

Burma

Despite Pressure, Myanmar Govt Employees Refuse to Work Under Military Rule

Workers at Myanmar's Private Banks Join Nationwide Anti-Coup Work Stoppage

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YANGON - Operations at many government departments in Myanmar all but halted this week as staff refused to work for the military regime, which early this month seized power from Myanmar's democratically elected government.

Many hospitals, banks, municipal departments and other government offices have been deserted as their employees have joined the growing Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), staying at home or urging other civil servants to join the movement by taking part in anti-coup protests.

In Yangon on Tuesday, township General Administration Department offices and a few government-run banks were found to be open. But the banks had to struggle with a very small number of staff.

A director of a township labor department told The Irrawaddy that some labor departments are closed because staff have been on strike against military rule.

Many protesters have opted to join the CDM since ousted leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi urged people to resist the coup.

It was initiated by medical staff at government hospitals, and others followed suit.

The impact of the medics' CDM was so huge that coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing himself urged them to go back to work. Undermanned government hospitals have been turning away new admissions, and some have closed.



Hundreds of anti-coup demonstrators protest near the Central Bank of Myanmar office in Yangon calling on staff to join the CDM. / The Irrawaddy

Nearly 500 staff including at the director level under the ministries of Commerce, Electricity and Energy, Transport and Communications, and Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, joined the CDM in Naypyitaw last week.

Since Monday, public support for the CDM has intensified. People have staged sit-ins in front of government offices, calling on their workers to join them.

An official from state-owned Myanmar Economic Bank in Yangon's Insein Township told The Irrawaddy that his bank was struggling to maintain operations after 30 staff went on strike against military rule. Hundreds of demonstrators outside called on the staff inside to take part in the CDM.

The Government Office complex in Insein Township, which is normally crowded during office hours, was deserted when The Irrawaddy visited it.

Another government sector hard hit by the CDM is transportation. Staff from Myanmar Railways (MR) in Yangon and Mandalay have proven to be second only to the medics in their participation, with 99 percent of railway employees on strike, according to an official from MR.

U Myo Myint Saw, who is in charge of the mechanical department at the Insein Locomotive Shed, told The Irrawaddy on Tuesday that all 245 staff at the shed joined the CDM last week. As result, the circular rail service, one of the transportation lifelines for many Yangon residents, has been halted, he said.

"Nearly all MR staff are in the CDM," he said.

He admitted that there had been some pressure from upstairs, including threats that workers would be "kicked out of their staff quarters" if they didn't to go back to work.

U Myo Myint Saw said staff at the shed were still resistant because they simply didn't want to work under the military regime.

"We will be paid the same as under the NLD government. But we don't like the military dictatorship. That's why we are all in the movement to bring back the good system [a democratically elected government]," he explained while calling on staff at other ministries to join the movement.



Hundreds of government staff from various ministries in Naypyitaw join the CDM last week. / The Irrawaddy

However, regime spokesperson Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun told the media at the regime's first post-coup press conference on Tuesday that "the government mechanism is functioning well," as there were some dutiful civil servants at work, while issuing warnings to those in the movement.

"We are giving them some time to go back to work. If they fail, there will be unavoidable legal action against them," he said.

Contrary to the spokesperson's claim, U Tun Htet Naing, a deputy staff officer at the Rural

Development Department in Natogyi Township, Mandalay Region, said nearly 200 of the department's more than 300 staff in Mandalay have joined the CDM.

He said his township office had not been operating since Feb. 8, as more than half of his 13-strong staff, including himself, had been on strike since then.

The official said he simply joined the CDM as he didn't want a dictatorial government and he would stay in the movement till the elected government comes back.

Asked whether he feared retribution for his activism, he said :

"I joined because I am not afraid of being fired. I don't mind if I'm sacked, but I can't work for the dictator."

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<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/despite-pressure-myanmar-govt-employees-refuse-to-work-under-military-rule.html>

Workers at Myanmar's Private Banks Join Nationwide Anti-Coup Work Stoppage

Bankers join a CDM protest on Tuesday. / Myanmar Bankers Union / Facebook

YANGON—Employees of private banks across Myanmar have joined the growing civil disobedience movement (CDM) against the military regime, which overthrew the democratically elected government on Feb. 1.

With a majority of their employees now taking part in the CDM, and endorsing its "no recognition, no participation" approach, private banks nationwide have since Feb. 8 closed almost all branches due to a shortage of staff, resulting in sluggish banking services and financial transactions.

Participating bankers told The Irrawaddy they were continuing the movement for a second week on Monday.

Veteran democracy activist U Min Ko Naing, a leader of the 1988 uprising, said on his Facebook page that this is the most important week yet for the civil disobedience movement, and singled out the key role of financial institutions.

"Banks in particular are in the most important place [to make the CDM successful]," he said in a video message.

The Yangon Region Administrative Council reportedly planned to provide security for banks and help them maintain their operations, but with staff continuing the CDM on Monday, private banks' branches remained closed.

An employee of private lender KBZ Bank in Yangon said banks had to close because their employees

were out in the streets protesting against the coup.

“All of our bank branches are closed [on Monday]” he said. He added that though banks have been closed, money could be withdrawn through ATMs.

“We will keep doing this until [the military regime] is over,” said a banker in Yangon going by the pseudonym of Ma Snow. She joined the CDM a few days after the movement was launched by medical professionals on Feb. 3, informing her supervisors that she would no longer be coming to work, as she had joined the CDM together with her colleagues.

“Like everyone else, we totally reject the coup. Thus, we are participating in all ways, like joining in the CDM and holding street protests, to fight against the regime,” she added.

Another banker who joined the CDM said, “We can’t just sit idly by. The CDM is something we can and must do.”

Besides stopping work, banking staff in several cities have also held street protests for several days, declaring their support as bankers for the CDM and urging others to join in.

Ma Snow, who has been in the banking sector for 18 years, added that if more staff from state-owned banks and semi-government banks joined the movement, the CDM within the banking sector would be 100-percent successful.

Some staff from Myanmar’s Central Bank and Myanmar Economic Bank have also joined the movement. By last week, over 100 staff of the Central Bank, including employees of both the headquarters in Naypyitaw and other branches, had joined.

The military has replaced the Central Bank’s governors and deputy governors since the Feb. 1 coup. Deputy Governor U Bo Bo Nge, who was appointed by the National League for Democracy administration, remains under detention, though other deputy governors have been released by the military.

In an earlier announcement, the Central Bank urged banks to operate normally and systematically.

San Yamin Aung

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<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/workers-myanmars-private-banks-join-nationwide-anti-coup-work-stoppage.html>
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Customers Flock to Withdraw Cash From Myanmar Military-Owned Banks

YANGON—A large number of people rushed to the Myanmar military-owned Myawaddy Bank in Yangon to withdraw cash on Tuesday morning after anti-coup protesters called for a boycott of military-related businesses.

On Monday, military-owned banks in Yangon opened for only half a day after hundreds of people thronged to withdraw money from their bank accounts as the civil disobedience movement (CDM)

gathered strength across the country.

A bank employee at a Yangon branch of Myawaddy Bank on WarTan Street informed customers queuing for services on Tuesday that the bank would service 200 customers a day and that withdrawals were limited to 5 million kyats (about US\$3,550) per person. He said customers who were not among the first 200 could return to queue at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday morning.

Over the weekend, there were calls on social media urging private banks to join the CDM and suspend their operations as of Monday, amid rumors that people would withdraw all their money from any bank that remained open.

The Yangon Region Administrative Council reportedly planned to provide security for banks and help them maintain their operations, but many banking staff joined the CDM on Monday, forcing private banks to close. The private banks' branches remained closed Tuesday, except for ATM services.

Myawaddy Bank, one of the two banks operated by Myanmar's military, opened in the commercial capital, Yangon, on Monday. But after its branches experienced unusually large numbers of customers withdrawing money, they closed around noon, citing the risk of COVID-19.

"We opened the bank today [Monday], but closed at around 11 a.m. because there were many people taking out money from their bank accounts. We'll open the bank tomorrow," a Myawaddy Bank official based at the bank's headquarters in Yangon told The Irrawaddy on Monday.

An employee of private lender KBZ Bank in Yangon said banks had to close because their employees were out in the streets protesting against the military coup.

"All of our bank branches are closed [on Monday]. We have put a notice on the bank's website saying that the banks would be closed and money can be withdrawn at ATMs," he told The Irrawaddy.

Myanmar's military has deployed security at branches of the Central Bank of Myanmar as well as state-owned Myanma Economic Bank (MEB) since Monday. They reportedly took money from the banks. Employees of MEB, which plays a vital role in managing payroll and pensions for active and retired civil servants, have also joined the CDM.

An official of Myanmar Citizens Bank wrote on his Facebook page asking account holders not to worry about their deposits, saying banks have never gone bankrupt in the country. It is safer to keep the money in banks than keeping it oneself, he said, urging the public not to believe rumors.

A senior officer from a private bank said private banks are prepared to provide ATM and mobile banking services as long as there is internet access.

Private banks have however not announced when they are likely to resume operations, and neither the Myanmar Banks Association nor the Central Bank of Myanmar has issued an instruction regarding the operation of private banks.

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