

Burma: The Day a Student Leader, Salai Tin Maung Oo, was Hanged for Anti-Junta Activism

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Yangon — On this day in 1976, 25-year-old student leader Salai Tin Maung Oo, a strong voice of dissent against the military regime led by dictator General Ne Win, was hanged in Insein Prison.

The ethnic Chin zoological student at the University of Yangon (then Rangoon) participated in student movements and labor strikes against military rule. He became a well-known opposition figure in 1974 when students took to the streets against Gen. Ne Win's refusal to honor former United Nations secretary-general U Thant, who died that year of lung cancer, with a state funeral.

Following the military's violent crackdown on protesters, an event which would later be known as the U Thant incident, Salai Tin Maung Oo fled to the Thai border and led an underground student movement.

While plotting to stage an anti-government protest to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Thakhin Kodaw Hmaing, a father of nationalism in British-run Burma, he was arrested by military intelligence in Yangon, allegedly with a pistol, in 1976. He was hanged three months later in Insein.

When Salai Tin Maung Oo, who was the eldest son in his family, was hanged and his body was cremated at Kyan Taw Cemetery (now the site of Junction Square Shopping Center), his parents and three siblings who were arrested along with him remained in prison.

Salai Tin Maung Oo is the only student recorded as being hanged in the country's history. His opposition to the military dictatorship influenced subsequent generations of students.

"What happened to Salai Tin Maung Oo must not be allowed to happen to anybody else in Burma," said Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, while she was an opposition leader, at a commemorative event to mark his death.

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P.S.

• The Irrawaddy. 26 June 2020:

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/on-this-day/day-student-leader-hanged-anti-junta-activism.html>

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