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Military imprisoned about 6,600 anti-junta activists last year

Myanmar's ruling junta arrested and imprisoned thousands of anti-regime activists, members of People Defense Force resistance groups and soldiers from ethnic armies across the country in 2023, a continuation of nearly three years of turmoil since it seized political power and suppressed its opponents.

In all, nearly 25,700 people have been arrested and about 19,900 detained since the Feb. 1, 2021, coup that deposed the democratically elected government, according to the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (AAPP), a Thailand-based rights group founded by Burmese former political prisoners living in exile.

In 2023 alone, authorities arrested nearly 9,000, with about 6,600 sentenced to prison, according to the group.

The number of inmates sentenced to death last year was 163 as of Dec. 26, compared to 139 who received the death penalty in 2022, AAPP said.

ecoi.net description:

Military junta arrested nearly 9,000 opposition activists, members of People Defense Force resistance groups and fighters from ethnic armies in 2023; 6,600 of them were sentenced to prison terms

Country:

Myanmar

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[RFA – Radio Free Asia](#) (Author)

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Severe human rights violations against prisoners continued to occur in the most notorious of the country's dozens of prisons and labor camps. Some inmates in prisons such as Thayarwaddy, Daik-U, Insein, Myingyan prisons died of torture in 2023, according to a report by the Myanmar Political Prisoners Network.

Sixteen prisoners died last year due to a lack of treatment and different kinds of torture, the group said.

"Prisoners were brutally beaten, but they did not get access to medicine for their injuries," a spokesman from the group said. "It took one or two months to get medical treatment, and our prisoners lost their lives unnecessarily."

Among the most serious cases of deaths in prison was the murder of at least 15 political prisoners accused of trying to flee when taken from their cells for transfer to other detention facilities in May and June 2023.

The inmates who were killed included 10 from Daik-U Prison in Bago region, two from Myingyan Prison in Mandalay region, one from Thayarwaddy Prison in Bago region, and two from the interrogation center at Yangon's Insein Prison, sources close to the prisoners said.

At the time, their family members told RFA they believed that transfers were an excuse to execute the prisoners without accountability.

Jailbreaks and pardons

Some inmates managed to escape. In May, 10 members of a People's Defense Force militia held in Taungoo Prison in the Bago region, seized guns from guards when they were taken from their cells to attend a court hearing and [got away on motorcycles](#).

During the year, the junta released prisoners on several occasions, although most of them were serving time for drug-related offenses and other crimes, such as robbery.

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The military council released more than 20,000 prisoners, including about 2,500 political prisoners, during four amnesties in 2023, according to the AAPP.

On last Jan. 4 – Myanmar’s Independence Day – more than 7,000 prisoners were freed. Among the few political prisoners released were writers Than Myint Aung and Htin Lin Oo, both arrested on Feb. 1, 2021, as well as some journalists.

“We are active in politics for the interest of our country, but we were arrested,” Htin Lin Oo told RFA.

In April, just over 3,100 inmates were released under a second amnesty for the Burmese New Year. Kyaw Win, the former finance minister under the previous civilian-led government was the only political prisoner freed.

The [junta released 2,153 political prisoners](#) in May, although most of them had less than a year to serve, sources told RFA.

During the fourth amnesty, nearly 7,750 prisoners were pardoned for a religious holiday in August in the Buddhist-majority country.

In December, junta leader Sen. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing released some army deserters serving time so they could be re-deployed to the front lines against rebel forces. But [many were jailed again for refusing to rejoin the military](#).

Aung San Suu Kyi

The military council denied outside medical treatment for jailed former political leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who showed symptoms of low blood pressure and had gingivitis and a severe toothache.

Suu Kyi, the former state counselor in the democratically elected government, is serving multiple sentences for various offenses charges, including corruption, incitement, and breaching the Official Secrets Act. Critics and international observers say they are trumped-up charges to discredit the country’s ousted leadership.

In August, Min Aung Hlaing reduced her original sentence of 33 years to 27 as part of the larger amnesty, while former President Win Myint's combined sentence of 12 years was reduced to eight years, after he was pardoned for two offenses.

Suu Kyi's banned National League for Democracy issued a statement in September, expressing concern about her health and demanding adequate medical care to no avail. The same month, more than 130 lawmakers in Malaysia signed a petition calling on the junta to allow her immediate access to medical treatment.

She was reportedly moved to house arrest in 2023, but some doubt that is the case, and her exact whereabouts are unclear.

Kim Aris, Suu Kyi's younger son, told RFA that he believes his mother is still in a prison and that the junta has not yet allowed her legal team to meet with her.

"As far as I'm aware, she's not actually under house arrest, she's in prison somewhere," he said. "I have had no contact with her, and the military hasn't responded to any requests I have made for contact or to inform me of her whereabouts."

The ruling junta also decided to resume family visits for prisoners on Oct. 24, after they had been suspended in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because visitors must present their national ID cards, documents from their relevant ward and police station and COVID vaccine certificates, many family members who lacked documents could not be admitted to prisons to see jailed loved ones.

Authorities have prohibited medicine and books from outside the prison since July, according to the prisoner support groups.

Translated by Aung Naing for RFA Burmese. Edited by Roseanne Gerin and Malcolm Foster.

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