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Three years of misery in Myanmar, by the numbers

The military junta that ousted the elected government on Feb. 1, 2021 has less and less to show for its coup.

By RFA Burmese

Three years after Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing led a military coup that ousted the democratically elected civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi, citing unsupported claims of electoral fraud, Myanmar is in a state of war, chaos and economic ruin and the junta rules less territory than it did at the start.

The Civil Disobedience Movement, the early civilian uprising of street protests against the return of military rule after a decade of reforms, was met by the junta with mass arrests and gunfire.

The military and its proxy militias have arrested more than 25,000 people in three years. In addition to being arrested for protesting on the street, people have been detained for wishing for for wearing flowers. In urban areas, authorities arrest fathers of targets if they cannot not find the son.

According to the Burmese Women Union, nearly 400 women politicians and activists have punished with long-term prison sentences – including Suu Kyi, who's been sentenced to decades in jail, and documentary filmmaker Shin Daewe, who received a life sentence. At least 16 women have received the death penalty.

After street protests were quelled, resistance took the form of local militias known as People's Defense Forces (PDFs) that fought back against the far better-equipped Myanmar army across large swathes of the country.

The junta's response to the PDF forces was a mix of air attacks and organized arson campaigns against villages suspected of housing anti-

regime militias.

From Feb. 1, 2021 to Dec. 31, 2023, nearly 80,000 houses, were burned down across the country, according to the NGO Data for Myanmar. Of these, nearly thirty thousand houses. were burned down in 2023.

The brunt of military arson—with nearly 60,000 houses burned—has been borne heavily by the Sagaing region of northwestern Myanmar, where PDF fighters staged notably daring attacks on junta forces, drawing retribution from the junta.

The most common form of arson involved junta columns raiding villages and torching dwelling house by house, often slaying and burning residents.

At the time of the coup, Myanmar had an estimated 500,000 internally displaced persons (IDPS), the result of conflicts between ethnic armies and the central government, some of which date back the the former Burma's independence from Britain in 1948.

After three years of conflict, the IDP population has swelled to 2.6 million people. Many suffer a lack of shelter, food and water, while there is no access to education, health care or jobs.

In Shan, Rakhine, Chin and Kayah states, where fierce fighting have been raging, displaced people face food shortages because roads and waterways are blocked. Areas of Sagaing region, Rakhine, Chin, Kayah, Kayin and Kachin states go long periods without communication because internet connections have been shut down.

In late 2023, an alliance of ethnic armies that had long fought the military united to push the junta out of strongholds across northern Myanmar. Operation 1027, launched on Oct. 27, 2023, has displaced 628,000 people as junta-held towns fall to the rebels.

Three Brotherhood Alliance—which comprises the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Arakan Army (AA), and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)--and other resistance forces have seized 32 towns and district-level cities.

In a fast-growing tally of junta surrenders, six brigadier generals surrendered, and another one was captured, while there were reports that entire battalions with hundreds of soldiers surrendered or fled. Rebel groups say as many as 4,000 soldiers have surrendered.

Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing's response to the unprecedented setbacks has been to reshuffle the junta leadership, arrest and imprison top

military leaders on corruption charges, and mete out death sentences or life imprisonment for generals who surrendered.

Reported by RFA Burmese. Translated by Aung Khin. Edited by Paul Eckert.

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