

A Diary to Remember Women's Contributions in the Revolution to End the Military Dictatorship in Burma

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Since the Burmese military staged a coup d'état on February 1, 2021, people from all different sectors, ages, and backgrounds have actively participated in anti-coup demonstrations in various ways. In response, the military and security forces have brutally cracked down on peaceful protesters, who have suffered arrests and other inhumane abuses.

Despite the oppression and brutal crackdowns, people have not stopped taking to the streets and making their voices heard. Defying the risks, women have stood on the frontlines holding bulletproof shields. Some have been arrested, brutally harassed, and even killed. Their memory and stories must not be forgotten, and must serve as lessons for the next generation. For this reason, Honest Information (HI), a women's media platform, is creating this record of women's participation in the 2021 Spring Revolution, for the period of February 1 to March 31, 2021.

Our hope is for this to become a memorial document for the women's movement after the revolution is over.

Women Lead the Demonstrations

On February 6, six days after the coup, large crowds of people staged a mass protest against the military dictatorship in downtown Yangon. The country was awoken to the loud slogan, "End the military coup!" Women have dominated the protests in all sectors, which has made the movement even more powerful.

The first labour strikes began with thousands of workers from Hlaing Thar Yar industrial zone in Yangon, most of whom were women. On the same day, the young political activist Ma Ei Thinzar Maung, led a strike starting in Hladden, Yangon.

Creative Demonstrations

Anti-coup demonstrations accelerated throughout February, and people all across the country took part in creative demonstrations against the junta. Women organized and participated in some of the most significant demonstrations, including the hundreds of thousands of protestors representing the union of education and health workers who have taken part in the revolution.

Housewives and elderly women have participated by banging pots and pans every night to protest the coup since February 2.

On February 10, over one hundred young women marched in the streets wearing colourful ball gowns and wedding dresses; and on February 11, mothers groups marched in Yangon, carrying their babies.

After the military released over 23,000 prisoners on February 12, including those convicted of violent crimes, some houses in wards and quarters of Yangon were victim to arson. Local people organized self-security watches of their neighborhoods, and took turns patrolling at nighttime. Women also participated in these security efforts and also acted as watch persons.

On February 20, women gathered and performed a symbolic ritual of taking out the roots from bean sprouts. This symbolizes the Burmese people wanting to remove the roots from the military dictatorship.

On February 25, protestors all across the country took part in the Thanakha Strike, also known as "The Battle of Thanakha". Thanakha is a traditional cosmetic face paste, made from ground barks of the Thanakha tree. Women made fresh Thanakha, and used it to paint different messages and shapes on the faces of protestors to send a message of anti-coup resistance.

On February 28, an historic demonstration was organized by a women's group in Kayah, where more than 100,000 women marched against the military dictatorship carrying bras and sanitary pads. They sent the message that women's lives under the military are not safe, and even sanitary pads are better at protecting women than the military is.

On March 15, teachers gathered at Bagan Pagoda to pray and swear (*religious belief, saying true words to fulfill desire*) for those who have fallen to the military dictatorship.

Housewives also took to the streets on March 22 and 25 in South Dagon and Mrauk-U Township, Rakhine, using kitchen materials and vegetables to protest against the military coup.

Memorable Longyi (*Hta Main*) Revolution

Women's longyi or *hta main* have become a defence tool in the revolution. This strategy plays on the superstition of members of the junta, who are known to believe in fortunetellers and astrologers, etc. With respect to women's longyi, many soldiers believe that the "phone" or power/masculinity will be diminished, and their victory in battle will be lost and their lives threatened on the front lines, if they walk underneath of women's garments such as longyi.

As a result, we have seen that using women's longyi has been an effective defence in slowing down the crackdown of security forces against protestors. By hanging longyi high on lines above the roads, soldiers who dare not pass underneath are hindered from advancing directly on protestors. As a result, since March 3, most protests in Yangon have included stringing longyi up on lines across the street as a defence tool against the military and police.

The Longyi Campaign was successful as a deterrence tactic because soldiers went to great lengths to remove the longyi lines strung up across the streets before proceeding.

Aside from slowing down police and soldiers, the use of longyi has also been a demonstration against these traditional misogynistic beliefs which treat women and their clothing as somehow tainted or impure for men to contact. Women are therefore turning soldiers' beliefs against them by using their longyi to protest.

Women also widely used their longyi as a flag during the international women's day protests on March 8.

Some young men have also embraced the revolutionary Longyi Campaign by carrying longyi flags in the protests, or wearing longyi on their head or wrapping it around their bodies, and then showing their support by posting photos on social media.

The junta has responded to this campaign by announcing in their pro-military newspaper that those who lead the Longyi Campaign will be charged under religious law.

Admirable Women

In February, photos of a woman who sells pickled fruit, with her face painted with Thanakha, went viral across social media. The photos showed her smiling as she distributed "A Chin Phung" (Burmese traditional pickled fruit salad) to the protestors, as a way of showing her support for the revolution. Her name is Ma Tin Tin Aye, and she lives in Nyaung Yeik Thar, Htan Taw, Monywa Township, Sagaing Region. Many people

appreciated her kindness, however, on February 27, the police brutally beat and arrested her for supporting the protestors. After she was released, she was honoured with her own house and yard by a local donor from Monywa, Sagaing Region.

On February 25, Ma Zar Chi Oo also gained attention when, during a riot by military supporters on Sule road in Yangon, when she intervened to protect a civilian man who was being stabbed by the rioters.

On March 8, an image of a Catholic nun kneeling in front of police emerged and resonated around the world. Sister Ann Rosa Nu Tawng, 45 years old, was trying to protect a group of young protestors when she stepped forward and begged police not to use violence against them.

Women have also contributed with food and donations, as well as by hiding protestors who have fled from crackdowns by security forces. Moreover, mothers have been the ultimate support for their children. In this revolution, many women have shown love, bravery, kindness and sympathy.

Women's Representation in CRPH

On February 5, in order to carry on with the function of the *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw* (Assembly of the Union), the *Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw* (CRPH) was formed with 15 elected legislators. This included three female elected MPs, two of whom are members of the *Pyithu Hluttaw Taw* (Lower house): Daw Phyu Phyu Thin from Mingala Taungnyunt Township, Daw Zin Mar Aung from Yankin township; and Daw Myat Thida Htun from Mon State, who is a member of the *Amyothar Hluttaw* (Upper house).

Women Who Have Been Arrested

During the first two months of the coup, the junta arrested more than 530 women, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, female MPs, women protestors and Civil Disobedience Members, and female journalists.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was the first person arrested as the coup began on February 1. On the same day, writer Daw Than Myint Aung, and members of Ministers of Yangon Regional Government such as Naw Pan Thinzar Myo, Daw Nilar Kyaw, Daw Moe Moe Suu Kyi, were also arrested.

On February 8, Chief Minister of Karen State, Naw Nan Khin Htwe Myint, was arrested while she was in her house; and on February 27, Daw Win Mya Mya of the NLD, elected from Sintkaing, Pyithu Hluttaw, was also arrested.

On February 24, MCN TV News, Monywa district based journalist Tin Mar Swe, and The Voice News Agency, Monywa-based journalist Ma Khin May San, was charged under Section 505(a) and released on bail of 50 lakhs.

On February 27, reporter Ma Kay Zun Nway from Myanmar Now news agency was arrested while she was covering the news of police violence against protestors in Myaynigone, Sanchaung Township. She was charged under Section 505(a), and detained at Insein Prison.

On March 25, Nang Nang Taing, editor of Kambawza Tai news, and reporter Nang Win Yee were arrested and charged under Section 505(a).

On March 29, reporter Ma Chan Buu was arrested while she covering news from The 74 Media base in Myitkyinar, Kachin State.

Women Martyrs

A total of 35 women were killed during the first two months of military crackdown. Among them, the youngest is 7 years old, and the eldest is 78 years old.

20-year-old Mya Twal Twal Khaing, an anti-coup protester who was shot in her head at demonstration against the coup in Naypyidaw, was declared brain-dead. She later died on February 19, after her family members agreed to remove her from ventilator support, becoming the first person to lose her life from the crackdown against anti-coup protests.

On February 28, a teacher named Daw Tin New Yee, 59 years old, was shot by a rubber bullet by the police and died of a heart attack. This happened in front of the Yangon Division Education Office. On the same day, 32-year-old Ma Daecy was shot in the head and killed by police while she was walking in downtown Mandalay.

On March 3, Daw Myint Myint Zin (a writer whose author name is Kyi Lin Aye), and Ma Kyaw Nandar Aung, were killed by gunfire in Monywa. Ma Kyal Zin, a 19 year old, was also shot in the head by security forces that day while she was protesting against the junta in a Mandalay strike.

On March 13, Daw Kay Kyi, 53 years old, was killed in Mandalay after being shot in the head.

On March 14, Daw Tin Tin Win, a 36-year-old Hindu woman, was killed in Mandalay with a headshot injury. On the same day, 15-year-old Ma Zu Wint War, was killed in South Dagon, Yangon. She was a protester, and was killed within a few days after being released from jail.

On March 15, Ma Thidar Aye(b) Mee Mee, a 16 years old Mandalay resident, and Ma Pan Myat Chal, a 20 year old Min Cha resident, were killed.

On March 16, Daw Win Kyi , 78 years old, and Ma Shwe Zin Htun, 16 years old, were both killed in Hlaing Thar Yar Township, Yangon.

On March 17, Daw Mya Win, 70 years old, was killed while she was praying in her house in Yangon.

On March 18, 22-year-old Daw Aye Aye Khaing, was killed while she was preparing to close her shop in North Okkalar, Yangon.

On March 19, Daw Marlar Win was killed while taking part in a night protest in Magway. She had kneeled down to apologize to police and beg them not to kill her when she died.

On March 21, 66-year-old Daw Mwar Si, was killed in Magway. That same day, Ma Lhan Zwar Eil, a Chin woman, also died when she fell from the **We Love Yangon Association** office building, which was being raided by security forces in Mingala Taung Nyunt Township, Yangon.

On March 23, Ma Khin Myo, a 7-year-old girl, was shot dead by soldiers and police while she was inside her house with her father in Chan Aye Thar Si Township, Mandalay.

On March 26, Ma Khin Khin Soe (b) Mala Eisa, 32 years old, was killed with a left chest injury by the military's gun shot while she was at home in Myeik, Tanintharyi Division.

On March 27, Ma Shwe Myint, a 36 year old living in Bhamo; Ma Khine Zin Oo, a 21 year old living in Kawthaung; Ma Soe Soe Yee, living in Pyin Oo Lwin; Ma Pan Ei Phyu, a 13 year old living in Meiktila; Ma Zarli Naing, a 33 years old living in Pathein; Ma Aye Myat Thu, an 11 year old living in Mawlamyine; and, Ma Thet Thet Wai Hlaing, a 30 year old living in Mandalay, were all killed.

On March 28, Ma Koe Moe May from Monywa; Ma Khine Zar Thwe, 26 years old from Yangon; Ma Thinzar Hein, 20 years old from Monywa; Ma Zin Mar Aung, 25 years old from Mying yan, were all killed. Ma Ah Khu, a 37 year old women's activist and leader of Women for Justice (WJ), from Kalay Township, was also shot in the chest and killed.

All of these women were shot and killed by Burmese soldiers and police.

Throughout the Spring Revolution against the military coup, despite the risks, women have stood at the forefront of Myanmar's protest movement. They have used the Longyi Campaign as a powerful rebuke to the generals, in an effort to end the patriarchy that has suppressed women for half a century. Women have also been active behind the scenes, organizing; reporting, distributing food and supplies, as well as helping others find safety. They are resourceful, resilient, and determined to overcome the military and return their country to a path towards democracy. However, within the first two months of military council operations, women have lost their children and their family members, and we have also lost women heroes. The brutal acts of violence and abuse towards women are unforgivable, and the generations to come will remember the stories of the women we have lost. They will be memorialized every year on March 8, International Women's Day.



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