

How have the Vulnerable Groups in Myanmar Used Non-violent Tactics to Resist Military Forces after the 2021 Coup?

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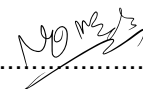
ABSTRACT

The paper explores the non-violent tactics utilised by the vulnerable groups in Myanmar to resist against the military forces after the 2021 military coup and the role of the community's solidarity to sustain the resistance movement from 2021 till the present, 2024. Various forms of nonviolent resistance including peaceful protests, civil disobedience movements, specifically online resistance campaigns which leads to offline movements were analysed with the aims of shedding the light on the dynamics, participations and effectiveness of these tactics. Social media content analysis, particularly Facebook which is the most common platforms that Myanmar people are using, was undertaken to explore how the intersection of traditional resistance methods with modern digital tools underscores the unique hybrid tactics utilised by the diverse communities in Myanmar, including low income families such as street vendors to challenge the military regime. For instance, the comparison of 1988 and 2021 movements against the Burmese military which are mainly led by the students and youths. The findings reveal the way nonviolent movements, sustained by community solidarity and digital platforms, can effectively influence public opinion and political landscapes. This research contributes to the broader understanding of people power in digital era to foster the democratic transitions and social change in the authoritarian settings.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university
2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and
3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed.....

Date 29th December 2024

INTRODUCTION

Since Myanmar declared its independence from British colonization in 1948, the country's political landscape has been majorly dominated and controlled by the military's leadership which led to the major barriers to the country's transition to the democratic governance. Myanmar was ruled by the military from 1962 to 2011 and the country initiated its democratic reforms led by the civilian government where the military briefly shared power under the 2008 constitution – stills it was favored by the influence of the military (Parliament of Australia, 2021). Even when the National League for Democracy (NLD) run by Daw Aung Sann Suu Kyi (civilian government) won the 2015 election against the opposition Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) run by the military, the country had specific democratic reforms and progress including sustainable development plans, the military still controlled the country's political situations. Although the NLD won again in the 2020 election the military led by General Min Aung Hlaing seized power again by undertaking the coup forcibly announcing so called voter fraud. This significant incident abruptly ended all the progress made in the country during the democratic period (CNN, 2021; Jordt, 2021).

The civilian population from diverse professions and backgrounds who together valued their human rights have been resisting the military by participating in peaceful protests across and beyond the country. The widespread resistance movements were speeded up by the young generation Z (Gen Z) protesters and the civil servants' Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) to restore democracy and move forward to an inclusive federal democracy (ICG, 2021a; Jordt, 2021). The military responded to the daily protest by undertaking a violent systematic crackdown — including shooting and killing the peaceful protestors utilising war weapons, shutting down the internet in cities and detaining civilians at night time, violating freedom of expression by arresting journalists and banning independent media who stood up for the public and spreading fear among the crowds (CNN, 2021 and ICG, 2021a). Despite the protestors initially believing their demands would be met due to community solidarity and determination, the resistance continues to the present time. On the other hand, it is notable that the economic crisis following the global COVID 19 pandemic which hit the country in early 2020 was doubly worse due to the early 2021 coup especially as it disrupted trade, foreign investment and stability which led to the increase of additional economic stressors (Boughton, 2023). As consequences, the population living under the poverty line has risen throughout the country — both in urban and rural areas.

At the same time, regardless of the double economic crisis, the landscape of solidarity against the military's dictatorship has kept evolving with the inclusive participation of communities including gender diverse and young individuals through various resistance forms — centering around use of digital communication (Chambers & Cheesman, 2024). At this point, with the accessibility of mobile phones and internet for almost every citizen in the country (Athan, 2023), social media usage plays a crucial role in widespread non-violent movements as the major media tool for connecting, sharing information regarding nonresistance movements and campaigns both virtually and physically. Facebook is the most common social media platform in Myanmar and is mainly used to raise awareness and organise the protests despite the surveillance of the military which suppress the online expression including by arresting people who shared their political opinions against the military virtually. As consequences, the military targeted and banned Facebook inside the country and slowed down the internet connections with the aims of causing disturbance in flow of up-to-date information from the ground situation and totally shutting down the internet in specific conflict areas (RFA, 2022; Targeted News Service, 2022a; Targeted News Service, 2022b; Myanmar Now, 2023; Ruiz-Canela, 2023). As well as the online posts causing offline harm, there are on-going humanitarian crises inside the country with the destruction of over 75,000 homes and numerous casualties (the actual data on ground is expected to be more than this existing verified data) by the military. Healthcare setting of the country was affected with the raising needs of protection and aid for the diverse communities especially for the vulnerable populations including women and children (ICG, 2021a; Htet et al., 2024). Htet et al. (2024) highlighted the urgent need for international support and humanitarian intervention particularly for people who has been displaced either internally or internationally due to the destruction made by the military forces. It was believed that collaborative efforts bridging local efforts with international support could create hope for rebuilding peace and restoring the country's democratic progress.

In summary, following the February 2021 military coup, many vulnerable groups in Myanmar have been resisting the military forces using various tactics based on the individual protestor's strength and background. By organising individual's strength collectively as a group to undertake and sustain the long run resistance movements, the community's solidarity is the core strength which is deeply rooted in the heart of Myanmar citizens. The objective of the paper is to explore the non-violent tactics utilized by the local communities by focusing on the role of digital/ social media where the people movements has been facilitating and contributing to overcome the restrictions on freedom of expression. By discussing this topic, the study aims to raise awareness about Myanmar's ongoing political instability. (In terms of terminology, in this paper, diverse unarmed

communities who stand up for their own freedom of expression and rights against the brutal military who used war weapons on the vulnerable communities.)

LITERATURE REVIEW

I. Power of Non-violent Resistance in this Digital Era

Non-violent resistance is the united strategy used by unarmed citizens to collectively raise their voices by undertaking political actions which could range from peaceful protests on the streets to joining civil disobedience movements (CDM) to challenge the autocracy and lead to democracy (Lehoucq, 2016; Chenoweth, 2020). Political scientists label these non-violent passive resistance strategies by marginalised and vulnerable communities as 'weapons of the weak' (Ardeth et al., 2023). This approach is utilised mainly because people have more awareness about human rights, and is thus recognised as one of the most effective tools to create change. In addition, many people may be inspired by global civil resistance movements that are booming because of the rise of information technologies (Chenoweth, 2020). In further support, Kim and Kroeger (2019) argue that non-violent protests are powerful techniques in influencing a country's democratic transition compared to violent ones and can equally threaten elites and encourage splitting within the regime (e.g. by boycotting the businesses of elites).

Most recently, Shuman et al. (2024) categorised non-violent resistance as two types – normative such as peaceful rallies and nonnormative such as sit-ins and CDM – which aims to break societal norms and supports changing laws and policies and public opinion without violence while also allowing diverse people to join. Collingwood et al. (2018) had previously demonstrated that non-violent protests are effective in influencing public opinion and challenging to gradually shift from the previous beliefs. For instance, in 2016, US President Donald Trump banned Muslim immigration and over the half of the population agreed with the ban. However, protests, such as occupying airports and blocking roads which delivered the message of the ban against Trump's values, changed the public views who then opposed the ban (Collingwood et al., 2018).

Still, the effectiveness and success rate of non-violent resistance strategy is not only based on the result of the revolution but also on the general public's opinion and their impact and outcomes. According to Chenoweth (2013), non-violent civil resistance was twice as effective as violent campaigns between 1900-2006 — which is remarkable given the historical record of people's movements in the 20th century. Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) also agree that this success was especially noteworthy while fighting against dictators, with an approximate 60% success rate compared to less than 30% for violent methods. Furthermore, a country has a 45% higher likelihood of transitioning to democracy five years after the conflict if non-violent methods were

utilised (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011). Lehoucq (2016) argued that many researchers in studies of peace and conflict agreed on the effectiveness of non-violence, and all the previous successful cases rely on a common variable which is an educated and well-organised civil society. Kalin et al (2022) added to this by outlining the role of scale and power dynamics. In their study, they discussed the influence of major powers in smaller countries that are crucial to them in terms of geographical location, trade or military support. The researchers found that these smaller countries often struggle to achieve success through non-violent civil resistance. An example of this is China's influence in Myanmar's on-going political instability (GMF, 2024). Although, this paper will not delve into the perspectives regarding the influence of external factors, it is important to acknowledge that external factors can affect these situations.

According to Turner (2023), the success of non-violent resistance movements is traditionally measured by whether they achieve their objectives, and is often evaluated based on political and economic outcomes. However, measuring non-violent protest outcomes is far more dynamic and results in multiple unintended consequences which can be both positive and negative and beyond politico-economic consequences. For instance, social benefits and costs are not often incorporated in these evaluations. Peaceful protestors for example, could face 'restrictions on free speech, violations of life integrity rights such as torture and political imprisonment' (Turner, 2023). Nevertheless, despite the traditional measurement of the success rate, mass protests by using digital platforms are impressive.

Some of these were highlighted by Sastramidjaja (2023) using examples from local communities in Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Generation Z (those born in the 2000s), particularly spearheaded social media anti-regime campaigns for social justice and encouraged democratic pathways for their country.

. These digital political movements are from multi directions and allow the local people to collectively take decisions and actions across the whole country and beyond which is different from the early 20th Century movements where action was centralised, hierarchically organised and mono directional (Sastramidjaja, 2023). The concept also aligns with earlier work by Chenoweth (2013) who pointed out non-violent strategies create a more inclusive society since everyone from all walks of life could participate — which is a modern way of evaluating the effectiveness of non-violent protests. Generation Z indeed have more participatory modes of protest than previous generations such as millennials (born 1980s and 1990s). However, the proliferation of information technologies such as social media platforms are advantageous to many other generations as they

allow people from different age groups, genders and cultural backgrounds to join movements virtually and/or physically, and feel personally involved and go beyond boundaries and spread the lifespan of traditional protests (Sastramidjaja 2023).

II. Understanding Myanmar's Unstable Political Landscape

In 1988, the 26th year of military rule, the people in the country protested against the then-dictator Ne Win, who infamously declared that the army must shoot to kill rather than to intimidate (Chambers and Cheeseman, 2024). Echoing his words, the military responded violently — resulting in significant human rights violations and numerous fatalities. Again, after the 2021 coup, numerous violent crimes have been committed by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Military Council), resulting in thousands of deaths, arrests, and widespread destruction. As of September 9 2024, a total of 27,328 person have been arrested and 5,612 have been killed since 2021 coup, including over a thousand children and nearly seven thousand women according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP, 2024a) database. The data on women itself contributed 20% of total deaths and total arrested respectively. Those are the only verified data and many more incidents on the ground remain unverified (AAPP, 2024b). The Parliament of Australia (2021) described the coup as 'destroying hopes of democratic progress' in Myanmar, referencing statements from the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2021b) that indicated Myanmar 'stands at the brink of state collapse' — highlighting damage to the health and banking system, supply chains and markets. A similar report from Save the Children noted the impact on education reporting that over one hundred schools had been attacked. One of the case studies by the Karen Human Rights Group highlighted the incident of a military aircraft that dropped about 12 bombs on villages including its school campus in Khaw Hpon Pleh Village Tract in Southeast Myanmar on March 23, 2024 at 10pm. The principal of the school stated that they “...saw three bombs land on the school campus. [...] I cannot describe the extreme fear I felt. My heart breaks when I see the destroyed school. I feel utterly powerless. [...]” (KHRG, 2024).

The situation is dire, with millions needing urgent aid, many displaced, and healthcare facilities and workers under attack. Myanmar citizens from diverse professional backgrounds and societies and eager to restore the country's democracy led the 'Spring Revolution' – the national level mass protests against the 2021 military coup by utilising both or either non-violent or violent tactics (Kapur, 2022; Wießmann, 2024). By February 29, 2024, 4,611 individuals had been executed, almost 75,000 houses damaged, and many others were detained by armed troops in the country.

Consequently, 57 million people needed help, with 18.6 million requiring urgent aid (Htet et al., 2024). Initially, protestors started with peaceful demonstrations on the street asking for an end to military rule, rewriting of the Constitution and the release of the country's political leaders. However, the military's response has been violent and brutal, involving the arrests and killing of unarmed protestors. This has forced the public to turn to violent forms of resistance, including guerrilla warfare training. Such incidents have been driving the country towards economic collapse and internal conflict (ICG, 2021b). In addition to general discontent, some ethnic groups have been fighting to gain political independence with the long-term goal of federal democracy in the country (Vrieze, 2023). Ethnic civil society groups have promptly backed protests and organised dissent using their extensive networks. They have supported the wider public's anger by hosting planning meetings, raising funds, and leading online campaigns. Their experience in national advocacy campaigns and their networks with progressive civil society nationwide, including the National League for Democracy supporters and Burmese-led strike committees, empowered them to effectively coordinate an inclusive movement (Vrieze, 2023).

As a consequence of the unrest, the international community have called for sanctions on military owned businesses and pressured the military regime to protect the peace of regional areas (Croissant et al., 2018). During uprisings, the way that the military responds is complicated and influenced by previous human rights violations and the fear of being held responsibility. According to the observations of other protests around the world, within the last four decades, other non-violent mass protests have often led to the end of dictatorships, however, this does not mean that the peaceful movements always bring a successful transition to democracy. For instance, people in Tunisia protested peacefully in 2011 resulted in President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali stepping down and similarly, in South Korea, the non-violent mass protests in 1960 and 1987 led to the end Syngman Rhee's leadership and a stable democracy respectively. Moreover, 1986 in the Philippines, the military backed the 'people power' movement and lead to a democracy pathway (Croissant et al., 2018). In the case of Myanmar, the on-going conflict and resistance movements (for over three years now) have been shaping the country's political landscape which requires international engagement to restore democracy and the stability of the country and within the region (Croissant et al., 2018). The country's economy rose steeply with the average GDP growth rate of 8.2% annually for 14 years from 2005 to 2019 – a year before COVID 19 restrictions. As a result, 75% of the country's population were lifted from poverty. However, due to COVID 19 and the 2021 military coup (two Cs), progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

deteriorated and plunged many communities back into poverty (Boughton et al., 2023). The two Cs had a severe impact on vulnerable communities including women and marginalised groups especially, and subsequently resulted in limited access to healthcare systems (Quadrini, 2021).

III. Online Posts Cause Offline Harm

Since the 1962 military coup, the fundamental human rights including freedom of speech and expression have been violated in the country. The positive change was undertaken since 2010 – the time that Myanmar opened to foreign investment and became accessible to mobile phones, internet which led to widely social media usage (Athan, 2023). According to the statistics of the Statista (2024), usage of the mobile phone in Myanmar had dramatically escalated within ten years (a decade) with the usage by 1.12 million individuals in 2010 to 73.66 million in 2019. Among the social media platforms, Facebook became the most popular in the country with 98% of its users expressing their opinions online. Then, following the 2021 February coup, the suppression by the military was counted in both physical and virtual ways — arresting people who shared their opinions against the military online. The junta specifically targeted social media platforms, banning Facebook within the country and arresting individuals who criticised them online. This was part of an effort to suppress freedom of expression, restrict the flow of current information, spread fear, and shut down internet access in certain conflict zones. (RFA, 2022; Targeted News Service, 2022a; Targeted News Service, 2022b; Myanmar Now, 2023; Ruiz-Canela, 2023).

In response, Facebook's Meta company stated 'online threats could lead to offline harm' in their special regulations of community standards tailored to Myanmar (following the 2021 coup situation) and they banned Myanmar's military and affiliated entities from their social media platforms including advertainments from military-related companies (Global Witness, 2021; Meta, 2021). This continues in 2024. According to news coverage by Radio Free Asia (RFA, 2022), Tatmadaw security forces monitor the Facebook profiles and social media posts of citizens and arrest anyone who expresses anti-military sentiments or even solicits donations for the on-going resistance. For instance, the 'Silent Strike' — an online campaign which urges people to limit outdoor physical activities during specific times and dates announced on Facebook — was advocated by anti-regime protestors. The public were encouraged to join this non-violent resistant movement by remaining indoor - at home or in workplace (Myanmar Now, 2023). However, even posting these messages poses risks to citizens. For instance, 21 year old Soe Yadanar Oo's posted her support for the Silent Strike on Facebook and was subsequently arrested, facing up to seven years in jail under the counterterrorism law (Myanmar Now, 2023). Alarminglly, her story is not an

isolated case, and the primary intention of such arrests has generated fear among people (Myanmar Now, 2023).

A similar event occurred in June 2024 on the birthday of state counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (a daughter of General Aung Sann who brought the country's independence and the founder of the National League for Democracy who was arrested immediately after the coup). This time, the non-violent campaign bore the title 'flower strike' — since Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's signature was to wear a rose in her hair. Pro-democracy groups called for nationwide and international demonstrations where people were urged to wear or hold flowers to commemorate the jailed state counsellor's birthday. Myanmar people from both inside and outside the country, including multiple embassies in Myanmar joined the campaign by posting photographs of roses on their social media accounts (The Irrawaddy, 2024). In response, the junta arrested almost 40 people who wore or held flowers from multiple locations ranging from homes and garment factories to public streets and public transportation in Yangon and Mandalay. This also happened, on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday on 2023 when almost one hundred people were arrested, with the majority being women (The Irrawaddy, 2024).

Athan (2023) highlighted three key restrictions by the military — limitations on online expression, legal consequences for anti-military posts and systematic technological restrictions. Almost everyone who participated in Athan's (2023) survey responded that they fear raising their voice online due to monitoring and possible arrest by the junta and 82.5% said that they knew of someone in their community who had been arrested for online expressions. Moreover, frequent internet shutdowns by the military have interrupted daily communication and online expression for over half of the users. The fear that was intentionally created by the military is widespread and has led to self-censorship with 60% of the survey respondents utilising protective measures such as Facebook's profile lock feature to safeguard their privacy (Athan, 2023).

IV. Myanmar Women's Participation in the Peaceful Digital Campaign

Although everyone was affected by the social media surveillance there were particular impacts on women. For instance, Sharma et al. (2021) discussed the wellbeing perspective of women in Myanmar. According to the researchers, limiting access to the internet and social media by the military created a negative impact on Myanmar women in their wellbeing aspects during the COVID-19 pandemic after the coup. The lack of access violated people's rights to have access to

updated information and also increased the risk of domestic violence. In addition, Faxon et al. (2023) studied two thousand farming posts which were uploaded after the 2021 military coup on Facebook. The result of the study pointed out the way Myanmar farmers communities utilise the social media as a crucial emotional outlet - for resistance, escape and mourning in the midst of the military oppression. For instance, Orchid Aunty's posts about flowers allowed her to express her emotions while escaping from the reality of the coup by using social media outlets. The actions also demonstrated how digital media in Myanmar can help people to both resist and grieve. On the other hand, Ryan and Tran's (2024) study of social media post analysis showed that the resistance forces managed to prevent the military from fully functioning or controlling the country by the presence of digital pro-democracy activism. The activists and resistance forces have been exposing the violent actions of the military, maintaining the communication against the social media bans by using the free VPNs and importantly, publicising the national level protests. Some activists who were against the military coup used the internet to 'socially punish' the military and its related people by sharing their personal information such as workplaces and/or social media accounts as 'traitors' which impacted some to shut down their businesses or quit school (Martin, 2021).

V. The Hashtags Revolution in Political Movement

Digital Protest Campaigns are also powerful as they effectively utilise tools such as social media hashtags and symbolic resistance. Alaman's (2020) study on Twitter hashtags showed how Spanish politicians used this technique during the 2019 elections. Hashtags, often reflecting their campaign slogans, were utilised with the aims of highlighting the content of posts, encouraging the citizens (their followers) to join, spreading the campaign messages and most importantly, aligning with the current issues and/or events which indicated the standpoint of the politicians. The study by Bode et al. (2015) on the role of social media in the U.S. 2010 elections also supports that social media (Twitter (now X) in that case) hashtags played a key role of leading political discussions and conversation and especially mentioned 'hashjacking' as a common hashtag tactic. Moreover, in Thailand, a neighbouring country of Myanmar, the 2019 elections were notable for the significant influence of social media on the youth, especially first-time voters aged between 18 to 25. Most of this group had grown up during periods of political instability and coups (Chattharakul, 2019). For instance: two hashtags — #Futurista and #SaveThanathorn — were widely used on Facebook and Twitter by Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, leader of the Future Forward Party that won 31 constituencies and 50 party-list seats in that election (Chattharakul, 2019).

The methods used by anti-coup protestors in Myanmar are a mix of old traditions and modern digital tools and trends to enhance their voices. For instance, Silent Strikes, which have been used since anti-colonial times, are being organised on social media and car breakdown day when cars are deliberately stopped on the roads to demonstrate the protestor's resistance. Also, there are unique campaigns from local communities including the Htamein/Longyi (skirt) campaign and pots & pans protests, which are used traditionally to shoo evil away (Jordt et al., 2021; Egreteau, 2023). Generation Z activists also widely use social media to reveal the military's wrongdoings including using funds donated for the famous Shwedagon Pagoda by the citizens for funding their military government (Jordt et al., 2021). According to Misran et al.'s (2023) study of online anti-coup protests utilising social media campaigns by the citizens, hashtag usage proved effective in delivering the message of resistance. For instance, #SaveMyanmar, #Reject_the_Military, and #Help_us_and_support_our_Leader are the common hashtags that people used (Misran et al., 2023). Myanmar protestors used not only social media channels for national and global level movements but also online messaging applications for neighbourhood-level sharing information to protect each other against surprise military attacks, especially after dark (Jordt et al., 2021). Moreover, Banas and Saduov (2023) argued that as part of civil protests, songs with meaningful and motivated lyrics are often employed. This situation applies to the 2021 Myanmar people's movement too. After February 2021, MacLachlan (2023) interviewed eight Myanmar musicians who composed revolutionary songs to provide emotional and motivational support for anti-coup protestors. Among these musicians was Saw Sithu Htay, a 38-year-old Karen ethnic artist and co-composer of the popular anti-coup song titled "A Yay Taw Pone Aung Ya Mee" (which means "The Movement Must Go On"). He recalled how local police and authorities interrupted and threatened them while recording the song with other musicians in Kayin State. Despite this, they managed to send the audio file to a studio in Bangkok, where it was finalised and shared online for the public (MacLachlan, 2023).

These examples demonstrate how important social media was in allowing the people's messages to be spread.

METHODOLOGY

1) Qualitative Approach: The paper employs a qualitative research approach primarily based on academic literature, grey literature, social media content and internet-based resources to discuss how diverse local communities in Myanmar utilised non-violent resistance tactics against the military force known as 'Tatmadaw' following the 2021 coup. Although the majority of the literature directly relates to the situations in Myanmar there are indirectly related studies which are analysed to enhance the understanding of the non-violent resistance dynamics. Primary references are peer-reviewed academic papers, journal articles and reports by domestic and international non-government organisations published in English. Moreover, due to the social media content analysis the paper will work on, it can be both qualitative and quantitative depending on the discussion made below (Walther, 2019). The nature of qualitative research is detailed oriented and analysis of the content which does not always mean in-depth interviews but multiple techniques including content analysis, and research based digital media (Walther, 2019).

2) Timeline: The key discussion focuses on the non-violent protest movement which took place between February 2021 to October 2024. However, the study also explores the similar historical revolutions, and non-violent efforts employed by the citizens with the aims of providing deep insights into the traditional and modern way of resistance both from inside and outside the country. For instance, students and youths who led a national level revolution in 1988 in Myanmar used traditional ways of doing peaceful protests. At that time, mobile phones were considered a luxury item and not commonly found in every household. In contrast, at the time of the Generation Z led 2021 revolution, mobile phones and the internet were widely accessible and the protesters utilised the social media channels with effective hashtags to organise, promote and spread the movement offline at both the national and international level. However, the use of social media still faces limitations due to censorship by the military government.

3) Social Media Campaign: The study focuses on the utilisation of mass media, particularly the social media platform Facebook, as an effective tool to organise and promote non-violent campaigns and movements in a participatory approach by highlighting the tactics, actors, ideologies and strategies. A total of 80 Facebooks posts, with 20 posts selected from each year from 2021 (first year of the military coup) and 2024 (October), were analysed (see Appendix). The selection process involved using the key word 'Silent Strike' in Facebook's search box, selecting the posted year, and filtering to 'public posts' — to make sure not to include any 'friends only' post.

Find by simply type Silent Strike on Facebook search box > selected posts > selected year (2021 to 2024) and type of posts as public posts. The public posts which popped up after searching were posts by the trusted news media pages, official people defense forces' campaign pages, pages and accounts of activists, celebrities and campaign leaders from different region. For instance, Tay Zar San's posts were analysed. He is a political activist from Mandalay region, in the middle part of Myanmar.

Additionally, the paper also reflects the lived experience of the researcher who resided in Yangon, the commercial capital of Myanmar, through the 2021 February coup. This personal experience offers an insider's viewpoint which adds depth and uniqueness to the analysis. Finally, by centring on the non-violence resistance efforts, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of peaceful resistance methods and the role of digital media in contemporary socio-political challenges in Myanmar.

4) Bacchi's WPR Approach: Bacchi's (2012) What is the Problem Represented to Be? (WPR) approach has been utilised across various studies to uncover the limitations of government policies and programs and reveal underlying assumptions and biases, particularly on social issues. Gerrits (2024) applied the WPR approach to determine the way that the Canadian government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addressed gender-based violence (GBV) during the 42nd Parliament and the results showed inconsistencies and gaps in policy hindered feminist integration in the country's governance. Similarly, Komai (2023) examined French teenage pregnancy policies utilising the approach, revealing the need for transformative approaches which could activate inclusive policymaking by incorporating the individuals who have lived experience. Ugwudike and Sánchez-Benitez (2024) analysed the impact of imprisonment on families in policy discourses using the WPR approach. They examined 20,000 social media comments from Twitters (also known as tweets) from both policy makers and families of the prisoners by using software including Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies and concordance analysis and offering new insights into governance and resistance cultures with the aims of exploring the contributions from hard-to-reach populations. Moreover, Schwartz and Ungar (2015) considered that large-scale social media data analytics are replacing traditional surveys by undertaking automated content analysis which offer insights regarding wellbeing and personality. These studies showed that Bacchi's WPR approach is applicable to fostering transformative change. Therefore, this paper will analyse social media content on Facebook related to non-violent mass protest campaigns such as Silent Strike. It will

primarily examine the involvement of vulnerable groups in three highlighted social media campaigns mainly on Facebook, from February 2021 to October 2024.

The adaption of the Bacchi's six questions to the paper's research question is as follows:

I. What's the problem represented to be in the social media campaign which is inclusive to the vulnerable group and led to the non-violent physical protest movement against the military?

II. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

III. How has this representation of the problem come about?

IV. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?

V. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

VI. How and where has this representation been produced, disseminated, and defended?

DISCUSSION

Utilising Carol Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach, this paper analyses the 'Silent Strike' social media campaign by diverse individuals and communities in Myanmar following the 2021 military coup. Myanmar citizens initiated peaceful protests, including the 'Silent Strike' — which is a national and international level demonstration of Myanmar people characterised by deserted streets, closed shops and markets, and an absence of public movement, effectively speaking out in a silent way by avoiding the risk of arrest, according to the media coverage by Thee Irrawaddy (2021) and participating on social media campaign. The study explores the way the vulnerable groups engaged in this non-violent social protest which eventually led to a physical civil disobedience movement by collectively becoming involved in mass participation. Bacchi's framework includes assessing six questions around the representation of the problems, underlying assumptions, consequences, and the nature of participation in the resistance. The following discussion is based on content from social media, news articles and reports from human rights organisations, and relevant literature.

I. What's the problem represented to be in the social media campaign which is inclusive to the vulnerable group and led the non-violent physical civil disobedient movement against the military?

The Silent Strike campaign by the Myanmar people, a non-violent resistance movement against the military regime, advocated for the preservation of democratic values amid the violations of human rights and the suppression of civil liberties. The campaign was announced and encouraged on social media platforms, mainly on Facebook, by a wide range of community members including activists, celebrities, artists, students and civic leaders to get people's participation. The campaign effectively mobilised citizens encouraging them to avoid physical outdoor activities in public spaces during the specified hours and its slogan 'silence as the loudest voice' emphasised that the people (residents) own their own cities, not the military nor any other ruler. The common hashtags used for the campaign are #SilentStrike, #RejectMilitaryCoups and #WhatshappeninginMyanmar. The campaign initially took place one month after the coup (which is excluded from this analysis paper) and on December 10, 2021 which is Human Rights Day and now is currently observed annually on February 1 which is the anniversary of the coup and the first day of the Myanmar people's Spring Revolution. The times set up for Silent Strikes occur usually from 10am to 4pm which is during typical working hours to ensure the minimal disruption to the daily work routines of residents.

In terms of visual content analysis (see Figures 1 – 2021 campaign poster, Figure 2 – 2022 campaign poster, Figure 3 – 2023 poster, and Figure 4 – 2024 visual), the multiple campaign visuals are produced annually, however, to facilitate year by year comparisons, the most used visuals by the protestors are selected here to undergo the review process. The key messages and images on these campaign posters are subtly adjusted, however, centring around the main ideology of the non-violent resistant movement.

i) Colour and Font Size Usage: The solid red colour text with largest font size was used to highlight significant information. For instance, the visuals from 2021 to 2024 prominently display the word ‘Silent’ and ‘Silent Strike’.

ii) Imagery and Visuals: Photographs of the deserted streets, especially the City Centre, Sue Lay of Yangon, were used to demonstrate the anticipated atmosphere on Silent Strike days apart from in the first year of the campaign. As there was no prior imagery, a young woman cartoon character with a three fingers protest sign was used to portray and highlight the Myanmar women’s involvement in the civil non-violent resistance movement (Figure number). In 2022, the Myanmar country map with photographs crowded with protestors on the streets, was added (Figure number) to recall the memories of peaceful protests in public places on the first year of the Spring revolution.

iii) Evolution of Campaign Slogans: Every year from 2021 to 2024 the Silent Strike campaign has utilised a series of evolving slogans on its annual visual posters to highlight the issue (Figure numbers). In 2021, slogans involved amplifying the silent protest and reclaiming rights with statements such as ‘Silence is the loudest voice’ and ‘we own our city, if we want to be silent, we are silent; if we want to move, we move’. In 2022, the focus shifted to encouraging the return to the city while advocating for civil disobedience with statements like ‘let’s fight to have access to our city’ and ‘Silent Strike civil disobedience movement’. In 2023, the text on visual said the second anniversary of the People’s Spring Revolution. The 2024 phrases called for the continuation of the strikes without leaving home and highlighted moving towards a final victory with collective actions , such as ‘to the final victory with public waves and by opening all sails’.

Figures removed due to copyright restriction

Sequenced from left to right:

Figure 1: Silent Strike Campaign Poster in 2021

Figure 2: Silent Strike Campaign Poster in 2022

Figure 3: Silent Strike Campaign Poster in 2023

Figure 4: Silent Strike Campaign Poster in 2024

The lead protestors and activists portray the Silent Strike as one of the major non-violent forms of resistance and solution since the military responded seriously to the movement. Moreover, the media coverage highlights the widespread participation. In the first year of the revolution, activists suggested people not only join the strike and stay at home or work from home and close the shops, but also share individual portraits of people making the three-fingers protest sign on social media. In the response to this action, the military targeted participants joining the protest using Article 505 of the Penal Code. Two weeks after the military coup, the military amended Article 505 and added section 505A to oppress the freedom of expression — without going through the legal parliamentary process but only issuing the announcement with the signature of Min Aung Hlaing, leader of the coup. The new laws are unclear, making it easy for the military to misuse them against citizens who speak out and noting that penalties of up to three years in prison could result. The military targeted people who participated in non-violent resistance online and physically and charged them under this law. According to Free Expression Myanmar (2022), nearly 4,000 individuals (a number which can be verified) were charged under the Articles 505 and 505A but there actually could be more than 10,000 which remains unverified. The military employs not only internet but also phone surveillance, restricting internet access in 25 areas and blocking the usage

of social media platforms especially Facebook and Twitter, which were mainly used by Myanmar social media users. Following the coup, individuals who post anti-military content online have been arrested, and journalists have faced harassment, detention, and even been murdered. For example, a photojournalist died in custody and a filmmaker was killed after being arrested for documenting the Silent Strike campaign in Yangon (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Additionally, about a hundred political prisoners who were detained under 505A by reason of being against the military after the 2021 coup participated a Silent Strike in Yangon's Insein prison by refusing to leave their cells/units after the morning roll call (DVB, 2021; RFA, 2021) and they were violently beaten by the guards on Human Rights Day on December 10.

In response to the military arrests and unfair legal actions against Myanmar citizens, the opposition activists shifted their creative strategies in 2022, including announcing the strike date late to avoid the military's intervention. Moreover, since the vulnerable groups such as shop owners participate in the campaign by closing their shops, and since the military countered by pressuring the shop owners and penalising those who closed their shops, the idea of opening shops without conducting sales was proposed and moreover, it is observed that the campaign leaders and activists stopped encouraging the peaceful protesters to share their portraits to demonstrate the protest on social media unlike the initial years of the revolution regarding the security concern. The military also attempted to fill the deserted streets on the strike day by organising military supporters to march on the streets on that day. However, by 2024, while the pro-democracy gatherings faced violent suppression, the supporters of the military demonstrations were allowed.

II. What presuppositions or assumptions underly this representation of the problem?

non-violent Community Resilience and Solidarity: In 2021, it was found that the activists encouraged people to participate in the Silent Strike campaign against the military coup not only in a physical way but also by sharing their portraits on social media — by dressing in black and making the three-fingers protest sign. Local news outlets across various states and districts (both verified and unverified pages on Facebook) highlighted news photographs of deserted public streets, praising people's participation. On the other hand, very few mentioned the areas with

lower involvement. Additionally, participation in the Silent Strike campaign extended beyond individual social media users to unions and/or community levels. To be more specific, revolutionary groups and unions shared collections of their members' portraits making the three-fingers sign as a gesture of showing solidarity collectively as a group. For instance, religious groups like monks' unions (Figure 5). Moreover, celebrities, such as Myanmar movie star Dawn, have been playing the significant role of raising awareness about the non-violent Silent Strike.

Political and Human Rights Violations: As many people from diverse communities including street vendors and shop owners joined the campaign, the military responded by threatening shop, factory, and workshop owners to ensure they continued to open their shops. In addition the military organised marches with hundreds of so-called military supporters to artificially populate the deserted streets on the Silent Strike campaign day and time. Moreover, numerous unverified news pages on social media were created to spread fear – claiming that individual social media users who shared the non-violent campaign information were arrested and labelling such activities as propaganda by pro-democracy activists.

Figure removed due to copyright restriction

Figure 5: Screenshot of monk's union from Mandalay titled Samghasamagga-Mdy shared their participation in Silent Strike in 2021

Universal Participation: In 2022, the military's action forcing vendors to open their shops was responded to creatively – especially by street vendors who are low-income communities and vulnerable groups. The vendors employed tactics such as opening their shops without selling goods or ensuring no customers are present. For instance, a street meat vendor participated in the strike by displaying only one chicken and another vendor wrote down the names of the food items they sell on pieces of paper and displayed them instead of real food (figure 6 and 7). A cartoonist drew the cartoon depicting a middle-aged lady street vendor loudly expressing her fear of closing her shop while whispering about buying items in advance of February 1 (the anniversary date of

the military coup and Silent Strike campaign day as part of the spring revolution). The cartoon (figure 8) was shared with the caption – highlighting how crucial it was to join the Silent Strike while minimising the risk and underscoring the belief that the revolution must prevail. Other creative ideas to encourage people’s participation can be found in entertainment pages — which shared movie reviews and recommendations to watch during the Silent Strike’s designated hours indoors — promoting the avoidance of public spaces including streets. Additionally, other non-violent protest campaigns were attached to the Silent Strike (which is during daytime usually within working hour) including banging pots and pans at night time. As with 2021, there were some unverified pages that appeared to be spreading fear with unverifiable content. It is also notable that the announcement of the campaign was published on revolutionary pages and shared by pro-democracy activists, celebrities and individual social media users. A verified Facebook page titled ‘People’s Reporter’ regarded the military’s intense response to the strike as a testament of the effectiveness of the non-violent movement.

Figure removed due to copyright restriction

Figure 6: Only one chicken was displayed by a meat vendor at the street market on the day of the 2022 Silent Strike.

Figure removed due to copyright restriction

Figure 7: The names of the food were written down on white paper, but no real food was sold.

In 2023 and 2024, news coverage highlighted the people's participation in the strike by documenting vacant streets in different cities without people or vehicles like the previous years. In the 2023 randomly selected content, the participation of women across various professions is clearly exposed. For example, a post by female journalist Ja Mone, who continuously reports on revolutionary events as one of the news presenters/anchors at People's Spring media, shared an original post from 1008 Infantry-Southern Shan Revolution Youth. The post is about the appreciation of the public's participation in the Silent Strike and it served as the main source of motivation for young revolutionaries. Moreover, a post from female politician Daw Zin Mar Aung, Union Minister of Foreign Affairs of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, urged the citizens to join the Silent Strike and mentioned that the effectiveness of the strike could be fulfilled only with the collective national-level action i.e. each and every individual needed to join. Additionally, a notable post found in the 2023 content from the study was by the national level opposition body of the military National Unity Government (NUG) who expressed their appreciation of the public who were actively participating the campaign. They cleverly transformed a military slogan (military is the mother, military is the father) into one centred around the people as 'public is the mother, public is the father'.

Women's participation in the campaign meant that many women became the victims who were captured by the military and charged under Section 505a which the military had amended as outlined earlier. For instance, a post on an unverified media page called Myo Taw (means City) covered the arrest of three women in Nay Pyi Taw under Section 505a.

In 2024, it seems the pro-democracy activists have more confidence in the people's participation in the Silent Strike movement and, with the ambition of protecting the campaign participants from the military's violent action, the announcement of the protest campaign on the third anniversary of the military coup was made just a day prior. However, in response, the military organised a large march by hundreds of its so-called supporters carrying the Myanmar national flag through the city of Yangon. Despite the allowance for the military supporters to protest, the citizens who expressed their believe system against the coup faced severe restrictions and could not even assemble in small groups of 3-5 people without immediate and violent intervention from soldiers and police, resulting in arrests. Additionally, youths. especially the university students who have been mainly involved in all the protests against the military following 2021 coup, were targeted for their participation. For instance students from the Government Technical Institute (Insein) were attacked by the military after they joined the Silent Strike absenting themselves from school on

the campaign day. That news was covered by Myanmar Now, verified and reputable media. According to the news, six students were arrested and beaten violently without the perpetrators giving any reason (figure 8).

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Figure 8: Insein Government Technical Institute students were arrested and beaten as a consequences of participation in the Silent Strike. The news was posted on February 6, 2024 by Myanmar Now.

In summary, in 2021, it is observed that campaign leaders and activists encouraged the protestors to join one of the non-violent resistant movements against the junta called 'Silent Strike' and asked to share their portraits of showing the three-fingers protest sign and/ or wearing the black color outfits. The diverse communities showed their virtual involvement individually and collectively as the unions and community groups by sharing the information about the campaign on their social media account and demonstrating physical involvement which is evidenced by transforming the outdoor places into the deserted streets and ghost cities. In reponse, the military attempted to force the businesses to operate and spread fear by arresting people who participate in the campaign — especially the activists. In 2022, it is visible that the participation of low-and-middle income families such as street vendors in unique and safe methods — by displaying fake food to avoid the pressure by the military. Apart from the encouragement to stay indoors, people made recommendations to entertain or do activities indoors including movie reviews to watch during the campaign hours. Despite the military threats, the announcements and awareness about the campaign were widely spread. By the year 2023 and 2024, the participation of vulnerable

groups continued including women and youths such as university students despite the heavy surveillance of the junta and arrests of participants. It is also notable that the military attempted to fill the deserted streets with their military supporters through orchestrated marches, however, on the other hand, oppressed the peaceful protestors who were against the military. To reduce the risk of the protestors being arrested, the activists made efforts by announcing the protest information shortly just the day before the Silent Strike.

III. How has this representation of the problem come about?

The effects of this representation of the national level problem which also impacts on neighbouring countries and others will be explained below in three context perspectives for Myanmar — political, economic and social situation. Moreover, the interrelationship between the three contexts is deeply intertwined in contributing to the overall damage resulting in a reversal of overall progress in the country's Sustainable Development Goals. The discussion (below) will provide the insights of the overall situation of the country following the 2021 military coup from political, economic and social perspective.

i) Political Context: Following the February 2021 when the Tatmadaw (military) committed the coup with the formation of the State Administration Council (SAC) by commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing, the country's political situation has been instable. The SAC claimed itself as provisional caretaker government and assigned Min Aung Hlaing as prime minister (Liow, 2022). In opposition, the National Unity Government (NUG) established by a collection of deposed members of parliament and engaged citizens who refused to recognise the legitimacy of SAC, however, recognised the People's Defense Force (PDF) — comprises young people who know the value of democracy including freedom of expression so that they resist and fight back the military aggression (Palatino, 2021; Hein, 2022). Initially, hundreds of thousands of people who were against the dictatorship by peacefully protest all over the country, however, the SAC responded violently which led many youths to enlist with existing ethnic armed forces. The SAC has been responding with air strikes and burning the villages which led to internal and international displacement of Myanmar civilians. For instance, one month after the military coup, within March 2021, three thousand civilians were forced to leave their homes in Karen state due to the airstrike and become refugees in Thailand (Lilly, 2021). Later, tens of thousands of people have fled for safety reasons. As a gesture of solidarity globally against the 2021 coup, international countries enacted sanctions for Myanmar

(International Crisis Group, 2021). Even though military and its related families are dominant in the Myanmar business sector in the country, it is crucial to make sure the impact on vulnerable populations who are still residing in the country as well. In addition, it is notable that since COVID-19 global pandemic hit Myanmar, its economy has been heavily affected and caused an increase of people living under the poverty line (International Crisis Group, 2021). To be brief, the country's political instability caused many people including dependent populations such as children and elderly to suffer not only mental wellbeing but also economic distress regarding the basic needs.

ii) Economic Context: The on-going political landscape in the country contributed to economic hardship and disrupted foreign trade including the bilateral relationship with the United States (Asia News Monitor, 2021). Moreover, the inflation rate has risen significantly from 14% to over 18% in 2022 and 60% lost in the value of local currency (Myanmar kyat) against the U.S dollar (Asia News Monitor, 2022). This disproportionately impacts low and middle class households who are vulnerable since the 2021 coup difficulties in catching up to the rising the market prices. At the same time the unemployment rate jumped up since early 2020 due to the Covid pandemic to around one million individuals becoming jobless (World Bank, 2022). According to the data of World Bank (2022), the economic stability of Myanmar reduced from 7% to 4% in 2019 and 2020 respectively which deteriorated into minus 20% due to the 2021 military coup. It is also notable to mention that due to the security concern under the military regime, some local and international non-government organisations and civil society organisations (CSOs) moved their offices to neighbouring countries which also contributed to a decrease in working hours and a rise in the unemployment rate (Ebbighausen, 2021).

iii) Social Context: Deterioration in freedom of expression by the citizens and in physical and mental wellbeing are discussed as the highlighted concerns. In the year 2023, Myanmar was regarded as one of the countries with the worst world press freedom at 173rd out of 180 total countries according to the Reporters Without Borders (2023). Not only freedom of expression by the media industry but also by the local community's rights to raise their own voices are also threatened since early 2021. For instance, women participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) faced extreme violence during their fight for democracy (Human Rights Watch 2022). In addition, all the detainees including binary and nonbinary people who are part of the

either non-violent or violent resistance movements are at risk of sexual violence and violent torture in custody. For instance, a male journalist who covered stories about political events in Myanmar was arrested and was raped by soldiers due to his refusal to rape another detainee during custody (Mon, 2022). The Four Cut strategy of the SAC — means cutting the basic needs such as electricity — and aims to cause people to stop their resistant movement by letting them worry about the day-to-day needs which has a negative impact on the overall wellbeing of the diverse communities residing in the country (States News Service, 2023). Moreover, witnessing the violent deaths of normal citizens including journalists and human rights activists by SAC caused mentally insecurity and trauma which adds to the feeling of uncertainty of the future especially refugees and survivor's guilt (Holzl, 2021; Fishbein, 2022).

IV. What is left unproblematic in this 'problem' representation? Where are the silences?

To reflect the silences regarding the non-violence resistance movement, the changes starting from the 2021 February should be analysed. Wießmann (2024) described Myanmar's resistance movement in three phrases — from peaceful protests to People's Defense Forces (PDF) — unarmed to armed resistance due to the violent action by the military. In the first phase, the coup happened and people responded with their peaceful protest collectively titled the 'Spring Revolution'. The SAC performed the internet shutdowns to control organising the physical protest online, however, the peaceful protests kept growing and the military used rubber bullets and tear gas against protesters. In the second phase, the military increased the violence and people, especially youths, who considered armed resistance to restore the peaceful shift to democracy, escaped from the military's influences and joined ethnic armed groups who have been fighting for federal democracy. In the third phase, armed resistance became strong despite non-violence movement remaining and locally organised defense forces developed and conflict has continued. The study by Wießmann (2024) on the trending of the anti-coup fight in Myanmar could be observed that the peaceful protests are not sufficient to resist the violent military. At the same time, the realisation of the only non-violence campaign including the Silent Strike could not achieve the desired political change while fighting against the SAC's brutality. However, Aung (2022) believed that the Silent Strike plays a key role in creating a collective participatory action and is a powerful way to remind people to keep undertaking the resistance movement and keep fighting for their own rights.

V. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

The Silent Strike creates both direct and indirect effects while fighting against the dictatorship. It not only speeds up the solidarity of resistance by the diverse Myanmar communities even though they are facing power cuts or slowing internet roaming and social media bans so that they have to use vpn. The other effects include visibility, mobilisation and raising awareness/speeding up or reminding people to keep fighting this on-going resistance for their own rights. And this is Human rights based protest by diverse communities.

i) Effect of being visible: The campaign posters and news coverage highlighted by the deserted and vacant streets without cars and pedestrians during the Silent Strike campaign day and time symbolise the solidarity of residents. And it is notable from the Facebook posts by different stakeholders the researcher of the paper observed (Appendix) that the campaign activists assumed this is effective only with their collective action. The military's response to fill the streets with their supporters on the Silent Strike day is also showing that the campaign is effective. It raises awareness and can draw international media attention, potentially prompting global diplomatic or economic pressure on the government.

ii) Effect of mobility: The campaign is a universal approach since people within the country or outside the country can participate. Residents inside the country just join by not going outside within the campaign time and utilising the strategy of being silent and adopting the non violent protest which could mobilise people with disabilities and elderly, including introverted people, while protecting campaign participants from the risk of the military's violent action.

VI. How and where has this representation been produced, disseminated, and defended?

This paper analysis 80 social media posts (see Appendix) regarding Silent Strikes from 2021 to 2024 on Facebook social media and literature both grey and academic. It is observed that, apart from social media posts by pages as collectively or individual accounts, the Silent Strikes news and the problem representation has been produced and published as news coverage by local and

international media houses, reports of international advocacy groups and academic journals by academia both in Myanmar and internationally.

The movements are observed to empower vulnerable groups including grass roots and low and middle incomes families such as street vendors and shop owners. It is worth mentioning their participation since the first year of the coup and even with the threat of the military, they are still involved in creative wayd. For instance, in 2022, chicken street vendors' participation in Silent Strike at the wet market by writing down the meat items on pieces of paper and putting it on display. This kind of physical participation in the Silent Strike campaign is different from online participation such as reacting to the campaign information posts by likes, sharing and commenting. It seems like people in the country can do physical involvement in the campaign by turning the public places into deserted places during the campaign hours while people from outside the country could do another way of physical participation. For instance, about 30 Myanmar people including youths and activists who reside in India joined the Silent Strike by peacefully protesting in New Delhi on 1st February 2024. They wore face masks both for their security concerns and as a sign for silence and held posters which said 'not to forget the 3rd years of the coup' (Federal Journal, 2024). In summary, it is pointed out that the non-violence resistance movement by the vulnerable communities of Myanmar is limitless – not only geographically but also different professions.

LIMITATIONS

1) Data: Due to the on-going instability in Myanmar, accessing accurate data on the number of individuals involved in non-violent resistance efforts from both within and outside the country remains challenging although the paper cites the most reliable national and international databases. For instance, updated data from the local Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) on 9 September 2024, shows the validated figures of 5,649 out of 27,328 person having been arrested and 1,132 out of 5,612 having been killed by the junta since February 2021 were women. This equates to around 20% of total arrests and deaths, however, the actual numbers are likely to be much higher, but remain unverified and thus are uncounted (AAPP, 2024a and AAPP, 2024b). Moreover, the paper utilises only the English language resources such as academic and grey literature – which potentially left out considerable ground data and information.

2) Scope: The study aims to raise awareness of non-violent protest tactics utilised by Myanmar's diverse communities to fight against the military coup with a particular focus on leveraging the social media platforms, mainly Facebook, to deliver the movements information in a timely manner and effectively which led to the physical non-violent civil movements. For example, the women led the Longyi feminist movement campaign, the symbolic banging of pots and pans, the three-finger salute, silent protests, and various other forms of resistance. The project concentrated solely on non-violent resistance using Facebook and did not explore beyond this such as when the protestors used violent methods on the ground or other social media platforms. Moreover, the influence of domestic or international non-governmental organisations on Myanmar's crisis are out of the scope of this paper.

3) Capacity and Resources: The constraints such as time, first time experience of working on an academic paper and the emotional toll on the researcher, who was born and raised in Myanmar and has intimate experience of the daily lives before and after the 2021 military coup, restricted the paper from comprehensively addressing diverse perspectives of the complex issues. Additionally, Turner (2023) mentioned that studying the consequences of non-violent public movements in authoritarian regimes is significantly challenging and similarly, so is assessing the effectiveness of such movements. The paper aims to provide valuable discussions and findings focusing on fostering community solidarity and utilising social media campaigns as a participatory approach which is accessible to the wider peaceful protestors within these limitations. Lastly, the

censorship and restrictions on freedom of expression in Myanmar and responding brutal and violent actions by the junta should also be considered as a major constraint.

4) Security Concern: The military junta has severely impacted freedom of expression online through frequent internet connection shutdowns and limitations of some social media applications including Facebook. A recent survey by a youth activists led non-profit organisation which works for the freedom of expression movement in Myanmar called Athan (2023) demonstrated that this disrupted online expression for over half of the recipients who are social media users and moreover, the military's violent actions against the individuals who raised their opposition voice online has led to the widespread use of self-censorship. Consequently, three-fifths of respondents to Athan (2023) locked their Facebook's profile and restricted social media content to safeguard their privacy. Moreover, it is notable that some Facebook users may avoid reacting to or sharing campaign information publicly, opting instead to participate in non-violent campaigns silently. Additionally, there is high concern about utilisation of fake accounts.

On the other hand, from the researcher's perspective, the major limitation is also concern for security. Having family residing within the country might create the possibility of unconscious self-censorship during the research process since the junta usually takes action against family members when they cannot find the person who is part of the protest, even when it is non-violent, such as sharing an anti-junta post on your own social media account.

Despite these limitations the information is analysed based on the facts and figures and even strong academic evidence. The Myanmar Research Centre at Australian National University suggests that Myanmar postgraduate students and researchers should use 'pseudonyms' instead of their real names to protect their own and their loved ones' safety. On the other hand, apart from that kind of psychological and physical fears associated with security concerns, witnessing women and children being killed by the junta motivated the researcher to address issues in her country Myanmar's situation academically, which is also a way of participating in non-violent resistance which aligns with Flinders University's slogan, 'Be Fearless'.

5) Silent Strike: While undergoing the selection of the 80 Facebook postings related to the Silent Strike analysis (see Appendix), there may have been bias influenced by the Facebook account owner's algorithm – considering that the researcher's background in journalism likely led to approximately a quarter of analysed posts coming originally from verified and reputable local news media pages.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper discussed non-violent tactics that diverse communities in Myanmar who fight for their human rights against the brutal dictatorship following the 2021 military coup as the vulnerable groups have been utilising for the resistance movements collectively as the community. Different methods such as peaceful protests, the Civil Disobedience Movements (CDM) mainly by the civil servants and government staff, digital activism and symbolic demonstrations especially the 'Silent Strike' which is assumed as the loudest voice by fostering community solidarity. Moreover, the Silent Strike is one of the most powerful non-violence resistant movements where the citizens across the nation demonstrate their political opinion by simply staying indoors which resulted in the public spaces such as streets being turned into deserted places which led to ghost cities. This civil mass protest is peaceful yet delivers the bold statement which is the widespread disapproval of the junta regime.

The activists, youths, ordinary citizens and community leaders use Facebook as a social media platform as a crucial tool to organise and spread the campaign information and mobilise diverse people from different locations to join non-violent resistance. The online platforms offer the people from different backgrounds the chance to connect, exchange the information, sense of unity and get motivation by undertaking collective action despite the heavy digital and physical surveillance by the SAC and life threatening risk. The most common hashtags of this nonviolent movement such as #SaveMyanmar and #RejectMilitaryCoups were used to broaden the wider reach by increasing visibility and global awareness and support.

The solidarity of the communities is central to sustain these mass resistance movements. Transforming into the deserted streets in different cities across the country could not be successful without the collective action. Despite the restrictions, the individual and collective involvement of the diverse communities such as women, ethnic groups, religious groups, grassroots could be observed. Moreover, the innovative ways of solidarity, such as street vendors creatively participating by displaying goods symbolically to reject the military's pressure were vital. Those inclusive actions demonstrate the resilience and adaptability of people regardless of suffering the long-term uncertainty and oppression by the SAC. In addition, the collective spirit

created no boundaries physically and virtually since both Myanmar communities from within and outside the country participated which means raising international awareness by supporting the local efforts.

It is also recommended that further studies should be made on the comprehensive analysis which covers the societal costs and effectiveness of the non-violent resistance for the vulnerable communities and how participatory the digital activism is for the Myanmar's civil resistant movement beyond the 2021 February coup. Academic discussions and analysis based on mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative analysis centering around the voices and needs of the most affected unarmed communities should be followed up until another significant political change in the country occurs. In conclusion, these non-violent strategies also take place with risk of heavy surveillance by the military and the military's response includes arresting, harassment, and violence to the participants. Nonetheless, only due to the shared determination and creative resilience of the communities, the non-violent resistance against the dictatorship is still going on.

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APPENDICES

Social media content used for analysis, 20 comments per year, 2021-2024

2021

1. News media (local)

Visual: Photographs of Tachilek city with people driving around in their vehicles.

Caption: News coverage about a city in Myanmar where citizens have not all joined the silent movement.

2. Union (monks)

Visual: photographs of monks participating in the silent campaign by sharing their photos while wearing a mask and crossing sticker on their mouth and doing three fingers signs.

Caption: Explanation about fake news

3. Celebrity – Dawn

Visual: Simple three fingers cartoonised picture saying ‘Silent Strike’ ‘a than tate ta bate’.

Caption: Encourage people to participate in the campaign, including asking people to participate physically, and online by taking their portraits while wearing black outfits and doing the three fingers sign on December 10 Human Rights Day.

4. News media (local)

Visual: Photographs of vacant streets in Salin town.

Caption: Magwe district, Salin town joined the Silent Strike by intentionally staying inside.

5. Revolution group page (Spring)

Visual: Photo of Hommalin township, Thaung Thoot village’s vacant street and street vendor shop on the side of the street is also closed.

Caption: Description of how the Thaung Thoot village participated in the campaign - the village where the military’s members were being trained.

6. Women Group – Women Alliance Burma

Visual: A female cartoon character in black shirt whose cheek has a bruise and has her three fingers put on her mouth. The Myanmar text on the visual delivers all the information such as dates, time, outfits, and activities.

Caption: The core value of the Silent Strike is ‘we own our cities, if we want to be silent, we silent, if we want to move, we move’

7. News media (local) – The Irrawaddy

Visual: Birdseye viewed photographs of military supporters marching on the streets of the Commercial city of Yangon during the Silent Strike when the rest of the road is vacant without pedestrians apart from those marching.

Caption: While the national level Silent Strike is happening, a group of people do a military march. Apart from that the military try to do activities intentionally, such covid vaccinations, and threatening shops, factories and workshops to keep running, in some places by asking them to commit and sign. The military record the shops that participate in the Silent Strike by shutting them down.

8. News Media (local) – Myaelatt Athan

Visual: A group of the youth defense force, including three women out of 22 individuals, pose with the three fingers sign and put red crosses on their mouths.

Caption: Peoples defense force from Pyi (on freedom land) joined the Silent Strike movement.

9. Yangon’s Township Info sharing page – Mingalar Taung Nyunt Informations

Visual: A photo of a group of real dogs on the street.

Caption: Metaphoring people who don’t join strike as a group of dogs (background ideology: In Myanmar slang, military soldiers were called as Sit khway meaning military dogs).

10. Revolution Page – General Strike Coordination Body GSCB

Visual: a collective photo of individual’s portraits doing three fingers signs.

Caption: General strike body and Yangon youths joined the Silent Strike.

11. Fake News Page – Ma Mya Ta Yin Ma Nyein Chan Buu

Visual: Unblurred photographs of young women and men like the recorded photo of prisoners.

Caption: The individuals who spread propaganda about the Silent Strike campaign on social media were arrested.

12. Revolution Page – Anti-junta forces coordination committee – Mandalay

Visual: Activity information about the Silent Strike including date and time on the background photo of vacant street.

Caption: Voice of brave youth protestors to fight against the military dictatorship and fight for federal democracy.

13. Political Analyst – Khun Saing

Visual: A photo of a young girl on her knees with her hands handcuffed and her eyes are photoedited with yellow paste with the intention of blurring her identity.

Caption: To spread fear eight women were arrested at 2pm for participating in the Silent Strike on December 10. Among the women, the girl (in the photo) is underage. So, it is nothing strange that people hate the military.

14. Personal Blog – KP Diary

Visual: Vacant streets of Kalay during the Silent Strike campaign period.

Caption: Kalay, Latt Pan Chaung. Scene of Silent Strike.

15. Personal Blog – AK Japanese knowledge sharing

Visual: overview photographs of vacant Yangon streets

Caption: Today Yangon's Silent Strike.

16. News media – The Irrawaddy

Visual: Scenes of closed shops and vacant streets in Yangon.

Caption: Activists for democracy encouraged people across the country to join the Silent Strike by closing work, schools, and shops to show their will against the military.

17. News Media – DVB tv news

Visual: Photographs of Inya (popular, crowded spot in Yangon) where it is totally vacant without people.

Caption: Scenes of vacant Inya in the afternoon of the Silent Strike movement.

18. Revolution Page – Myasandi Defence Force (exclude this post since it is related to violence)

Visual: Photograph of three long guns.

Caption: To the memory of Silent Strike traditional guns were made for youth people defense forces (PDF)

19. Celebrity – Dawn (similar to post 3)

20. Revolution Page – We Support Heroes

Visual: no visual

Caption: Office staff who would like to join the Silent Strike didn't get leave.

2022

1. News media – Myanmar Now

Visual: Scene of wet street vendors market – only one chicken was on display.

Caption: Due to the military pressure, in Mandalay, street vendors opened their shops for show and joined the Silent Strike. The Military threatened the vendors that if they joined the strike, they would be charged, so vendors opened their shops for show by displaying a chicken, or writing down the names of the food they sell and put the names on display.

2. News Media – Development Media Group

Visual: Vacant streets in different cities in Myanmar.

Caption: Scene of Silent Strike from different places in Myanmar.

3. Revolution page – People's Reporter

Visual: cross sign of shopping cart and text on picture said 'we don't do shopping whether shops are open or not'.

Caption: The fear (means violent response) of the military against the Silent Strike is a success of our people (who are against the military).

4. Random media page – the Medium Platform

Visual: Exterior building photo of Maw Da Nu restaurant. On the rooftop of the building, there is a vinyl hanging which says to vote National League of Democracy, part of daw aung sann suu kyi.

Caption: Maw Da Nu restaurant, which posted about the Silent Strike on February 1, was sealed off by the military and the owner and sons were arrested on the morning of January 27.

5. Media page – Burma VJ (a Facebook verified page with blue mark)

Visual: Street photo of Yangon.

Caption: Although the junta threatened the people, on the day of the anniversary of the coup, residents of Yangon were preparing to join the Silent Strike in the early morning of D-day.

6. Public post by Facebook user – Myo Win

Visual: None

Caption: Long text post – he shared his opinion on the Silent Strike.

7. Public post by Facebook user – Nan Nwe Aye

Visual: movie posters.

Caption: I shared the movies for people to entertain themselves at home/indoors by joining the Silent Strike – without going out to the public spaces.

8. Local media page – Myeik g-y media

Visual: Hard copies of Silent Strike campaign poster were being delivered in the local market.

Caption: Campaign posters were being delivered in Myeik city to encourage people to join on February 1.

9. Personal blog – 2/2021 Kaing mae taw lat myar

Visual: none

Caption: Encourage people to join different and diverse/creative non-violence protest campaign such as banging pots and pans at 8pm, wearing traditional Myanmar makeup ‘tanaka’, and so on.

10. Local media page – The Irrawaddy

Visual: Vacant local markets stalls.

Caption: Scenes of Pha Kant city (Kachin state). On the anniversary day of the coup, local residents joined the Silent Strike by closing their shops and not using the public streets.

11. Local media and revolution page – Monywa-amyint road information

Visual: Video of vacant streets in Monywa city on the day of the Silent Strike.

Caption: Silent Strike day, February 1, 2022.

12. Public post of Facebook user – Aung toe-travelin bamar

Visual: A cartoon of a female street vendor said loudly ‘oh my god, I don’t dare to close my shop’ and on the hand, whispering that ‘hey, I just said that...please buy ahead since I gonna close on 1st day (of February)’.

Caption: Let’s join the Silent Strike by avoiding risk. Let’s succeed in the revolution (‘a yayy taw poan aung ya mi’ in Myanmar).

13. Random local media page – Lashio media

Visual: Scenes of closed shops.

Caption: Northern Shan state, Mu Sel city’s the scene of the Silent Strike.

14. Random local media page – HTY information

Visual: birdseye view photograph of vacant street.

Caption: The photographs were taken on the day of the Silent Strike at 10am around Yangon, Kyi Myin Daing (bar ka yar area).

15. Revolution page – Pdf Channel (non-verified)

Visual: Cartoon delivered the message that if the junta arrest the shop owners/ vendors because of closing their shop to join the Silent Strike, no matter. Just open the shop but the vendors do not sell goods to customer. To make sure there is no car on the streets on the announced campaign period. But recommend to watch youtube at home and click to donate by watching the advertising to raise funds to undertake the resistance movement.

Caption: It is a Silent Strike, not a closed shop strike. Be smart and overcome the (junta's) response.

16. Revolution activists – Bo Mote Sate (meaning general moustache)

Visual: A cartoon girl who covers her mouth with the three fingers sign and text on the picture says, Silent Strike .

Caption: Let's everyone join the strike. (Encouraging people to join the Silent Strike by providing information about the activity.)

17. Activist (verified Facebook account) – Moe Thway, President of Generation Wave (a collective of Myanmar pro-democracy youths following the 2007 saffron revolution)

Visual: Silent Strike poster in Myanmar language.

Caption: Ways for shop owners to join the Silent Strike.

18. Revolution page – People's spring

Visual: Vacant city centre of Yangon, sule' area.

Caption: Yangon's silent revolution on the anniversary date of the military coup

19. Public post of random Facebook user – Chaw Sukhita

Visual: none

Caption: About the post owner's opinion about the Silent Strike from a so-called religious perspective.

20. Politicians – Nan Lin

Visual: Silent Strike campaign poster.

Caption: Encouraging people to join Silent Strike on the anniversary date of the coup.

2023

1. Revolution page (unverified) – We Support Heroes

Visual: Vacant street photo of Yangon city centre, sule area.

Caption: Announcement of third Silent Strike and said first time announcement about Silent Strike on March 24, 2021 was a mess, however, 2nd time was a success since public joined the strike..and so on.

2. Public post by Facebook user – May thingyan hein

Visual: Silent Strike campaign poster.

Caption: Information about the activity.

3. Revolution page (verified) – Ministry of Defence – National Unity Government of Myanmar

Visual: Cartoon of a woman and a man wearing soldiers outfits pose. The respect sign and text on visual says 'public is mother and public is father, paying respect to the public' (a sarcastic version of the junta's slogan 'military is mother and military is father'.)

Caption: We paid respect to each and everyone of the citizens who joined the Silent Strike. This spring revolution is initiated by the public. Revolution must prevail.

4. Random media page – Myo Taw (means city) (unverified and seems fake)

Visual: Photographs of women whose eyes were blocked out with solid colour with the intention of hiding their identity and portraying them as criminals.

Caption: Three ladies from Nay Pyi Taw were arrested under section 505a (the junta took action social media users who post against them with that law).

5. Local media page – Than Lwin Khet news (reliable but unverified)

Visual: Two men wearing red t-shirts which have words on the back which encourage people to join the campaign as a large group in Mandalay.

Caption: A physical campaign movement in Mandalay to encourage people to join the Silent Strike on the 2nd anniversary of the coup.

6. Local media page (verified) – Myaelatt Athan

Visual: None

Caption: To disturb the Silent Strike, the junta arrested about 50 motorcyclists on 30 January in Magwe. They then asked people to get back their motorcycles on February 1 (D-Day of the Silent Strike).

7. Revolution group's page – Octopus

Visual: Vacant streets of Yangon' from the balcony of a high building.

Caption: Yangon Silent Strike scene. These photographs are taken and sent by the public from different townships and quarters to octopus. Revolution must prevail.

8. Revolution page (verified) – Ministry of Defence – National Unity Government of Myanmar

Visual: A woman and a man cartoon wearing soldiers uniform (which represents the youths people defense force) holding guns and text on the visual said this was the 2nd anniversary of the spring revolution.

Caption: February 1, 2023. As this is the Second anniversary of the unsuccessful military coup, our page will broadcast the voices of people defence forces to the public. Please join the Silent Strike and looking forward to hearing your voices.

9. Celebrity – Phio Thiha

Visual: Campaign poster which said it was the 2nd anniversary of the people's protest – people's spring revolution in Myanmar language.

Caption: We proved that silence is the loudest voice multiple times and the military is scared by it. There will be more Silent Strikes on the 2nd anniversary of the military coup.

10. Activist (verified) – Tayzar San

Visual: Campaign poster.

Caption: Make one voice, fight one time but as a mass.

11. Activist (verified) – Mauk Kham Wah (visual story teller)

Visual: Screenshot of private message which said 'Since people are really tired of conflicts and thought they won't join, it's understandable. However, seeing today's photographs makes me feel touched'. And photo of vacant market where shops are closed.

Caption: The one who messaged me is the one who started the idea of the Silent Strike.

12. Female Journalist**– Ja Mone who shared the post of 1008 infantry–southern shan revolutionary youth**

Visual: Group of youths wearing soldiers' outfits and carrying guns.

Caption: The revolution youths said they felt like they are not forgotten and still have people (who join the Silent Strike) as their backup.

13. Activist (verified) – Tayzar San

Visual: On ground activities of people from Mandalay raising awareness of the Silent Strike campaign.

Caption: Make one voice, fight one time but as a mass. (Encourages people to join the strike.)

14. NGO page (unverified) – LWF Myanmar–national staff

Visual: None

Caption: The staff of the Lutheran World Federation (based in Geneva, Switzerland) note related to the ill treatment by the organisation of the staff. For instance, not setting their salary based on the exchange rate, firing 80 Myanmar staff who joined the Silent Strike from Sittway, Rakhine.

15. Female politicians* – Zin Mar Aung**

Visual: None

Caption: It is already the 2nd anniversary of the spring revolution. We encourage people to join the strike since joining the campaign means we show our will to fight against the military

16. Politicians – Dr. Sasa

Visual: Portrait photo of politician Dr. Sasa on the stage set up for a speech.

Caption: Appreciation post to the Myanmar people who have joined the Silent Strike.

17. Local media page – Myo Taw (means City)

Visual: Vacant street.

Caption: Scene of the city centre of nay pyi taw.

18. Activist (verified) – Tayzar San

Visual: Portrait of the activist and in background, there is a Silent Strike poster.

Caption: Encouraging people to join the Silent Strike.

19. Politician – Zaw Wai Soe

Visual: None

Caption: Same announcement/statement as Daw zin mar aung. (similar to post 15)

20. Local media page (verified) – Than Lwin Times

Visual: Silent Strike 2023 campaign poster

Caption: The military threaten the shop owners by forcing them to sign the commitment to open their shops on February 1 on which Silent Strike campaign were announced to hold.

2024

1. Revolution page (verified) – People's Spring

Visual: Campaign poster

Caption: News coverage about how famous politician Min ko naing asked people to join the Silent Strike in a more safer way, ethnic political organisation Karen national union (KNU) invites people to pressure the military by joining the Silent Strike more.

2. Activist – Phio Thiha

Visual: None

Caption: Sarcastic comment that the military didn't even announce by loudspeaker in the ward (like last years) 'not to join the Silent Strike and ask you to open the shops'.

3. Revolution page – Octopus

Visual: None

Caption: Regardless of the location, everyone can join the Silent Strike and the military is scared by it.

4. Local media page – The Irrawaddy

Visual: Vacant streets of Dawei.

Caption: residents of Dawei joined the Silent Strike on the third anniversary of the first Silent Strike .

5. Local media page – The Irrawaddy

Visual: Photo of usually crowded city centre of Yangon where at the time of photographing, there are very few pedestrians and vehicles.

Caption: Scenes of Yangon's Silent Strike. On the Silent Strike day of 3rd year of the Silent Strike, it was almost vacant without the usual crowd in Yangon.

6. Revolution page (verified) – General Strike Coordination Body (GSCB)

Visual: Portrait photo of a lady wearing a white blouse and doing a cross sign pose on the famous bridge in Mandalay.

Caption: 3rd year of people's revolution.

7. Revolution page (verified) – People's Spring

Visual: Vacant streets photo.

Caption: News coverage about how people join the Silent Strike and how the streets are emptier than usual.

8. Revolution page – General Strike Coordination Body (GSCB)

Visual: vacant streets with no people at all

Caption: 3rd anni of people spring revolution. Revolution must prevail.

9. Local media page (verified) – The Irrawaddy

Visual: Vacant streets.

Caption: In big cities, Silent Strikes were held on the third year of the military coup. The shops opened in the early morning and closed during the campaign period, according to the local residents staff also worked from home.

10. Politician & activists (verified) – Nay Phone Latt

Visual: 2024 poster of Silent Strike.

Caption: Silent Strike, tomorrow, 10am to 4pm.

11. Revolution page (unverified) – Mandalay Revolution Group

Visual: Same photo as post 6.

Caption: Without going outside, Silent Strike. In the place of tight security, white campaign was held.

12. Random media page – Moe Joe News

Visual: Photo of vacant street in Yangon city centre area, Sule’.

Caption: Silent Strike will be held on February 1 for the third anniversary of the spring revolution.

13. Politician (verified) – Min Ko Naing

Visual: 2024 campaign poster.

Caption: Announcement about Silent Strike one day before it was to happen asking people to spread the news. If the announcement was made multiple days ahead, then the military will take action to disturb it. And we have learned lesson – don't close the shop, however, only don't go out from 10am to 4pm.

14. Revolution and information page (verified) – the Voice of Spring

Visual: Campaign poster in news announcement frame.

Caption: There will be a Silent Strike on tomorrow. Please share this news as widely as possible .

15. Local media page – Mandalay free press (MFP)

Visual: Vacant streets.

Caption: Monywa city residents join the Silent Strike.

16. Local media page** – The Irrawaddy**

Visual: Photographs of people protesting in a big group.

Caption: In response to the Silent Strike, military supporters do the protest (marching) in Yangon.

17. Public post of Facebook user – That Ka Moe Nyo

Visual: None.

Caption: Oh there will be a Silent Strike tomorrow. Some are pioneers of Silent Strike – no posts at all after the military coup happened (sarcastic – makes no sense and just looking for attention post.)

18. Local media page – *Khit Thit Media*

Visual: Magwe city development committee members in the vendor's market.

Caption: Magwe city development committee members ask shop owners to sign not to close the shops during the Silent Strike campaign.

19. Media page (verified) – *Myanmar Now*

Visual: Exterior photo of Insein GTI building.

Caption: Students from Insein GTI were attacked by the military after the students joined the Silent Strike by refusing to go to school on that day. 'Six students were arrested and violently beaten without any reason' stated a GTI student union member.

20. Local media page (unverified) – *Red News Agency (high chance of being fake news)*

Visual: Insein jail photo.

Caption: The leader of the jail guards ordered staff not to go outside while holding the Silent Strike.
