely a health statistic—it is a national development imperative. It reflects our values, priorities, and commitment to the next generation. Only through coordinated, inclusive, and locally anchored action involving government, civil society, and the private sector can we ensure a healthier, smarter, and more resilient Bangladesh.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Rainbow shapes
- 5 Lists of candidates
- 11 Yard part
- 12 Roman orator
- 13 Clip contents
- 14 Bird sanctuary
- 15 Didn't go
- 17 List-shortening abbr.
- 18 Christina of "Sleepy Hollow"
- 22 Velvety flower
- 24 Berate
- 25 Outdated
- 26 Cattle call
- 27 Convenes
- 30 Shoe parts
- 32 Brake, for one
- 33 "Patience ___ virtue"
- 34 Won back
- 38 Orbit point
- 41 Together, in music
- 42 Red Cross headquarters
- 43 Richard of "Chicago"
- 44 Wine expert
- 45 Smell



DOWN

- 1 Miles off
- 2 Colosseum setting
- 3 Praised
- 4 Some ermines
- 5 Checkout act
- 6 Sources of bile
- 7 With a low pH
- 8 Caffeine source
- 9 Blunder
- 10 Kind of milk
- 16 Frozen over
- 19 Was in charge
- 20 Hoof sound
- 21 Altar exchange
- 22 Splendor
- 23 Out of the wind
- 28 Goal
- 29 Jacket part
- 30 Through
- 31 Crumbly cheese
- 35 Clock part
- 36 Franc's replacement
- 37 Some bucks
- 38 IRS employee
- 39 Casserole bit
- 40 Switch settings

FRIDAY'S ANSWERS



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