

## Life during the Coup!

I bet none of you expected to have another newsletter so closely on the heels of the previous one. So much changed in the 48 hours after sending out the last newsletter. It sure feels like a few months have passed in the last 2+weeks.

Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February, we woke up to find that what we had been pondering and questioning and ultimately thinking not logical – had actually happened. In an early morning raid the military took control of the country arresting many senior National League of Democracy ministers including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the President of Myanmar Htin Kyaw Win Myint. They were arrested and remain under arrest 2 weeks later – in undisclosed locations. A number of the ministers have been released and banned from government.

We woke up to find all communications had been cut. We were able to know the coup had happened due to frantic messages sent by people out of bed earlier than us (we were up at 630) and in other countries. Their messages had appeared on the screens of our otherwise useless phones before communication was cut. Eh Hsu when he saw the news shrugged and said, “this is what Myanmar Military does – they don’t know how to do democracy”. To be honest – the logical thing was not the likely path the military would take so it wasn’t a huge surprise. That we were plunged into no communication was a challenge. My first thought was I need to tell mum we are ok. If she hears this it will naturally be a worry. We got to clinic and things were quiet for a Monday morning. We were still trying to make sense of what was going on. By 11am one of the communications providers came online and those of us with that network had our phones going ping ping ping like they were having seizures. I was able to see a message from Andrew my brother and I responded to him first saying – tell mum that we are ok! I then was able to talk with some of the team in Thailand. I found out that Dr Mitch had asked a good friend to contact mum as well. As I understand it mum found out that all was ok – before she had heard that there had been a coup!

Internet has been off and on for the past two + weeks with periods of lack of connectivity that are restored soon after, but last weekend for a day and a half we again lost connection to internet but still were able to make calls within the country, and while we were unable to dial out – friends in Thailand were able to dial in and check in with us. Facebook has been the method of sharing information and there are millions of Facebook accounts registered to the people of Myanmar. The military issued a ban on Facebook, messenger, Instagram, WhatsApp, and warned that twitter would be next. Well after people found they couldn’t access their Facebook there was an unprecedented surge in signups to twitter. News continued to flow freely. Then the government decided to ban twitter. Well, both of those bans have easily been circumvented by use of VPN’s. So, seeing that the bans have had next to no impact on use of those banned sites – the military talked about a complete 2 week cut off of communications. What happened instead is that they are shutting the internet off from 1am – 9am. You may well think this is reasonable – but nighttime is their time and opportunity to get out and do things in the cover of darkness while people cannot get the news out. They threatened to take all communication away from 14<sup>th</sup> Feb – 28<sup>th</sup> Feb. One week in and it is still the 1am – 9am. Tomorrow its set to be off for the majority of the day. There is a nationwide strike planned.

After the first day or so, people seemed to be waiting to see what would happen. Then after about 2 days at 8pm at night people started banging pots and pans for 15 mins. A symbolic show of beating out the demons. This has grown and each night it seems more people are banging their pots in solidarity. There has been a very effective movement called the Civil Disobedience Movement CDM that has seen people en masse striking – particularly government workers. Doctors and Nurses were amongst the first to enact this and stand firm to this day. More and more groups join, including many of the banks, and government departments. There have been police who have joined the protesters. In Karenni state 42 police joined the protesters, and their colleagues have attempted to arrest them – however the people are protecting them. The public have been trying to engage the police saying -you are the police of the people not the military. The crowds of people protesting continuing to grow in size. Even Naypyidaw and other cities that are heavily military are protesting. The military are responding with water cannons, water spiked with chemicals, and rubber bullets and in the past few days have escalated to using guns with real bullets. On the 9<sup>th</sup> February in Naypyidaw real bullets were used and a 19-year-old woman, sheltering behind a bus shed was shot in the back of the head, the bullet passed through her motorcycle helmet. Initially the military turned up to the hospital wanting to assume her care and were not allowed by the doctors and staff there. Yesterday it was announced that the family had agreed to withdraw life support for her and sadly she has passed.

There have been protests all around the country. Kyaukkyi has been having protests, and also there are counter protests – much to our disgust. How can people want to return to military dictatorship is beyond us? Police in Kyaukkyi following the military play book have started visiting houses late at night and attempting to arrest

organisers of the demonstrations here in Kyaukkyi. It is happening with greater frequency in Yangon and Mandalay.

So why?! Good question – and there are many answers – the truth is that we don't really know – as the argument is that the military are saying that free and fair elections didn't happen. This is merely a sham of an excuse. Now to be clear I don't believe they were free and fair because there were too many areas of the country ineligible to vote for a variety of reasons – this was an epic case of voter suppression – that had the support of the military and the government. So, while I believe that it wasn't free and fair – it's not for the reason that the military stated. I think it's clear that the NLD really truly won the election when you see that the country has shut down in protest against the military.

So, for me – it seems that the most obvious reason is that Min Aung Hlaing the Military Commander in Chief is 65 this year and it is the year of his assumed retirement. He had high hopes that the military party would win the election creating the role of president for him. They failed to get much support at all. With retirement comes the possibility of being tried for his crimes against humanity. While he is the Commander in Chief, he is immune from being tried. When he realised how poorly his party had performed the way to get the power he craved and to avoid being tried this became his only option. It's all about power, it's all about money.

It's too many kinds of despicable – there are late night arrests, there are tanks on streets in main cities as an attempt to create fear. There have been 20,000 prisoners released from prison to create havoc – they are being treated by the communities with dignity and caution but not violence. This movement is led by Generation Z. They have stated democracy or death. They have no desire to live the lives of other generations of Myanmar – they have had access to education and the opportunity to dream. They have learned the lessons from the activists of 88 and are leading the way. I am so proud of them. I am so impressed with how brave and yet humorous the people of this country are.

Now on the other not so seen side of things is increased military action against the ethnic minority groups – particularly the Karen. There has been intense fighting in areas just a few hours up the road from us. Literally up the road. Hundreds of IDP's (Internally displaced People) are hiding in the jungle unable to return to their villages. The Ethnic Armed organisations have issued a statement that they will suspend all political negotiations with the military until the democratically elected government is reinstated. The NLD haven't valued the ethnic groups but allowed the military to lead the way with achieving peace with them – this was a mistake, and it will be the unity of all these groups against the military that will lead to its downfall.

There is so much to write about. It's so hard to condense it down- it's a constantly changing situation. The reality is that Myanmar is experiencing the Myanmar Spring.

Tomorrow will see the biggest strike and protest yet. It is the 5 2's strike 22/2/2021. Pray for this – the military is being backed into a corner and they only know how to fight – they don't know what to do with peaceful protests. Pray for safety for the demonstrators, for courage and for endurance. This civil disobedience movement is achieving things.

Pray for the country, for peace, pray that the military would be defeated. Pray for courage for the demonstrators and for more and more people to stand against the military. I will add some links to the email to check out. Email the foreign minister, I will put a link to a template in the email. Advocate against business like Woodside gas that intend to still do business with the military. There is some speculation that Australia has accepted members of the military's families in recent days – that needs a good investigation. Stand with the people of Myanmar – they need your help.

Its late and it's been crazy here – there is still so much to share, but we are safe and healthy, we have good supply of food and enough money on hand for now. I will try to continue to add small additions to this regularly to keep you up to speed with what is going on.

Many thanks for caring and following  
With love Mon, Eh Hsu and 2 cheeky boys Phoenix and Orion.