

Burma

# After Working With Myanmar's Regime, Rakhine's Major Party Remains Divided

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**Rakhine State's voters and some senior party members have questioned the convictions of the Arakan National Party (ANP), the largest ethnically Rakhine party, as it begins to cut ties with Myanmar's regime three months after taking a seat on the military's governing council.**

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ANP policy leadership committee member and spokeswoman Daw Aye Nu Sein joined the State Administrative Council (SAC), on Feb. 3 in the wake of the military coup.

However, its central executive committee meeting in Sittwe on Tuesday decided to end the party's association with the military council.

The ANP's chairman, U Tha Tun Hla, said the party no longer thinks cooperating with the SAC is in Rakhine interests after the military regime ignored ANP demands for a greater role in handling Rakhine affairs.

The party on Feb. 4 demanded the chair and two seats on the Rakhine State administrative council, the junta's state-level ruling body, and a majority of Rakhine ministerial positions.

Its seven demands included delisting of the Arakan Army (AA) and its political wing, the United League of Arakan, as terrorist organizations, and dropping charges against Rakhine citizens under the Counter-Terrorism Law.

The military regime has removed the AA from its list of terrorist organizations and released former ANP chairman Dr. Aye Maung.

"Our demands were disregarded. We don't think an association with the military council is in Rakhine interests," said U Tha Tun Hla. The party's central committee is planning to meet again to make a final decision on the matter, he said.

## **How did Daw Aye Nu Sein get involved in the SAC?**

U Tha Tun Hla sought to distance the ANP from Daw Aye Nu Sein, saying she was not assigned by

the party to join the junta's council and she took the decision on a personal basis.

"The military regime didn't make an offer to the ANP. The position was personally offered to her through an individual close to Myanmar's military," U Tha Tun Hla told The Irrawaddy.

The ANP, however, considered her role an opportunity for the party to work for Rakhine interests, he said.

"It is up to Daw Aye Nu Sein whether she remains on the SAC," said the ANP chair.

Another ANP member, U Zaw Aye Maung, a former Rakhine affairs minister in the Yangon regional government, also accepted the position as deputy ethnic affairs minister in the regime. He will decide whether to stay on, said U Tha Tun Hla.

The ANP at the time welcomed the decision to offer Daw Aye Nu Sein a SAC seat, which drew heavy public criticism.

U Pe Than, another ANP policy board member, said the party must take responsibility for its SAC involvement.

"In its statement, the party said it welcomed Daw Aye Nu Sein's appointment to the SAC. This meant she was assigned by the party and is responsible to the party. After issuing that statement, it should not say her involvement is personal and nothing to do with the party," said U Pe Than.

### **Friction within the ANP**

Following Daw Aye Nu Sein's appointment to the SAC, an ANP central committee meeting in Mrauk-U in mid-February decided to wait before deciding on further cooperation. Some members opposed the non-committal approach.

"I don't understand the idea of cooperating with the military council. I was criticized at the meeting and faced anger when I told them to listen to the people about cooperation with the military council," said a senior ANP member who asked for anonymity.

"I have since boycotted the party," he added.

Kyaukphyu Rural Development Association chairman U Tun Kyi said the ANP's demands were just excuses to justify its association with the military regime.

"I doubt the party's decision to cooperate with the military council just for the release of [the state parliament speaker] U San Kyaw Hla and Dr. Aye Maung. The party lied to the people. It abused the people," he said.

U San Kyaw Hla, a senior member of the ANP and also the father-in-law of AA chief Tun Myat Naing, is still in detention.

"The military council has no problem if the ANP chooses to leave. It is the ANP that has problems. It has already behaved poorly," U Tun Kyi.

## **After three months working with the SAC**

ANP leadership realized it had to do something after its calls for a leadership role in the state-level council fell on the deaf ears, said a Rathedaung resident.

“Its demands were not met. So the party is planning to cut ties with the military council to salvage its image and win back public support,” he said.

However, some senior ANP members are open-minded about working with the SAC, leading to a rift within the party, according to analysts.

“The majority of the party’s policy board wants to wait and see as there have been no significant changes. But the majority of the central executive committee disagree,” said U Tun Aung Kyaw, who is on the party’s policy board.

“We have yet to see what Daw Aye Nu Sein and U Zaw Aye Maung do,” he told The Irrawaddy.

Young, educated members have left the ANP following its decision to cooperate with the regime and the ANP has sought to distance itself from the military regime.

The ANP has failed the Rakhine voters, who overwhelmingly supported the party since 2010, said U Soe Naing from a civil society organization in Sittwe.

“The party does not have any firm policy. Far from leading the people, the ANP doesn’t even know how to manage itself,” he told The Irrawaddy.

### **The Irrawaddy**

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