

Burmese supporters in Taiwan denounce coup with songs

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People yesterday hold placards at Liberty Square in Taipei to denounce the military coup in Myanmar.

Photo: Ann Wang, Reuters

Hundreds of people from Taiwan's Burmese community yesterday rallied in central Taipei to denounce the coup in Myanmar, singing defiant songs and holding white and red roses in mourning for those who have died protesting the military.

Taiwan is home to about 40,000 people originally from Myanmar, most of whom are ethnic Chinese. Some are descendants of Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) troops trapped in Myanmar, then called Burma, at the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949. Others have come more recently, fleeing repression and anti-Chinese sentiment.

Dressed in white, the color of mourning, holding pictures of detained Burmese State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and signs condemning the coup, about 400 people protested at Liberty Square, mainly Sino-Burmese, but also non-Chinese Burmese citizens, Taiwanese and Hong Kongers.

"People in Myanmar are once again forced to live under the dark shadow of the military regime. As an emigrant from Myanmar, today we gather here to pay tribute to our fellow countrymen and those fallen heroes," Yangon-born Thomas Chen, 28, a teacher of Burmese at Taipei's Soochow University, told the crowd.

People sang *We Won't Be Satisfied Until the End of the World*, the Burmese-language anthem from the country's 1988 pro-democracy uprising, brutally put down by the military government of the time, and bowed their heads in prayer to remember the dead.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Hung Sun-han (洪孫漢) accused China of supporting the coup.

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Beijing denies this, although many people in Myanmar view China as supporting the junta that seized power on Feb. 1.

“We know that behind this military coup there are forces from [the] Chinese Communist [Party]. This is the thing that people can’t stand the most,” Hung said.

Sunday last week saw arson attacks against 32 Chinese-invested companies in the Yangon suburb of Hlaingthaya, although demonstrators played down fears of wider anti-Chinese feelings.

“Many ethnic Chinese are on the streets protesting against the coup,” said Wei Lin, who lived through anti-Chinese riots in Yangon in 1967. “People know how to distinguish between Chinese-Burmese and the Chinese government.”

The Overseas Community Affairs Council last week warned Taiwanese businesses operating in Myanmar of the risky situation there after a Taiwanese company was damaged in a fire amid protests.

The nation’s representative office in Myanmar has advised Taiwanese firms to fly the national flag at their premises.

Additional reporting by staff writer

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