

Myanmar: Aung San Suu Kyi could face two years in jail over 'illegal' walkie-talkies

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Ousted Myanmar leader facing prison as civil disobedience campaign against military coup grows

Myanmar police have charged ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi with possession of illegally imported walkie-talkies, which could result in a two-year prison sentence, as a civil disobedience campaign grew against [the military's coup](#).

A document from a police station in the capital, Naypyitaw, said military officers who searched Aung San Suu Kyi's residence had found handheld radios that were imported illegally and used without permission by her bodyguards. The charges, confirmed by members of her party, appear to carry a maximum prison sentence of two years.

A state newspaper also reported that the new military government would investigate what it has described as fraud in November's election, in which its proxy party was heavily defeated by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD).

The ousted president, Win Myint, is meanwhile to be charged for allegedly breaching coronavirus laws by meeting people on the campaign trail.

The moves are likely to fuel already simmering anger towards the military. In one of the first organised acts of defiance against the army since Monday's coup, health workers in 70 hospitals and medical departments in Naypyidaw, Yangon and other towns and cities said they would not work under the military regime, accusing the generals of placing their own priorities above those of ordinary people during the pandemic.

"We refuse to obey any order from the illegitimate military regime who demonstrated they do not have any regards for our poor patients," the organisers said.

Teachers' groups, including the [Myanmar](#) Teachers' Federation, announced they would join the civil disobedience campaign, while a Facebook page that was set up to coordinate such action accumulated more than 180,000 followers by Wednesday evening. The All Burma Federation of Students Union has urged other government workers to strike.

"They will not stop this movement until the elected government is restored," said Kyaw, a surgeon at West Yangon general hospital who has resigned from the government hospital where he worked.

"I am upset about being apart from the patients, but I have no regrets, knowing that I did my best to help fight the pandemic," he said.

Doctors are instead treating patients in their homes and at charity health clinics.

There have been no reports of street demonstrations against the army, but there is palpable anger among the public, who lived under repressive military regimes for five decades.

On Wednesday night, the [clanging of pots and pans](#) echoed through the main city of Yangon, as people took to their balconies in a symbolic protest against the military. On social media, many adopted red profile pictures to signal their loyalty to Aung San Suu Kyi, who spent nearly 15 years in detention as she campaigned against military rule before being released in 2010. Within Myanmar, she is widely revered as a heroine of democracy, despite international condemnation over her treatment of the Rohingya.

The NLD has called for Aung San Suu Kyi's release and urged the military to acknowledge the results of November's election, which it won by a landslide.

The military [detained Aung San Suu Kyi](#) in early morning raids on Monday, hours before the opening of parliament. It has accused the NLD of election fraud, a claim observers have dismissed as fabricated. She reportedly remains under house arrest.

It also emerged on Wednesday that the International Monetary Fund last week sent \$350m (£256m) in cash to the Myanmar government, part of a no-strings-attached emergency aid package to help the country battle the coronavirus pandemic. Days later, the generals seized power.

The US, which has formally declared the military's takeover a coup, has threatened to reimpose sanctions, while countries around the world have demanded the release of detainees and for the army to relinquish power.

The G7 group of the world's largest developed economies on Wednesday condemned the coup and said it was deeply concerned about the fate of detained political leaders.

At a meeting of the UN security council on Tuesday, however, China and Russia blocked a statement condemning the coup and calling for its reversal, while India and Vietnam also voiced reservations.

China and Russia previously undermined attempts to pressure Myanmar over the atrocities committed against Rohingya in 2017, when a military crackdown forced 700,000 people to flee to safety in Bangladesh. In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where they remain trapped, refugees said they were even more afraid of returning now that the military is in total control.

"The military killed us, raped our sisters and mothers, torched our villages. How is it possible for us to stay safe under their control?" Khin Maung, the head of the Rohingya Youth Association in the camps in Cox's Bazar district, told Associated Press. "It will take a long time because the political situation in Myanmar is worse now."

Louis Charbonneau, the UN director for Human Rights Watch, said the failure of the security council to condemn the military would embolden its leaders to "feel they can engage in horrific abuses and pay little or no cost".

The army has claimed the coup is in line with the country's constitution. The army chief, Min Aung Hlaing, now head of a new cabinet, on Tuesday defended the military's action as "inevitable". Civilian leaders, he said, had not listened to the army's complaints of voter fraud.

As public action to resist the military emerged, the military issued a warning in the state-controlled Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper.

"Some of the media organisations and people are posting rumours on social media, releasing

statements to occur riot and unstable situation,” the English-language statement read. It called on people “not to make such moves and to cooperate with the government in accordance with existing laws”.

Many have rushed to download the offline messaging app Bridgefy, which was used during Hong Kong’s pro-democracy protests in 2020, after phone and internet services went down earlier in the week. The company said its app had been downloaded more than 1m times in Myanmar this week.

The military has a grim record of using violence against to quash dissent, and protesting against it carries huge risks.

A human rights activist based in Yangon said she believed other government workers would join civil disobedience action. “The numbers will grow, it is growing now,” she said.

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