

Burma

Myanmar Citizens Reflect on Two Years of Military Rule

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Wednesday marks the second anniversary since Myanmar's military seized power after rejecting the results of the 2020 election and ousting the civilian government. The coup plunged ordinary citizens into crisis as the economy spiraled out of control. Food prices and the cost of living have soared as the kyat weakens and unemployment hits unprecedented levels.

The Irrawaddy has collected the voices of people from various walks of life and different areas of the country, as they reflect on their struggles, hopes and the coup's impact on their lives.

Kyaw Thura (CDM doctor - Tanintharyi Region)



Medics and staff under the Ministry of Health stage an anti-regime protest in Naypyitaw in February 2021. / The Irrawaddy

The price of medicines has increased by three or four times due to inflation. When I went to the clinic before [the coup], I spent about three or four thousand kyats, but now I spend at least 10,000. Furthermore, the people are experiencing both mental and physical insecurity every day. As a CDM doctor, there are many difficulties but I realize they are all revolutionary memories. I tell myself that I must survive and that difficulties are challenges. I want the revolution to succeed in 2023, we must win. Even large rocks eventually crumble from water erosion. So why can't Min Aung Hlaing's army, which is not accepted by the people, be crushed within a year?

Khin Lay, 37 (construction company employee - Yangon)

There were a lot of difficulties in business after the military coup. Businesses are struggling to keep operations going for various reasons. Rules and laws have changed, so it is difficult for companies. Also, exchange rate instability is having a big impact on businesses. The impact is hitting not just employers but the employees working for them, too. Many have seen their salaries cut. Since the coup, our salaries have barely covered living costs due to the sudden rise in commodity prices. Without the coup, our dreams of better lives would be coming true by now instead of being ruined like this. Now, both the country and the people are badly wounded and suffering.

Myint Aung, 30 (taxi driver - Yangon)

Our living conditions and income now are completely different from two years ago. The price of fuel was just 600 to 800 kyats per liter in 2020, under the National League for Democracy government. My daily income was around 15,000 kyats (US\$7) per day minus fuel costs and vehicle rental. We could save money and daily life wasn't a struggle back then. Now, my daily income is just 5,000 kyats (\$2) because the price of fuel has nearly tripled. Also, commodity prices are skyrocketing. It means our income is not enough even though my wife and I are both working. We are struggling to get enough to eat every day, and worry for our safety as the crime rate surges in Yangon. Taxi drivers like us are always on alert for threats. I want our country to be peaceful. I just want a government that values and gives opportunities to its people.

Aye Myo, 41 (Sagaing resident)

Before the military takeover, we had full human rights. However, those rights were no longer assured after the military took power. Our house was torched twice by their soldiers. We rebuilt it the first time but we only slept one night in the new house before soldiers returned to torch it a second time. We now find ourselves in a situation where we don't even own our properties or our lives. How many times will they burn our houses? We have become even more motivated to support the revolution. Let them [the military regime] do what they want. But they should prepare to suffer when their turn comes. Despite all the hardships, the main thing is to succeed in the revolution. We are convinced that our revolution must succeed.

Wai Lin, 20 (university student)

It has been two years since everything went wrong. I stopped attending the second year of university because I didn't like the education system under military rule. If I get a degree [under military rule], it will not be valid when a civilian government is restored. A lot has changed in these two years. Before the military seized power, I worked at a Japanese investment company and everything was fine. The company allowed me to do distance learning to get a university education. However, the company closed after the coup, leaving me without a job. As a young person, there is nothing to do under military rule.

John Moe, 43 (Kayah resident)



John Moe's family members mourn the deaths of his two children in a regime artillery strike.

We have fled our house repeatedly since last year. We can't stay in our village because of raids and shelling by regime soldiers. Our crops were torched by the regime and our house was destroyed by their artillery. I had six children, but two - my daughters aged nine and 13 - were killed by regime artillery strikes last year. We are not safe even though we live in a downtown ward. We have to run here and there every day. So we want to return home as soon as possible, to live peacefully as we did before the military staged a coup. We want the revolution to succeed quickly.

Yu Nandar, 25 (garment factory worker)

Many garment factory workers have lost their permanent jobs and now work as day laborers. Their hours now depend on how many garment orders the factory has. With the economy in such bad shape after the military seized power, no factory owner wants to hire permanent workers. Also, we no longer have labor rights as we did under the previous government. The relevant department won't take action if we report violations of our rights as workers. Employers are also taking advantage of the situation to infringe on workers' rights. Sometimes, we have to work two hours overtime without pay but we don't dare to complain to the employer for fear of being sacked. Under the junta, the lives of factory workers are worse than ever.

Ei Phyu (food distributor - 28)

Sales are falling by the day as the political situation worsens. Our customers are from the countryside and can no longer operate their businesses because of junta soldiers. Some buyers from other regions have shut down their businesses and left the country. So income has fallen significantly. The unstable exchange rate is another problem, as goods have to be bought with Thai baht. Nothing is convenient under the military council [junta]. I want our country's economy to be stable like in 2020. I hope the revolution ends successfully and quickly. I just want a government that values its citizens.

Some names have been changed for safety reasons.

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P.S.

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