

Burma

Myanmar Youths Call for Boycott of Traditional Water Festival to Defy Junta, Honor Those Slain

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Myanmar's young people are calling on their fellow citizens not to celebrate the country's major traditional new year water festival next week. The boycott is seen as an act of defiance against the regime and as a way of honoring those murdered by the military junta.

Normally at this time of year, the Southeast Asian country is buzzing with preparations for its annual Thingyan Water Festival, one of the landmark traditional and cultural activities on the Myanmar calendar. It is a days-long holiday with joyful outdoor events, dominated by people splashing water on each other, which nearly everyone in the country loves to celebrate.

Many people in Myanmar had been particularly looking forward to participating in this year's festival, which is scheduled to start on April 13, as they missed last year's due to a government ban amid the raging COVID-19 epidemic in the country at the time.

However, their hopes were shattered with the military takeover in February and the regime's subsequent killings of more than 500 people so far amid their crackdowns on protesters against military rule. Nationwide resistance is in full swing and the whole country is reeling from the bloodbath created by the regime.

One week prior to the festival, young people in Yangon, Taunggyi in Shan State, and other areas launched online campaigns urging people not to take part in the event.

If the campaign turns out to be a success, it would be a big blow to the junta, which is desperate to show the world that everything in Myanmar is under control and that the situation is back to normal.

If the boycott goes ahead, the streets of Yangon and other cities across the country will be totally deserted, reminiscent of the COVID-19 lockdown period that Myanmar saw exactly one year ago.

"We seriously urge you not to participate in the festival, especially at this time when we are under the regime that unjustly seized power," requested an announcement made by young people in Yangon's Hlaing Township.

The statement also warned that public participation in the festival could fuel the regime's disinformation effort to create a show of normalcy at home and abroad.

"Furthermore, we request you to show your sympathy for those killed and wounded by the junta and their bereaved families, by not participating in the festival," it added.

Unsurprisingly, many people have already expressed reluctance to take part in the celebration, feeling it would be inappropriate amid the ongoing national strife and the resulting tragedy.

Ko Paing, not his real name, from Yangon's Thaketa Township said he won't join the water festival under military rule.

"Yes, it's one of the festivals I enjoy most. As long as they are in power, happiness means nothing for us. Even Thingyan can't bring it for us," he said.

"Furthermore, any participation is an act of dishonor to those murdered by the regime," he added.

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P.-S.

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