

Burma

Myanmar's Ethnic States Rise Up in Protest Against Military Coup

Thursday 11 February 2021, by [Nan Lwin](#) (Date first published: 10 February 2021).

YANGON—One day after protesters rejecting Myanmar's military regime held mass rallies in Myanmar's biggest cities including Yangon, tens of thousands of people in all the ethnic dominated states also took to the streets, trying to bring down the generals who seized power on Feb 1.

Residents in Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Rakhine, Mon and Shan States have joined anti-coup nationwide rallies beginning this week, facing off against police officers and military personnel day after day.

In the past, the crucial demand from Myanmar's ethnic regions was the formation of a federal state, but now their demands are the same as those in Burman-dominated areas.

They called for military to stop the coup, release the national civilian leader State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other politicians from National League for Democracy (NLD), restore power to elected government and abolish the 2008 military-drafted constitution.

In Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State in northern Myanmar, thousands of people have joined protests against the coup despite the fact that most of them had previously criticized the NLD-led government's failure to amend 2008 military-drafted constitution and address ethnic rights.



Thousands of residents in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin, protest against the military coup on Wednesday. /Kachinwave

Many of the protesters in those states dressed in their own ethnic attire, holding the flags of each ethnic group, and their demands reflect those around the country.

They shouted slogans: "We want Democracy," "We reject the military coup," "Free Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint!" In Kachin state's capital Myitkyina, protesters also expressed their desire to a new charter, urging "Abolish the 2008 Constitution." Later, the protests spread across the state from the capital to northernmost part of the state, Putao township.

A young Kachin woman activist, who is leading the anti-coup protests in Myitkyina, Sut Seng Htoi told The Irrawaddy, "Rejecting the military coup is a matter for the future of our country, so I am actively involved in the demonstrations."



Thousands of residents in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin protest against the military coup on Wednesday. /Kachinwave

"It is our responsibility to [protest] against the dictatorship...for our future," Sut Seng Htoi said.

Sut Seng Htoi said that Kachin people are also demanding the 2008 military-drafted constitution be abolished to remove the role of the military in politics.

Myanmar police began to crack down on the demonstrations on Tuesday, using water cannons and opening fire, however anti-coup protests strongly continue across the country, on the fifth day of nationwide demonstrations.

"We all know that violent crackdowns could come anytime, but we want to do whatever we can....to overthrow the dictatorship," Sut Seng Htoi added.



More than 20 police officers joined an anti-coup protest in Loikaw, Kayah state on Wednesday. (Photo: Supplied)

In Myitkyina, hundreds of civil servants from education, general administration departments, and Myitkyina University also joined the growing civil disobedience campaigns, refusing to go their offices to show disapproval of military regime's cabinet.

They also participated in the protests and called for other civil servants to join them, shouting a slogan: "Don't go to work, leave the office!"

Residents in several cities across the Shan state—from Taunggyi in Shan's south to Muse in the north—have joined the nationwide protest to reject the military coup.

A 30-year-old engineer, Ko Arkar who has been participating in protests in Taunggyi, the capital of Shan state, told The Irrawaddy, "The government I voted for in the 2020 election, has been toppled by the military. At least they need to respect our votes. I grew up under the military dictatorship. We just got democracy the past few years. I do not want the next generation to grow up under a dark age like I had to go through."



Residents protest against the military coup on Wednesday in Karen State. (Photo: Supplied)

"As a citizen of this country, I will do whatever I can to denounce the coup. We will keep demanding until we get what we want," Ko Arkar said.

Sao Haymar Thaike, the daughter of Myanmar's first president-Sao Shwe Thaike who was killed following Ne Win's military coup in 1962- told The Irrawaddy the military coup is totally unacceptable.

"I stand with the people who are demanding to bring down the military," she said.

Sao Haymar Thaike, a 75-year-old, demands that military release democratic leaders including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and return power to a civilian government as soon as possible.



Health care workers take part in a civil disobedience campaign against the military regime in Myawaddy, Karen State on Wednesday. (Photo: Supplied)

"I pray every day for the protesters to be safe and that we would get what we demand," Sao Haymar Thaike said.

In Kayah state (located south of Shan State), the NLD and a local popular party Kayah State Democratic party (KySDP) issued a joint statement to condemn the military coup, despite the fact that both parties competed against each other in the 2020 election. KySDP even has fired its number-two vice president from the party after he accepted the military regime's offer to take a position in the State Administrative Council (SAC), set up by the coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

Maw Moe Myar, an elected lower house lawmaker from KySDP who is also leading the protest movement in Shadaw township in Kayah state, told The Irrawaddy, "We do not want a military dictatorship. We want a democracy. I believe that only with true democracy, can we establish the federal union that we have been longing for so long."



Civilians in Thandwe, Rakhine State, join the nationwide protest against the military rule on Wednesday. Photo: Supplied)

“I think the most important thing right now is to get back to civilian rule,” Maw Moe Myar said.

In the country’s west, anti-coup protesters join the nationwide demonstrations this week, despite the Arakan National Party joining hands with the regime.

The most popular Rakhine party, Arakan National Party (ANP) has been strongly criticized by civil society organizations (CSOs) after its spokesperson accepted the position in military-led SAC.



Anti-coup protesters are seen in the Yangon, commercial capital of Myanmar, on Tuesday. /Hein Htet/The Irrawaddy

On Feb.9, eight anti-coup protesters were detained by the police in Rakhine State after protests against the military coup in five townships in central and southern Rakhine. Among them, two of the protesters are ethnically Chin students from the organization Chin University Students in Rakhine State.

A lawyer from Ann Township in Rakhine’s south, Ko Khaing Myat said, “I voted for the NLD. The military must respect my vote.”

“We will keep demanding until they hear our voices. We believe that our people deserve better.” Ko Khaing Myat said.

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The Irrawaddy's senior reporter Nan Lwin has written extensively on Myanmar's economic liberalization—both its pros and cons—as well as foreign direct investment, and the country's relationships with other nations through the lens of business, economic policies and strategic projects. A particular theme of her reporting has been China's aggressive push into various economic sectors across Myanmar, and its socioeconomic impacts, as well as the neighboring country's influence in Myanmar's politics. Follow her in-depth coverage of these topics and current events.