

Myanmar: Police and protesters resume running battles in Yangon for fourth day

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Security forces have deployed tear gas, rubber bullets and stun grenades to dislodge protesters from their home-made barricades, with only limited success.

Yangon is today again a battle zone, with police and soldiers attempting to disperse thousands of peaceful protesters from sites across the city including Sanchaung, Insein Road in Hlaing Township and near Yuzana Plaza in Tarmwe Township.

There were also reports of crackdowns elsewhere in the country, including Kalay in Sagaing Region, where medics told *AFP* that three protesters had been critically injured when security forces fired live rounds at anti-coup protesters.

For a fourth straight day police used tear gas, rubber bullets and stun grenades to dislodge protesters from their home-made barricades. Although it often sent protesters running, and led to small numbers of arrests, they were usually able to find safe haven and then regroup as soon as the security forces left the area.

In Sanchaung, police moved in shortly after 9am to disperse protesters on Padonmar Street, and at 10:45am police and soldiers fired tear gas and rubber bullets on nearby Kyun Taw Road. A Frontier reporter who was close to the confrontation managed to take shelter in a nearby shop. At least three people were arrested, while a soldier was seen cursing as he destroyed a National League for Democracy flag.

A Frontier reporter hides from soldiers inside a store in Sanchaung. (Frontier)

On Mingalar Street in Sanchaung, rumours of snipers on rooftops created a tense atmosphere this morning. Police eventually moved in to disperse protesters, deploying smoke bombs and what appeared to be tear gas. Protesters took cover in nearby apartments. During this time a police officer was seen firing directly into a ground-floor room on Mingalar Street. Once the police left and a scout had given the all-clear, the protesters emerged to resume their demonstration.

A police officer is seen firing directly into a ground floor apartment on Mingalar Street in Sanchaung. (Frontier)

Later in the morning, security forces broke up a protest near Yuzana Plaza, with a heavy military presence seen on nearby Ma U Kone Street, a *Frontier* reporter said.

Insein Road has been one of the key battlegrounds again, with police employing more ruthless tactics to disrupt protests.

Yesterday protesters set up roadblocks and staged sit-ins at several points along the road north of Hledan junction, bringing traffic to a standstill. They were eventually forced to flee in the afternoon

under police fire and sought shelter in nearby apartments.

In a now familiar scene, protesters wielding home-made shields had this morning erected makeshift barricades using rubbish bins near the Butaryone bus stop on Insein Road.

They were forced to disperse after 11am when police unleashed tear gas and rubber bullets. Residents told *Frontier* the police crackdown came sooner today than yesterday. A *Frontier* reporter and photographer both narrowly escaped arrest by hiding in nearby apartments.

Frontier saw five people being arrested, while police were also seen releasing another nine people who had been detained in the same area.

Police have also been breaking the windows of cars that had been stopped on Insein Road to hinder their advance.

"The crackdown today is fast," one demonstrator told *Frontier*. "They have even been going into the wards to arrest people." Police have now reportedly blocked Than Lan and Butaryone streets, and *Frontier* also saw police and military near the Kan Lan bus stop on Insein Road.

One person in a densely populated ward in Hlaing Township near Insein Road told *Frontier* it was "basically a war zone", with community leaders setting up temporary roadblocks around the entire ward. Security forces are said to have blocked off roads in all directions, and warned that anyone who tries to leave will be shot.

Meanwhile, at the end of some streets within the ward residents have also set up temporary barricades with rebar, bamboo, or PVC tubing to stop and search any cars that try to enter, forcing all the passengers to get out of the vehicle.

In Mandalay, rallies in Maha Aung Myay Township drew thousands of protesters this morning despite previously deadly crackdowns in the city.

"No matter how they crack down on us, we will fight ... We will find any way to get back on the streets," one defiant protester told *Frontier*. "This is the only way to show that we don't want dictatorship."

There was a lighter than normal police presence, but more plain-clothes officers were spotted in the vicinity, our reporter said.

Elsewhere in Myanmar's second-largest city, motorcyclists have been riding in convoys in protest against the junta.

Meanwhile, people across the country have been coating their streets in X-ed out photos of junta chief Min Aung Hlaing's face, then stomping on the images or using them as betel-juice bullseyes. Today our reporter caught protesters in Chan Aye Thar Zan Township joining in the fun. In some areas they've also been pasting the entire street with photos of Min Aung Hlaing, in an apparent attempt to dissuade security forces from entering, because it would require them to walk on his face.

There have been no protests in Nay Pyi Taw today, but at Naung Pin Gyi stupa a ceremony was held for those killed in anti-coup demonstrations.

"We will forever respect and be proud of them ... I pray they'll never face such terror in the next life," an event leader said.

After the ceremony, participants painted pro-democracy slogans on nearby streets.

“Let [the authorities] erase [these phrases] as much as they like,” a young participant told *Frontier*. “We are not afraid of their weapons – they’re afraid of our words.”

While police and army crackdowns in Myanmar’s major cities have grabbed the most attention this week, protests have been violently dispersed and activists hunted down in smaller provincial hubs.

In Lashio, northern Shan State, the Kachin Youth Solidarity Network reported that 13 people were arrested on Monday from inside the town’s Kachin Baptist Church, after a morning demonstration was broken up with water cannons and teargas. The network said protesters were pursued down side streets by plain clothes officers, with some arriving at the Baptist church.

Eyewitnesses said the church was surrounded by about 50 police officers and soldiers. At 1pm the security forces broke down the gate, questioned those inside about the presence of an “ethnic youth group”, and forced themselves into a study room where the 13 were arrested. The network said theological students were among those arrested, and that they are believed to be being held at Lashio’s No 1 police station.

Correction: An earlier version of this article incorrectly said the 13 arrests in Lashio took place today.

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