



MYANMAR COUP: A SETBACK TO DEMOCRACY

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Myanmar's military has once again seized control of the country and proclaimed a year-long state of emergency, putting elected officials and lawmakers such as Aung San Suu Kyi and others in prison or house arrest. The past of Myanmar has been much scuffled from the start of its independence i.e. 1948; Myanmar has struggled with army rule, suspension of civil rights, civil war, isolation from global affairs and widespread poverty. Country has been managed by a pack for several decades. In 1947 Aung San father of Aung San Suu Kyi fought against the Japanese and led the country to independence from Britain, but was assassinated. Shortly Myanmar achieved formal independence under president U Ne. the union of Burma now referred to as Myanmar, started as commonwealth, kind of like the foremost of its neighbouring countries including independent India.

But democracy only lasted till 1962, when general U Ne Win lead a military coup and held power of Myanmar for the next twenty six years, i.e. from 1962 to 1988. During that time the spokesperson for the Tatmadow(Myanmar military) claimed that “economic and political crisis had forced Ne Win to dispose president win maung and premise U Nu and reinstall a military government. Few political leaders and spokesperson of Burma had different view, such as Myanmar’s foreign minister during the time of the coup believed that the military had tasted political power in 1958 and the

coup was to quench its thirst for more. Beyond all the argument about the reason for the coup, the military had exercised its monopoly on force and displaced Myanmar’s elected government and kicked aside the democracy.

After the 1962 Burmese coup d’état a new constitution was ratified in 1974, the first constitution was embraced by constituent assembly in 1947. The country was under the government of the Myanmar socialist program party as a one party state. It was based on an isolationist policy and a socialist economic program that nationalized Myanmar important enterprises because of which countries economic situation degraded rapidly, which gave rise to a black-market economy. By 1998 problems like omnipresent corruption, speedy shifts in economic policy related to Myanmar’s currency and food shortage thrashed the country, resulting in a massive student-led protests.

On august 8, 1988 a cross country strike including a huge number of students, Buddhist priests, government employees, and customary residents prompted concurrent fights in urban areas and towns across Burma to finish military standard and to achieve democracy. The size and power of these protests amazed the public authority, which at that point ordered soldiers to stifle the fights with power. Troops terminated on quiet dissidents, executing and injuring hundreds of protestors. While many escaped. Few protestors, dissidents retaliated with maloti mixed drinks, blades, harmed dashes, and honked bike spokes, slaughtering some cops and military personals.



On August 10, military purposely terminated on and slaughtered specialist doctors and attendants who were treating injured regular citizens at Rangoon general hospital. On August 12, Sein Lwin, who had replaced long-time dictator Ne Win as president, stepped down once seventeen days in power. Officers to a great extent pulled out to the military enclosure, and a break government, headed by regular citizen Dr. Maung, was selected on August 19. On August 26 approximately one million individuals exhibited at the Shwedagon pagoda, Rangoon's focal milestone. Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who in 1991 would win the noble peace prize, was one of the important speakers who resisted the military government and called for an end to dictator rule. Day by day fights proceeded through August and September, with demonstrators sorting out nearby organization boards with Buddhist priests, understudies, and local area pioneers to keep up harmony and requests.

The military dispatched a coup on September 18 that set up the state law and order council (SLORC). On September 18 and 19, 1988, military government came back to the road and terminated live ammo at tranquil dissidents, murdering thousands. A large number of activists were captured and thousands more escaped to adjoining nations like Bangladesh and India. Different activists were detained for quite a long time and exposed to torture and different maltreatments in jail. No administration authorities were at any point considered responsible for manhandles submitted during the crackdown.

“the mass killings 25 years ago in Burma are an unaddressed open wound that challenges the government’s rhetoric of reform”¹, said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights watch.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s role widened during the 1988 uprising and as a result she became a national icon, then she was given permission to form National League for Democracy (NLD), a political party that she established along with the help of former military officials. Undeterred, her bold demands for human rights, and democracy as her growing popularity among the people, made the soft-spoken Suu KYI, one of the biggest threats to Burma’s military establishment. The military was so concerned with Suu Kyi that it made her a political prisoner in 1989. She was placed under house arrest and barred from elected office in the country which was officially renamed Myanmar. But Suu Kyi’s impact on Burmese politics was already past the point of control. Despite her detention, Suu Kyi’s NLD party won a landslide victory in the country’s parliamentary election in 1990.

Even though her party won the 1990 election by approximately 80% votes, the Burmese military refused to hand over the power, claiming that the vote’s was only to form an assembly to draft a new constitution and not for a parliament. “The 1990 elections sent a clear message to the Burmese military that the people wanted them out of power”², said Elaine Pearson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights watch.

The new constitution was approved by a nationwide referendum in May 2008, that so,

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/04/22/all-you-can-do-pray/crimes-against-humanity-and-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-muslims>

² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/05/26/burma-20-years-after-1990-elections-democracy-still-denied>



during intimidation and irregularities. Provisions in the constitution of Myanmar guaranteed that the military would have a leading role in the future governments in Myanmar, notably that one-fourth of the members of each house would be appointed by military. The military junta unexpectedly formally dissolved in 2011 because of which a civilian parliament was established for a transitional period, in which ex-army bureaucrat and Prime Minister Thein Sein was appointed as new president.

During 2011, president Thein Sein led a long series of reform, where he relaxed media censorship, implemented new economic policies to promote foreign investment, and in 2015 Myanmar witnessed its only nationwide, multiparty elections, which is considered to be the freest and fairest election in decades. In these elections Suu Kyi's opposition National League for Democracy party recorded a grand slam wins, securing a majority in both the house i.e. higher and lower house of the parliament. Htin Kyaw who was a long time confidant of Suu Kyi, became Myanmar's first civilian leader in decades. Suu Kyi was appointed as the state counsellor, de facto head of the civilian government. Although military exercised a huge power because of dominance in legislature but experts considered that Myanmar was gradually moving towards democracy and towards cleaning its image internationally, until February 2021, where Myanmar again witnessed a bloody military coup.

In 2020, Myanmar organised its second national elections under civilian rule, which again resulted in the landslide victory of NLD party, where they won 396 seats out of 476, defeating USDP who won just 33 seats. After

the outcome of election result, military leaders alleged voter fraud and misconduct during the election. The claims were denied by countries election commission, stating that they found no evidence regarding this, after the statement of election commission, the military detained and charged Aung San Suu Kyi. Lawmakers from the NLD and other parties were kept under house arrest.

The military, which had tried in the country's Supreme Court to claim that the election results were rigged, vowed to "take action" and surrounded the houses of Parliament with troops, increasing the risk of a coup. When a news presenter quoted the 2008 Constitution, which allows the military to declare a national emergency, the coup was effectively declared on the military-owned Myawaddy TV station.

The military soon took charge of the country's infrastructure, cancelling most domestic and foreign flights and halting most television broadcasts. In major cities, phone and internet service was cut off. The stock exchange and commercial banks were closed, and there were long queues outside A.T.M.s in some areas. Residents in Yangon, the country's largest city and former capital, fled. Military declared that the senior general Min Aung Hlaing would take charge of Myanmar and announced a yearlong state of emergency. Military claimed that re-election would be held once the emergency ends, but it is believed that the military could retain power indefinitely which is considered as the major setback for the democracy of Myanmar. In the after-effect of the coup, Myanmar noticed its largest protest after the saffron revolution, and they're spreading across the country. Some activists started what they call a civil disobedience movement



honking horns, banging pans and giving a three finger salute. On the other side more than 700 people have been killed since the military took power in the February and since then its crackdown on pro-democracy protestor has only grown stronger. Military are acting on a presumption that the protestors on the streets are their enemy, and they are using lethal force against them, they are treating Myanmar cities as the battlefields, they have used machine guns, live ammunitions against protestors.

The front line of Myanmar's resistance is forming into a guerrilla force after weeks of peaceful protests. Protesters have constructed barricades to defend communities from military incursions in the cities, and have learned how to make smoke bombs on the internet. They are practising simple warfare tactics in the woods and planning to destroy military-related installations. This new armed front's bravado and desperation echoes the radicalization of a previous generation of Myanmar's democracy activists, who exchanged treatises on political theory for weapons. The hard-line opposition as in the past, is a defensive response to the military's increasing reign of terror.

However, there is increasing awareness that such measures might not be sufficient, and that the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's military, must be confronted on its own terms. Protesters are practising with guns and hand grenades in the country's jungles.

Political leaders, international organizations including UN has criticised the coup. Protestors are hoping for the international support as well as help from their neighbouring countries like China, India, Bangladesh, Laos and Thailand who can

build political pressure on Myanmar's army. Experts believe that Myanmar may face various sanctions in international level and believes that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations which also known as ASEAN may come as the protector of democracy in Myanmar. China, which shares a 1,300-mile border with Myanmar and is one of the country's biggest investors, has taken a cautious approach, having established cordial ties with both Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi and the military hierarchy that detained her.

“China and Myanmar are friendly neighbours. We hope that all parties will properly handle their differences under the Constitution and legal framework to maintain political and social stability,” Wang Wenbin, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, said in Beijing.

Also many countries are facing towards United States to take some steps. In between this, President Joe Biden said that his administration will work with US partners to support democracy and rule of law in Myanmar. Biden has urged military leaders to relinquish power and let go the people they have captured, he also warned that the United States could impose consequences on those who are accountable for the coup, the situation remains uncertain and struggle of Myanmar for its democracy continues.
