

Myanmar junta hit by western sanctions as 'silent strikes' mark coup anniversary

Thursday 2 February 2023, by [RATCLIFFE Rebecca](#) (Date first published: 1 February 2023).

The UK, US, Canada and Australia have announced a range of measures aimed at punishing Myanmar's military.

The UK, US and Canada have imposed fresh sanctions against Myanmar's military, including some measures aimed at stopping the supply of aviation fuel to its air force, which is accused of indiscriminately bombing civilian areas.

The sanctions were announced two years on from the [2021 February coup](#), in which Myanmar's military ousted the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, detaining her and plunging the country into turmoil.

Since then, the junta has [torched villages across the country](#), [launched airstrikes](#) on civilians and detained anyone suspected of supporting pro-democracy movements, in an attempt to control determined opposition from the public.

On Wednesday, the anniversary of the coup, images on social media showed empty streets in some of Myanmar's major cities after activists, who can no longer safely protest in urban areas, called for a "silent strike". People were encouraged to stay at home and shut their businesses for several hours from 10am to show their opposition to the junta.

Images of banners hanging from bridges in Yangon, calling for people to join the "revolution", were published in local media.

In neighbouring Thailand, hundreds of people gathered at the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok, with some carrying images of Aung San Suu Kyi or raising their hands in a three-finger salute, a symbol of opposition to the military.

A pro-military rally was held in Yangon, according to reports. The US embassy in the city had warned of "increased anti-regime activity and violence" in the days around the anniversary.

The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said in a statement on Tuesday that the 2021 coup had placed Myanmar on "a disastrous path that has killed and displaced thousands" and that fresh sanctions would be imposed in conjunction with [Canada](#) and the UK. Australia has also announced sanctions.

The military has pledged to hold elections in August this year, but strict rules that were recently announced suggest the polls will be neither free nor fair. The junta has sought to justify the coup by claiming, without evidence, that there was widespread fraud in the 2020 elections, which Aung San Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide. Aung San Suu Kyi has since been sentenced to more than three decades in prison after a series of closed-door trials.

The sanctions announced by Canada on Wednesday prohibit the export, sale, supply or shipment of aviation fuel to Myanmar. The UK measures were focused on companies and individuals associated with the Asia Sun group, which it said “supplies fuel to the Myanmar air force enabling its barbaric air raiding campaign”.

Amnesty International’s business and human rights researcher Montse Ferrer described the measures by the Canadian and British governments as “an important step towards ending companies’ contribution to the military’s war crimes”.

“Until now, the inaction of governments has allowed the Myanmar military to use imported aviation fuel to launch airstrikes that have devastated families and terrorised civilians. While the companies targeted by the UK are key players in the aviation fuel industry in Myanmar, countries must take action on the entire industry to stop the flow of aviation fuel,” said Ferrer.

Ferrer said countries should also follow Canada in suspending the direct and indirect supply, sale or transfer – including transit, trans-shipment and brokering – of aviation fuel to Myanmar.

The US sanctions target the senior leadership of Myanmar’s ministry of energy, Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), its air force, as well as an arms dealer and a family member of a previously designated business associate of the military. The US also sanctioned the Union Electoral Commission.

Earlier this week, the UN secretary general, António Guterres, said he was concerned by the military’s apparent intention to hold elections “amid intensifying aerial bombardment and burning of civilian houses, along with ongoing arrests, intimidation and harassment of political leaders, civil society actors and journalists”.

Debbie Stothard, the founder of Altsean, a network of human rights groups in south-east Asia, said the run-up to promised elections in August this year had “already featured a huge spike in violence that has impacted the economy and human security”, adding that this would continue.

Australia, which has been criticised for its slowness to impose sanctions on Myanmar’s military figures, announced measures against 16 people, including the head of the junta, Min Aung Hlaing, and his deputy, Soe Win. Two entities, the Myanmar Economic Corporation and Myanmar Economic Holdings Public Company Ltd, were also targeted.

Rebecca Ratcliffe, South-east Asia correspondent

P.S.

• The Guardian. Wed 1 Feb 2023 12.50 GMT:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/01/myanmars-air-force-targeted-by-sanctions-two-year-s-on-from-military-coup-protest-strike>

• *Rebecca Ratcliffe’s articles in The Guardian:*
<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/rebecca-ratcliffe>

• Support the Guardian
Available for everyone, funded by readers

[Contribute](#)

[Subscribe](#)