

# Frontier Fridays: The Top Stories in Myanmar this Week

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**Welcome to Frontier Fridays. This week students and teachers bravely boycotted the junta's forced reopening of schools, the Arakan National Party said it would likely terminate its uneasy alliance with the military government, violent clashes continued across the country, and mixed messages on the Rohingya undermined the pro-democracy movement.**

## University reopening falls flat

Universities across the country officially resumed classes on May 5, but the forced reopening reportedly fell flat, attracting few pupils. This was a predictable outcome given that anything the junta does is considered toxic by the overwhelming majority of the population. Many education administrators and teachers remain on strike, while the feeling among many parents and students is that attending classes might legitimise an illegitimate government.

Ayeyarwady Times [reported](#) on the not-so-warm welcome students received at East Yangon University, which like other universities has been shut for more than a year (remember the COVID-19 crisis? Simpler times). According to one of the few students who attended yesterday, there was no social distancing despite promises from the junta, and soldiers and police were deployed across the university campus, searching students' belongings. The source also said students' movement inside the campus were strictly limited to the classrooms. Hardly sounds like the business-as-usual vibe the junta was going for.

The attempted reopening is also a stark reminder that many of the frontline protesters were students. As a result, students make up a high proportion of casualties and political prisoners, and are likely to harbour particularly strong resentment of the military. A final-year student from Yangon University of Economics [told](#) Myanmar Now that he and his friends have decided not to attend classes, declaring their truancy a version of the Civil Disobedience Movement. "Our friends' blood is not dried yet," said the student, who said some of his friends were killed in brutal protest crackdowns. Another student said she "cannot receive an enslaved education under the military dictatorship" while her friends remain behind bars. "I will return to the classroom only when the people's government is in charge," she said.

Joining their pupils, lecturers from many universities are also refusing to return to the classrooms. A member of the Myanmar Teachers' Federation told Myanmar Now that only around 20 percent of teachers were going back to campus, and most of those have some personal connection to the military. "I will absolutely continue taking part in the CDM until we win. I will never stop boycotting an education system run by the military," a striking teacher [told](#) *Frontier* from hiding.

Parents also seem to largely support the boycott, one of the few times they'd be happy to see their children skip school, both in defiance of the junta and due to safety concerns. "There is no guarantee

that students will not be arrested or shot, or that female students will not be sexually harassed by soldiers," one mother told *Frontier*.

The junta continued its efforts to pound education officials into submission, charging 10 people under section 505A of the Penal Code every day this week. The lists included quite a few headmasters and headmistresses, including those overseeing basic education high schools in Mandalay's Thazi Township, Bago's Taungoo Township and Sagaing's Kantbalu Township, and basic education middle schools in Magway's Mindon Township, Sagaing's Shwebo and Salingyi townships, and Bago's Kyaukkyi Township. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing said teachers must "dutifully serve the state" and warned that "deterrent action will be taken against anyone who undermines the administrative machinery of the state".

### **ANP looks to jump ship**

The Arakan National Party [announced](#) that it will likely suspend cooperation with the military regime, claiming it has failed to meet demands the party made on February 4, just days after the coup. Chairman Thar Tun Hla spoke on the issue in a press conference in party headquarters on Wednesday, adding that the ANP will convene an executive committee meeting soon to discuss its plans further. It is not clear what would happen to party vice chair Aye Nu Sein, who accepted a position on the junta's State Administration Council shortly after the coup. Thar Tun Hla said that was a "personal decision" that "had nothing to do with the party", but this isn't a particularly convincing explanation given that her appointment seemed to coincide with other ANP cooperation with the regime. And while other ethnic parties expelled members who took those positions without party approval, Aye Nu Sein continues to hold her position in the ANP.

So what exactly is the ANP unhappy about? The party said it made seven demands in exchange for cooperation on February 4: to release Rakhine State parliament speaker San Hla Kyaw, to appoint two ANP members to the Rakhine State Administration Council (one as chairperson), to appoint a majority of ANP members to the state cabinet, to appoint ANP members in the Yangon and Ayeyarwady regional administration councils, to lift the terrorist designation from the Arakan Army, to release other Rakhine political prisoners, and to drop counter-terrorism charges against Rakhine people. Thar Tun Hla claimed that the regime only complied with two demands, the release of San Hla Kyaw and the removal of the AA terrorist designation. (The junta has also released some other Rakhine political prisoners, such as Dr Aye Maung, and appears to be in the process of dropping counter-terrorism charges.)

We never thought the ANP-junta alliance would last forever - it seemed somewhat inevitable that the regime would balk at the party's demands. They are fundamentally incompatible institutions, given the ANP wants greater self-rule in Rakhine and the junta's instincts are to centralise power and basically run the country from a war room in Nay Pyi Taw. The big question is how this breakdown might affect the Tatmadaw's relationship with the AA.

The junta appears to be preparing for a possible resumption of conflict in Rakhine, though, [ordering](#) its newly installed village tract administrators to recruit villagers to create a militia group in Munaung Township, Rakhine State, according to local outlet Narinjara. One administrator told the outlet they have been told they must recruit 30 residents from each village and ward in the township. Another administrator said the idea was "very unpopular" with the community, and even told his superiors that "no one wanted to join". Pe Than, a senior ANP member, said it was a "strange move" given the Tatmadaw and AA are currently observing an informal ceasefire, and said these developments "should be watched".

### **Violent clashes continue**

The junta should be especially wary of any new violence in Rakhine, given it already has its hands full with major clashes in Kayin and Kachin states, and armed civilian uprisings in Chin State, and Sagaing and Magway regions.

In Kachin, the Kachin Independence Army shot down a Tatmadaw helicopter in Momauk Township on Tuesday, killing a captain, a major and a sergeant. Civilians took up arms in remote western Magway Region this week, the first such incident we've heard from that region so far, reportedly killing four soldiers in Tilin Township. Hakha Township in Chin State also saw fresh clashes, with locals reportedly killing nine Tatmadaw troops. In Mandalay's Sintgaing Township, an armed band of 20 reportedly attacked a police outpost guarding a Chinese oil and gas pipeline, killing three of the six police officers stationed there. Finally, major clashes broke out between the Tatmadaw and the allied Ta'ang National Liberation Army and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army in northern Shan State's Kutkai Township on Tuesday and Wednesday, in perhaps the fiercest fighting in Shan State since the coup.

That might be of particular concern for the Tatmadaw, given that Shan State has seen limited violence since the military takeover, and presumably the military wants to keep the violence contained as it deals with growing threats in Kachin and Kayin states. It could also put more pressure on the AA to take a stronger stance against the junta, given that it is closely aligned with the TNLA and MNDAA.

The parallel National Unity Government announced the creation of a People's Defence Force, which is definitely something to watch, but it's unclear how much the government-in-exile can actually influence fighting on the ground for now.

### **Rohingya waffling undermines movement**

In a hearing at the US House of Representatives, Myanmar's ambassador to the UN in New York, who has continued representing the civilian government, [urged](#) the US to do more to pressure the junta. "We need the United States to take a decisive leadership role in helping resolve the Myanmar crisis," he said, calling for sanctions against military-owned Myawady Bank and state-owned Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise, the latter being the junta's greatest foreign currency earner in the formal economy. His appeal for sanctions against MOGE echoes those of human rights organisations and some influential US senators.

But mixed messages on the Rohingya crisis continue to dog the civilian government, undermining the pro-democracy movement's message. Representative Ted Lieu [said](#) he would block efforts to recognise the National Unity Government as the legitimate government of Myanmar until it includes Rohingya representation. Representative Brad Sherman also expressed disappointment over the exclusion of Rohingya and [repeatedly grilled](#) Kyaw Moe Tun about whether the NUG would grant citizenship to the Rohingya if it took power. Kyaw Moe Tun gave a noncommittal, even rambling response that did not explicitly answer the question, which Sherman later called "disappointing". While Sherman said he had no doubt the NUG would be a more humane government than the junta, he said this is a "very, very low standard".

Two different strategies have emerged on how to address the Rohingya issue in the wake of the coup. There are those like Dr Sasa and Susanna Hla Hla Soe, who were not personally involved in the issue in the past but have now apologised for the NLD's failures and promised to do better in the future. Then there are others like Kyaw Moe Tun who have instead tried to argue that the NLD didn't do anything wrong, perhaps in part because it would mean contradicting their own earlier public statements on the Rohingya issue. Aside from being indefensible on human rights grounds, it's becoming clear that the second path is also strategically less effective, as politicians and rights

activists won't simply forget the events of the last four years.

The incident also sparked heated debate on social media, as many supposedly pro-democracy, anti-Rohingya users showed their true colours. Rohingya activist Yasmin Ullah called it a "gloomy day", saying there is still "so much resistance [to] including Rohingya at the table". But there were some positive takeaways as well. The Civil Disobedience Movement's official Twitter page said it wanted to be "very clear" that the "citizenship rights and human rights" of the Rohingya "must be fully respected" and "they must have their voices represented in government". Such a stance from a prominent NLD-affiliated group would be unthinkable prior to the coup.

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