

Myanmar Junta Set to Axe Police Units Because of Shortage of Officers

Tuesday 14 June 2022, by [The Irrawaddy](#) (Date first published: 4 March 2022).

Myanmar's military regime is planning to axe six units from the Myanmar Police Force and transfer the personnel from the axed units to other police departments, according to striking police officers.

Among the units set to be cut are the Maritime Police Force, Aviation Police Force, Tourist Security Police Force, Oil Field Security Police Force, Forestry Security Police Force, and Highway Police Force, a striking police captain from the Maritime Police told The Irrawaddy.

The decision to axe the units was reached at a recent police meeting in Naypyitaw, and the cuts are expected to begin once they are approved by the junta's Minister of Home Affairs.

The Myanmar Police Force has at least two dozen departments besides the six units set to be axed. Before last year's coup, the police was reported to have 100,000 personnel. The current number of police is unknown, as thousands of officers have joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), while others have retired or been killed by anti-regime resistance groups.

Personnel from the units to be scrapped have not yet been officially informed about the details of the planned cuts. But rumors and speculation on social media have resulted in low morale, with some officers complaining.

One police major from the Tourist Security Police Force in Sagaing Region said: "We know nothing more than what we have seen on social media. There is still no official notice about it."

Some 7,000 police have joined the CDM, according to striking police officers. The police are also having difficulty recruiting new officers, as soldiers wearing police uniforms have taken part in brutal crackdowns on peaceful anti-coup protesters, marring the image of the force.

Now the junta is planning to use personnel from the six units set to be axed to fill shortages in the departments of the police regarded as more important, said striking police officers.

A township police chief who is still serving said: "There are not enough police for highway security. But they are working in emergencies in cooperation with relevant organizations. It is not OK to axe the Highway Police Force. It is necessary for the security of highways. Travelers will suffer if it is disbanded." The Highway Police Force helps people in cases of road accidents, vehicle breakdowns and other emergencies.

Although police who have served for 30 years are entitled to voluntary retirement, the regime has now banned them for retiring, as well as preventing officers from retiring on health grounds, according to family members of police.

Myanmar's military has looked down on the Myanmar Police since the time of the former junta led

by Senior General Than Shwe. And there has always been tension between police officers and personnel transferred from the military to take up senior positions in the police force. Former military personnel also receive more rapid promotion and better jobs, despite not being trained as police officers.

Police officers who oppose military rule have been detained by the junta, including police Lieutenant Colonel Zaw Win from the Criminal Investigation Department and police Lieutenant Colonel Aung Nwe Oo, the police chief of Yinmabin District, Sagaing Region.

The Myanmar Police CDM Channel, a group of striking police officers, said that the regime's trust in the police is declining, and that personnel from military security affairs are sharing less information with police forces. The junta is also believed to be using civilian informants to spy on the police.

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