

Burma

Myanmar's Educators Resist Pressure From Junta to Reopen Universities, Schools

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Myanmar's striking educators and administrative staff are continuing their anti-regime action despite pressure from the regime to return to work and reopen universities and schools.

The junta has recently targeted striking educators and administrative staff who refused to serve under military rule with arrests, warrants and suspensions from their jobs.

Since the last week of April, the regime has been issuing arrest warrants against teachers and education staff who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) on charges of incitement.

As of Tuesday, 220 teachers, including professors, headmasters and headmistresses, education officers and officials, have been put on the list.

A number of teachers who went on the strike were recently arrested, charged or sentenced. Announcements of suspensions from their jobs were also issued.

Regardless of the growing threats, many striking educators and staff carry on their resistance against the junta.



Teachers take part in a sit-in protest against the military coup on Feb. 9, few days after the military staged coup. (Photo: The Irrawaddy)

Myanmar Teachers' Federations said about 60 percent of the academics at universities and colleges resisted the junta's reopening of campuses. The junta announced the reopening on May 5 of universities and colleges that had been closed for more than a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those striking academics, more than 19,000 out of a total of 35,000 teachers in universities, colleges, have been suspended from their jobs for carrying on their strike against the regime.

And in public schools for basic education, more than 100,000 teachers and education staff out of a total of 450,000 [that is around 27 percent] joined the CDM, according to an initial announcement by the Ministry of Education on April 23.

Starting on May 7, the junta has issued suspension orders to striking teachers and education staff at public schools nationwide. Among those who have been suspended are custodial staff, security officers at schools, lab technicians, teachers, principals and officials under the basic education department of Ministry of Education.

“The reopening of the schools is just to show the country is well under the control of the military rather than concern for disrupted education,” an official from the teachers’ federation, who asked to be anonymous, told The Irrawaddy.

He said that though some CDM teachers relented and returned to work in fear of being arrested after the junta ramped up detention, many of them would carry on the strike until the military regime collapses.

“We are determined to continue the fight until the fall of the dictatorship and return of a civilian government elected by the people,” said the official, who himself was recently suspended from one of Yangon universities.

A teacher from Yangon Region who was recently suspended from her job said she is proud to stand against injustice even though it meant she had to give up of a job she adored.

“I will only return to work under our elected civilian government,” she added.

Facing a shortage of educators, the military regime is recruiting lecturers and is planning to give promotions to non-CDM professors to replace striking academics. In public schools, the regime is calling for daily wage teachers to substitute for teachers on strike.

Meanwhile, the regime continues to pressure striking educators to give in. In some cases, the junta has arrested the relatives of teachers, holding them as hostages to force teachers to return to work.

Students boycott against ‘military’s slave education’

It is not only teachers, but also students who are boycotting the “military’s slave education.” Student protesters said they won’t attend or enroll the classes under the regime whose forces have killed hundreds of youths including high school students and children.



The teachers’ federation predicted about 80 to 90 percent of university students boycotted classes by refusing to attend or enroll.

The junta also plans to open public schools on June 1, but many students have expressed that they don’t want education under the dictatorship.

Parents have also expressed concern for the safety of their children due to the likelihood of violence amid the regime forces’ continuing brutal actions against civilians.

Making matters worse, a number of schools across the country were set on fire or bombed with

homemade grenades by unknown attackers. The regime claimed that school attacks were carried out by “rioters,” using its label for anti-regime protesters. The Irrawaddy can’t independently verify the junta’s claims. Despite the attacks on schools, the regime still insists it will open schools as scheduled on June 1. During a press conference last week, a regime spokesperson said the regime would provide enough security for schools but refused to reveal any details, citing security matters.



Students from Yadanabon University in Mandalay continued their protest movement against the military junta on May 9 morning. (Photo: CJ)

Meanwhile risk of contracting COVID-19 is also another cause of concern as Myanmar still detects a dozen cases daily. The regime has said it would deliver facial masks and shields to students free of charge.

A high school student said he and his friends wouldn’t return to school until the revolution prevails. “We will go to school only when Grandma Suu [State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who was put under detention at the time of the Feb. 1 coup] is released.”

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P.S.

- The Irrawaddy 19 May 2021:
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-educators-resist-pressure-from-junta-to-reopen-universities-schools.html>