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Myanmar insurgents attack navy base as junta recruits militias



Residents of Ayeyarwady's Hinthada township being recruited by raffle junta's military service on March 18, 2024.

Citizen Photo

Insurgents in Myanmar's Rakhine state are closing in on an important junta naval base, a spokesman for the group said on Thursday, as military authorities in neighboring regions rounded up people into civil defense teams in preparation for rebel advances.

The Arkan Army ethnic minority force has made stunning gains in Myanmar's westernmost state, capturing townships, military bases and an airport at Thandwe town, since going on the offensive late last year.

Now AA fighters are attacking the last remaining junta positions protecting its Maung Shwe Lay naval base in Thandwe, AA spokesman Khaing Thu Kha told Radio Free Asia.

He said eight naval vessels were supporting junta ground troops and the fighting was fierce.

Junta spokesmen have not commented on the latest fighting.

Myanmar's military has been battling insurgencies since soon after independence from Britain in 1948 but the pressure its forces are under this year is unprecedented.

Pro-democracy activists, outraged by the ouster of an elected government in 2021 and a bloody crackdown on protests that followed, have taken up arms, linking up in many parts of the country with ethnic minority rebels fighting long wars for self-determination.

Junta forces have lost ground in Rakhine and Chin states in the west, Kachin state in the north, Shan state in the northeast and eastern areas along the border with Thailand.

In addition, central heartland areas that have been peaceful for decades have been rocked by clashes as anti-junta People's Defense Forces go on the attack.

Junta officials told administrators on Aug. 16 it would begin setting up militias, or [public security committees](#), to arm people to defend their communities, according to information leaked on social media.

Residents in the Ayeyarwady region, near a [conflict zone](#) in southern Rakhine state, said on Thursday that authorities there had begun recruiting people into the militias, drawing names through a lottery system in five townships.

“They’re recruiting us for their militia,” said one resident of a township that borders Rakhine state.

“Local administrators are recruiting people between the ages of 35 and 65 under the pretext of serving public security in the neighborhoods and villages,” said the resident, who declined to be identified.

“They even tried to recruit some disabled people and when they refused, they had to pay a fine.”

RFA tried to telephone Ayeyarwady region’s junta spokesperson, Khin Maung Kyi, for information but he did not answer.

Political parties in the area have also been told to help fill the ranks, said one party member.

“Political parties have been called up for recruitment in some towns,” said the party worker who declined to be identified. “The junta asked us to contribute 50 people.”

Recruits would be asked to carry weapons and do some short military training, he said.

Translated by RFA Burmese Edited by Kiana Duncan and Mike Firn.