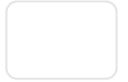


Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	573
Land:	Myanmar
Kilde:	Radio Free Asia (RFA)
Titel:	Arrested – or beaten – for wearing flowers to mark Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday
Udgivet:	20. juni 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	19. september 2023



Document #2093778

RFA – Radio Free Asia (Author)

Arrested – or beaten – for wearing flowers to mark Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday

By RFA Burmese

Across Myanmar, more than 130 people were arrested – and others were beaten – on Monday for wearing flowers, residents told Radio Free Asia.

The display of solidarity with jailed leader Aung San Suu Kyi – who often wore flowers in her hair – on her 78th birthday was organized by activists as a protest against the junta, which overthrew Suu Kyi and her democratically elected government in February 2021.

And the military clearly saw the “flower demonstration campaign” as a sign of rebellion, arresting dozens who participated.

The subdued protest is the latest creative show of defiance engineered by opponents of the regime. Over the past two-plus years, activists have organized a “silence strike,” a “doll campaign” and “women’s sarang campaign.”

Suu Kyi had been the face of Myanmar’s democracy movement and lived under house arrest imposed by previous military rulers for 15 of 21 years between 1989 and 2010.

Although her global reputation has been tarnished by her defense of the Myanmar military’s rape, murder and possible genocide against the Rohingya Muslim minority in 2017, at home she is still widely admired as “the Lady.”

In the National League for Democracy-led government, she held the title state counselor and was the de facto leader of the government. After the 2021 coup, she was arrested by the junta and sentenced to 33 years in prison on corruption and other charges.

Quiet defiance

The arrests happened in various locations around the country.

They started mid-morning on Monday, a resident of Mawlamyinegyun township in the southeastern Ayeyarwady region told RFA’s Burmese Service on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

“At around 10 o’clock, they started abducting people and arrested about 80,” he said. “There is a market on that main street. The people in the shops, including people who offered flowers to Buddha images, were arrested. At about 8 o’clock in the evening, all were released on bail.”

He said some of the people were arrested for writing and sharing posts on social media about the flowers.

RFA attempted to interview some of the people after they were released on bail, but they declined to talk due to security concerns.

Roses in their hair

In the northern Sagaing region, nearly 20 women with roses in their hair were arrested in the town of Kale, a town resident said.

“Women wearing jasmine and star flowers were released. They [soldiers] mainly targeted the ones who were wearing roses,” a resident of Kale said on condition of anonymity.

Meanwhile, 29 people – mostly women – were arrested in Yangon, the country’s biggest city, including 15 women from Kamaryut township.

In the central city of Mandalay, a resident who did not want to be named due to security reasons, told RFA that some women wearing flowers were beaten up by soldiers on the street Monday.

One woman wearing flowers who was riding a motorcycle with her husband and child was pulled over by police in front of a bank on 26th Street and beaten by them in front of her family, one Mandalay resident said.

“She was reeling in pain,” the resident said. “There were soldiers, not traffic police.”

Also among those arrested in Mandalay for wearing flowers were two family members of political prisoners and a former political prisoner who returned from a local prison after delivering packages to inmates.

The two facing charges are Thura Maung Maung, a former political prisoner who was released under amnesty on Jan. 4, 2023, and Sanda Myint, who sent a package to her husband, a political prisoner serving a 12-year jail term.

The soldiers’ actions are meant to instill fear, said Zu Padonmar, an official of the Myanmar Women’s Union.

“From a human rights point of view, it is a restriction of the freedom of expression in different ways,” she said. “Another thing is that it is a violation of an individual’s freedom – another example of oppression.”

The junta has not made any statements on these issues and RFA’s calls to junta spokespersons for the Ayeyarwady, Mandalay and Sagaing regions went unanswered.

RFA attempted to contact the junta spokesperson Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun for comment on Tuesday, but he did not answer phone calls.

Translated by Htin Aung Kyaw. Edited by Eugene Whong and Malcolm Foster.

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ecoi.net description:

More than 130 people arrested across the country for wearing flowers on the birthday of former leader Aung San Suu Kyi

Country:
Myanmar

Source:
[RFA – Radio Free Asia](#) (Author)

Original link:
<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/burma-flower-campaign-06202023183159.html>

Document type:
Media Report

Language:
English

Published:
20 June 2023

Available on ecoi.net since:
23 June 2023

Document ID:
2093778

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