Myanmar junta bans possible conscripts from foreign travel

AFP – Myanmar's embattled junta has banned anyone eligible for military conscription from leaving the country without permission, as it seeks to shore up its forces fighting rebel groups opposed to its rule.
The junta has lost control of swathes of the country to ethnic minority armed groups and other opposition forces in the civil war triggered by its coup d'etat four years ago.

A long-dormant conscription law was enforced last year as the army reeled from a string of battlefield defeats to ethnic armed groups and civilian "People's Defence Forces" seeking to oust it from power.

A bylaw passed late last month that has only just come to light imposes new restrictions on those eligible to be called up – men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27.

"The person who receives the order shall not be allowed to leave for foreign countries without obtaining the permission of the Central Body," section 51 of the bylaw says.

The rule applies to those who have been called up and also those waiting for the outcome of appeals for exemption, reduction, or postponement of military service.

Breaking the rules can bring a jail sentence of up to three years.

The military service law, authored by a previous junta in 2010 but brought into force only in February last year, requires those called up to serve for at least two years.

It also has a stipulation that during a state of emergency,

the terms of service can be extended up to five years, and those ignoring a summons to serve can be jailed for the same period.

Myanmar has been under a state of emergency since soon after a February 2021 coup, with the junta announcing the latest six-month extension on Friday.

Rights groups estimate tens of thousands of young people have fled Myanmar to avoid being called up to the deeply unpopular military.

The recent restrictions have affected workplaces in Yangon by driving their employees out of the country, said a senior employee of a private company in Yangon who asked not to be named.

“At least six colleagues have resigned from work since the law was imposed,” he told AFP.

“I worry when they will knock on my door and grab me from home,” he said, adding he was looking for a way to leave the country and support his family from abroad.

The bloody multi-sided conflict triggered when the junta overthrew the government of Aung San Suu Kyi has left more than 6,000 civilians dead, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners monitoring group

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