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# Young Burmese dismiss junta military draft order

Some say they will join resistance forces or leave the country.

By RFA Burmese  
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Myanmar junta military soldiers parade during a ceremony to mark the 77th anniversary of the country's Union Day in Naypyitaw, Feb. 12, 2024. (AFP)

Young Burmese called up to join the military under a conscription law said they would team up with resistance fighters or leave Myanmar rather than serve as soldiers for the ruling junta that seized power in a coup d'état three years ago.

Junta leader Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing announced on Feb. 10 that the People's Military Service Law, enacted in 2010 by a previous military regime though it had never been enforced, would go into effect immediately.

Enforcement of the law comes as anti-junta forces and ethnic armies have scored significant victories against junta forces in Myanmar's ongoing civil war, which escalated in October 2023 when the groups joined together and launched new offensives against the military that caused significant casualties.

Min Aung Hlaing's directive has stoked fear and concern among Burmese men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27, who face up to five years in prison if they refuse to serve for two years.

Professionals – such as doctors, engineers and technicians – aged 18-45 for men and 18-35 for women must also serve, but up to five years, given the country's current state of emergency, extended by the junta on Feb. 1 for another six months.

"If they are forced to serve, they will only fight to end the military dictatorship," a resident of Yangon told Radio Free Asia.

"It's probable that [the junta] will push city dwellers to join the resistance forces," she said.

Min Min, 24, said he would refuse to serve in the military.

"I will not live in the country anymore, and will find a suitable way out," said the young man, who also lives in Yangon.

Sandar, 22, from Mandalay, said that she was angered when she heard about the law taking effect because it would force the people to fight against each other.

Instead, she is considering joining the People's Defense Force, or PDF, of ordinary citizens who have taken up arms against the junta's military forces.

"We need to support this revolution and put an end to the dictators," Sandar said.

## **Losing battles**

In northwestern Sagaing region's Khin-U township, where armed conflicts break out nearly every day, residents said the junta has turned to forcibly recruiting civilians because its ground troops are losing battles and need front-line reinforcements.

"In this situation, they are using the law as the 'last bullet,'" said a resident named Hein. "Junta supporters are not exempted from this law, so even they will have to fight against the military [if they don't agree with it]."





**Soldiers from Myanmar's army provide military training in Lukyi village of Kalay township in northwestern Myanmar's Sagaing township, Feb. 11, 2022. (Citizen journalist)**

The junta had previously used prisoners and former servicemen to fight, but is now conscripting civilians to serve after suffering mounting defeats and troop losses, said Maung Maung Swe, deputy secretary of the shadow National Unity Government's Ministry of Defense.

"The public opposes [the junta] whenever they get an opportunity," he said. "If they are forced to serve under the compulsory military service law, this will be a sword for them, and [the junta] will be overthrown immediately."

Myanmar junta spokesman Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun said via state-controlled media on Monday that the mandatory conscription law was introduced because of the need for defense forces, given limitations of the military to handle high-tech weapons and military equipment.

His comment came a day after he urged every eligible citizen to participate in military service to protect the country. Quoting Myanmar's 2008 constitution, drafted by a previous military junta, he said the military service law was being enforced in line with the stipulations for basic duties of citizens.

Although the State Administration Council — the junta's formal name — has activated the compulsory military service law, bylaws for its practical enforcement have yet to be determined, Zaw Min Tun said.

## **A desperate attempt**

Burmese legal and political analysts have criticized the move as a desperate attempt to bring the public into the conflict.

Sai Kyi Zin Soe, a political commentator, believes that the law will fuel armed conflict in Myanmar.

“Amid military tension among armed groups and escalation of public hatred and suspicion of the [junta], the order of military service law is very dangerous, and it will lead to high-tension armed conflict,” he told Radio Free Asia.

He also predicted that the enforcement of the law will cause people between the ages of 18 and 35 to flee abroad to avoid military service.

Legal analyst and human rights lawyer Kyee Myint said the junta’s enforcement of the law is illegitimate because the regime violated the 2008 constitution when it seized power from the democratically elected government in the coup.

Min Aung Hlaing violated the 2008 constitution during the 2021 coup by arresting President Win Myint and voiding the results of the 2020 election won by de-facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy, Kyee Myint said.

“So, his enactment of the military service law is illegal,” he said.

***Translated by Aung Naing and Htin Aung Kyaw for RFA Burmese. Edited by Roseanne Gerin and Joshua Lipes.***

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