

# A year of fear and failure in Myanmar



UN estimates.

Political turmoil has devastated Myanmar's economy, too. Currency depreciation and retreat by foreign firms have crippled the country's economic growth.

Interestingly, although the military takeover in the past witnessed the least resistance and protest, this time it turned into an unprecedented occasion of movement against the junta. The country's youth has shown firm belief in democracy and remained at the centre of the protest. Myanmar's "Generation Z," also known as the "Five Twos," have surprised not only the Tatmadaw, but also the world. Their political consciousness is praiseworthy, and their spirit of struggle seems to be undying.

When the youth uprising was met with brutality, the Tatmadaw began to face an image crisis and fears to retain power in the context of undaunted public resentment. Externally, the Tatmadaw is enjoying strong support from powerful countries such as China and Russia. Contrarily, the citizens of Myanmar are depending upon the international community to improve the situation and restore democracy. It is evident that the situation will change in a positive direction with the retreat of the military from power, for which there is an inescapable need for massive engagement of the global community. Ironically, so far, the international community remains deeply divided and largely non-committal to resolve this political crisis.

The lukewarm responses of the global community, the geopolitical equation of great powers, the long history of military rule, and counter-insurgency operations of the Tatmadaw have made the lives of Myanmar citizens and ethnic communities miserable and endlessly chaotic. Displacement, hunger, and torture are the key aspects of Myanmar society today. Big companies—i.e. Chevron, Total, etc.—pulling out of the country over human rights abuses has had a limited impact on the Tatmadaw. Global community is driven by geopolitical interests rather than the causes of humanity, genocide, and ethnic cleansing. While many thought that NUG would get international support to kick the Tatmadaw out, in reality, it has failed to garner the support of key global actors except their lip service.

From the Rohingya crisis to the Middle East crisis, situations like these have shown global powers' avid attention to securing their own interests with strategic realignments and readjustments. The military coup and subsequent political developments in Myanmar have implications for Bangladesh, as the repatriation of 1.1 million Rohingyas from Bangladesh has been halted.

In Myanmar, repression and brutality of the Tatmadaw and the civil war have left the people's lives under constant fear and uncertainty. The international community must bring back democracy to the youth of Myanmar and restore hope for the displaced people like the Rohingyas. This demands a coordinated and stringent response from the global community before it is too late. The failure of the great powers would embolden the Tatmadaw and protract the sufferings and vulnerabilities of the Myanmar people in 2022 and beyond.

## HUSSAIN SHAZZAD

Hussain Shazzad is a strategic affairs and foreign policy analyst.

FEBRUARY 1, 2022 marks the first anniversary of Myanmar's audacious military coup, which has gone down in recent history of the country as the beginning of the most repressive regime. Since February 2021, the situation in Myanmar has reached an abyssal depth, with an ongoing civil war between the military and the pro-democracy front. 2021 was a tragic year for human rights conditions as the military—popularly known as Tatmadaw—resorted to extreme violence to quell the demand for democracy.

Arguably, the situation has come to this stage because of the international community's lacklustre response and inadequate stringent actions—a resolution was rejected in the UN Security Council due to Chinese and Russian support for the Tatmadaw. Predictably, 2022 may also witness relentless violence and repression perpetrated by the military, resulting in unimaginable suffering and hardship for Myanmar's citizens.

One year ago, the Tatmadaw staged the coup and arrested heavyweight leaders of the National League for Democracy (NLD), including Aung San Suu Kyi, over a farcical allegation of election-rigging. Though the NLD won the election with a resounding majority of seats, capturing 83 percent of the total vote, Tatmadaw, the "King Maker," rejected the result in fear of losing dominance in Myanmar politics. The common people of Myanmar condemned the coup and started protesting against it. Soon, the protest turned into a civil disobedience movement (CDM), under which professionals of all sectors refused to join their workplace and demanded restoration of democracy.

The Tatmadaw's decision to meet the demand with bullets painted the streets of Myanmar with blood. In one year, the Tatmadaw has killed around 1,500 people and arrested nearly 9,000 people, according to the Thailand-based human rights organisation Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma). Also, the Tatmadaw relied on strict surveillance measures to silence people's voice. Under the newly introduced draconian provision, Section 505A of the penal code, 120 journalists have been arrested, 15 of whom have been convicted and 50 more await trial. Licences of seven media outlets and satellite television have been cancelled.

Amid the violent crackdown, the CDM transformed into an armed resistance group after the formation of the People's Defence Force (PDF) as the political wing of the National Unity Government (NUG). Former NLD officials and pro-democracy fronts established NUG and PDF as their armed wing, even though NUG has the least control over the force. Gradually, PDF and NUG emerged as one of the key political forces in Myanmar. Tatmadaw has escalated its violence to counter PDF, while PDF relies on guerrilla warfare. Amid escalating civil war, at least 406,000 people have been displaced, per

A demonstrator holds a placard in front of a police line as he protests against the military coup in Naypyidaw, Myanmar last year.

FILE PHOTO:  
REUTER

**The lukewarm responses of the global community, the geopolitical equation of great powers, the long history of military rule, and counter-insurgency operations of the Tatmadaw have made the lives of Myanmar citizens and ethnic communities miserable and endlessly chaotic. Displacement, hunger, and torture are the key aspects of Myanmar society today.**

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Mental health and the workplace

Research has shown that around one out of 10 people are affected by mental health issues. But many employers are unwilling to employ people with mental health issues due to some misconceptions. However, a job can significantly ease one's mental health issues. It gives them a schedule to maintain. The symptoms of individuals with mental illnesses may worsen due to unemployment. Mental illness is now manageable, thanks to modern psychotherapy. Mentally ill persons are also assets for society and can do as well in the workplace as employees without mental health issues.

Many harbour the misconception that recovery from mental illnesses is not possible. However, many functioning individuals with mental health issues are able to go through daily life without many hiccups. This is because treatment in the form of

therapy and medicine can improve their condition to a large degree.

Many employers also believe that individuals with mental health issues cannot tolerate stress and may underperform at work. This is an oversimplification of the symptoms of mental illnesses. All workplaces are somewhat stressful for everyone and working conditions hugely affect how employees handle workload.

Another misconception is that mentally ill individuals are unpredictable, violent, and dangerous. However, the vast majority of mentally ill people are not dangerous at all. This myth has been reinforced by the media and its weak caricature of mental health individuals. So, let us try to come out of our collective backdated perception of mental illnesses.

**Md Rakin Bin Raihan, North South University**

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