

Specials

Myanmar's Long History of Informants

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Since the military coup on Feb. 1 people have been furious about the violence committed by the junta's police and soldiers. But their civilian accomplices and informants caused just as much anger.

They are among the people, closely monitoring anti-regime activists and informing on their activities to the junta. Thanks to their tip-offs, the regime detained activists in their homes and hideouts, enabling the junta to quash grassroots anti-regime activities.

Most of the collaborators accept the coup and have led to hundreds of arrests and forced others into hiding. Suspicions grow about who was passing on the information.

Through history, many resistance fighters against British colonial rule and military dictatorship have fallen victim to collaborators.

After the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852-53), a villager took British troops to the base of renowned revolutionary leader Bo Myat Tun who Governor-General of India Lord Dalhousie described as a good man and good soldier.

Bo Myat Tun, who had fought the colonial government for some six years, managed to escape but his uprising failed.

Another revolutionary, Bo Min Yaung, was a cousin of the grandmother of independence hero General Aung San. He was one of the leading resistance fighters against colonial rule during the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885).

He was arrested and executed after spies informed the colonial government about his whereabouts while he was hiding near Natmauk in today's Magwe Region as his troops were overpowered by the British forces.

Other revolutionary leaders were killed or forced into hiding after village chiefs told the British about their whereabouts.

Twenty-two years after Bo Min Yaung's death, Maung Thant, a farmer turned folk hero who many hoped would restore the monarchy, led a rebellion against British rule. The rebellion was quashed and Maung Thant was arrested at Yangon Central Railway Station. However, the British found it difficult to prosecute him as no one could identify him. However, a villager picked Maung Thant out and he was hanged.

An armed peasant rebellion broke out in 1930. Saya San led thousands of farmers to fight British troops and met the same fate. He was hanged after a collaborator took British troops to his hideout in Shan State.

The 25-year-old student leader Salai Tin Maung Oo was hanged in Insein Prison in Yangon in 1976. He was a well-known opposition figure who actively participated in student movements and labor strikes against the dictatorial rule of General Ne Win. He is the only student recorded as being hanged in the country's history.

Salai Tin Maung Oo was plotting to stage an anti-government protest to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Thakhin Kodaw Hmaing, a father figure in the anti-colonial movement. The student was arrested by military intelligence in Yangon (then Rangoon) after a fellow student told the junta where he was hiding.

Many democracy activists were arrested during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising and throughout military rule due to tip-offs by collaborators. Many died in prison and numerous families were shattered.

Today, collaborators continue to play their role to help the military regime function but some have faced rough justice after being identified as informants.

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P.S.

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