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**Transitions to
Democracy:
Options for
Myanmar**





PRAKSIS is a semiannual publication of the Network of Social Democracy in Asia (Socdem Asia). It seeks to combine theory and practice by providing cogent analyses to inform the strategy of the progressive movement and help shape the policy direction that should guide the region's governments.

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Editorial

Spring Revolution, Asian Spring

On the early morning of 1 February 2021, armored vehicles suddenly appeared on the streets of Myanmar's capital, Naypyidaw, as the military wrested power from the democratically elected government. After shutting down the internet and suspending all cellular services, soldiers quickly arrested more than 400 civilian leaders, including democracy icon and state counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and the country's president, Win Myint.

In a statement that was released later that day, the military or Tatmadaw justified its coup by citing alleged irregularities in last year's general elections, which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won by a landslide. It also imposed a year-long state of emergency, while vesting all power to armed forces chief Min Aung Hlaing.

Though the putsch had aborted Myanmar's nine-year democratic transition, it also galvanized public opposition to the Tatmadaw. In fact, people in the thousands took to the streets of Yangon and Naypyidaw a day after the military coup. Banging pots and pans, the protesters were quickly joined by government medical staff who began calling for a nationwide Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). By 7 February, the protest movement had spread across the country, with street demonstrations occurring in every major city.

The junta, however, retaliated with deadly force, ordering troops to fire live ammunition to disperse the crowds. The non-profit organization Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) estimates that as of 17 November, the military has already killed at least 1,270 people since the start of the protests, now

known as the Spring Revolution. To deprive the junta of outside support, activists and opposition lawmakers have formed the National Unity Government (NUG), which is now seeking international recognition as the legitimate government of Myanmar.

Though largely fueled by internal causes, Myanmar's Spring Revolution is also the latest in a series of civic uprisings that has been rocking the Asian region for the past two years.

June 2019, for example, marked the beginning of a massive protest movement that swept across Hong Kong, after authorities introduced a bill that would allow the extradition of 'criminal suspects' to mainland China. Opponents saw the proposed measure as Beijing's attempt to undermine Hong Kong's autonomy and assert greater control over the former British colony.

After months of paralyzing street protests, Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam was finally forced to withdraw the bill, announcing on 4 September that the legislative proposal would be suspended indefinitely. Protesters, however, were not satisfied, and demanded that the bill be completely abandoned instead. By late November, the pro-democracy movement had won a landslide victory in Hong Kong's local council elections, controlling all but one of the territory's 18 districts.

In February of the following year, Thailand's Constitutional Court ordered the dissolution of the popular opposition group, Future Forward Party, for allegedly receiving illegal campaign donations. This decision ignited numerous student-led protests, all calling for fresh elections and the immediate resignation of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

But by July, the protests have spilled into the streets of Bangkok and in other large cities. The demonstrations were often joined by LGBT groups calling for gender equality and the legalization of same-sex marriage. A month later, activists broke the country's longstanding taboo by openly demanding for monarchial reforms, and calling for the abolition of Thailand's *lèse-majesté* law that prohibits anyone from criticizing the King and the Royal Family. Despite the government's heavy-handed approach in dealing with demonstrators, protests actions continue to this day, occurring in almost half of Thailand's 77 provinces.

For Ei Thinzar Maung, Deputy Minister of Youth, Women and Children of Myanmar's NUG, these various protest movements are not isolated events, but the intimations of a coming region-wide democratic surge.

Asia, she observes, is "not the cradle of democracy." But "the nations of the region have already awakened," and eventually, "the Myanmar Spring will become the Asian Spring."

This issue of *PRAKSIS*, "Transitions to Democracy: Options for Myanmar," is the second of a two-part special edition on the ongoing civic uprising in Myanmar. The first part was released in August to commemorate the 8888 Uprising. It featured articles from Myanmar activists to honor all those who have fought for democracy and to encourage the Burmese people to remain steadfast and never falter from the struggle.

The second part pools together activists, journalists and academics from across the globe to reflect on various aspects of democratization in a bid to make sense of the situation in Myanmar and help the country find a suitable path toward democracy.

This edition opens with a statement from the General Strike Committee (GSC) — the largest coalition of political forces opposing the military junta. Issued two weeks after the coup, the manifesto "acknowledges the results of the 2020 election as legitimate" and condemns the Tatmadaw for seizing power from Myanmar's duly elected civilian government. Asserting that "the anti-dictatorship movement is (now) gaining momentum," the statement also outlines the actions that the GSC is undertaking to weaken the junta and pave the way for a new democratic federal union.

While the GSC statement is meant as a clear call for resistance, Ei Thinzar Maung's think-piece, on the other hand, provides a concise history of modern Myanmar, which describes the Tatmadaw as "the last remaining fascist military from the Second World War." Initially trained

by Japan's former imperial forces, the Myanmar military has staged four successful coup attempts in the past and has been committing unspeakable atrocities ever since. Concerned over the dreadful situation of her country, Ei faults the Tatmadaw for ruining the economy, for decimating their education system, and for depriving her people of proper healthcare.

"Why are we revolting against the fascist military," Ei asks.

"It is simple," she answers. "We want to live like human beings."

The third article is from Maung Saint, a young Burmese activist, who offers a glimpse of life on the frontlines, as he narrates his firsthand experience of the protest action that occurred in Yangon seven weeks after the coup, on 27 March.

"We, the comrades of the General Strike Committee, were eager to march on the streets that day," he recalls.

But their lively spirits soon turned to fear and shock when soldiers began firing at the crowd, forcing the demonstrators to scamper for safety.

"While we were dodging the bullets," Maung Saint continues, "someone fell down beside me and was drenched in blood. When I looked at him more closely, his calf had been blown and the bone inside was already broken and had dropped off."

On that day, more than a hundred people had died in mass protests all across the country. The military's increasing repression is also changing the character of the opposition, as more and more young people leave the cities to undergo guerilla training in the 'liberated zones.'

"The junta's inhumane oppression and unjustified killing of civilians," Maung Saint declares, "are pushing the Myanmar youth to the path of armed resistance."

Maung Saint is, of course, aware of the strength of the Tatmadaw, which has lorded over his country for more than six decades. But he also sees a growing sense of unity among the various opposition forces, which now share a common conviction that a "Federal Democratic Union is the solution to end armed rebellion and would ease the pain of centuries-old wounds."

The next piece from *PRAKSIS* editor-in-chief Francis Isaac offers a more analytical perspective and raises the question, "How does democratization occur?"

Informed by insights from renowned political scientist Samuel Huntington, Isaac maintains that "democratization occurs in the form of a wave," wherein a group of countries transition from authoritarianism to democracy within a specified period of time. His article further notes that three waves of democratization have already occurred in the modern world, "with each succeeding wave affecting more countries than the previous one." Unfortunately, the two previous surges were followed by reverse waves, "with some of the new democracies sliding back to authoritarian rule." Citing recent academic research, Isaac avers that a third wave of autocratization is already underway, as the number of democracies continue to decline.

But while autocracy seems ascendant, Isaac remains confident that progressives can overcome this difficulty "by planting the seeds of a future democratic society." By "fostering a culture of democracy," activists, he believes, can help "create the political ripples that will pave the way for the next great democratic wave."



Image: www.nytimes.com

Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, an adjunct professor at the University of Tsukuba, shares some of Isaac's observations, asserting that "democracy has been in serious decline worldwide." This problem is particularly acute in the Asian region, which has been one of the sources for the "sharp rise in the global percentage of people living under autocracy." The descent to authoritarian rule, Quimpo adds, often occurs lawfully through elections; and it is only after they gain political power that autocrats begin to slowly undermine democratic norms and procedures.

He also identified the three common patterns of Asian autocratization: the first is through assaults by authoritarian populists; second, is through greater military involvement in the running of government; and third, is by the tightening of control and repression in one-party states.

Though democracy's decline has yet to be reversed, Quimpo perceives the beginning of the "global waning of authoritarian populism," since "populist rulers in Asia and elsewhere (are now) being castigated for their mishandling of the COVID pandemic and of the economy."

The University of the Philippines' Aries Arugay further explores the exogenous factors affecting Myanmar by focusing on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Formed in 1967, this regional body is where the "twin worlds of authoritarianism and democracy have mutually coexisted," composed of "majority authoritarian and minority low-quality democratic regimes."

This predicament, according to Arugay, is due to ASEAN's principle of non-interference, which prevent member-countries from criticizing

each other's domestic policies. This is also the reason why "there has been little intraregional pressure to democratize," and why the Association is unable to "seriously resolve the current crisis in Myanmar."

Continuing the conversation on ASEAN, geopolitics expert Richard Heydarian affirmed Arugay's argument that the principle of non-interference has not been conducive for democratization. This was laid bare when Myanmar's ASEAN neighbors sought to water down a draft resolution of the United Nations General Assembly condemning the military coup.

Heydarian, however, cites two instances when this principle was set aside to prevent further instability in the region. The first was ASEAN's peacekeeping efforts in Timor-Leste, after the tiny Southeast Asian nation voted for independence in a UN-sponsored referendum in 1999. And the second was its intervention in the Third Indochina War, which persuaded Cambodia's warring factions to sign the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement after 16 years of bitter fighting. These two cases, according to Heydarian, demonstrate ASEAN's diplomatic sophistication and its ability to "significantly influence the course of a conflict in Southeast Asia," if it chooses to.

Hoping to provide lessons for Myanmar, Indonesian journalist Bunga Manggiasih highlights civil society's "pivotal role in the years leading to *Reformasi*." With no effective opposition party during the New Order regime, various NGOs and advocacy groups were instead formed to fight injustice and defend human rights.

Civil society, however, lost a great deal of its efficacy after the fall of Suharto as leaders began moving

into government. And with no common enemy to unite them, most groups became extremely disoriented and struggled to find their bearings under the new dispensation. Because civil society is no longer able to effectively "balance out the state's dominance," Manggiasih notes that Indonesia has now become increasingly "vulnerable to renewed illiberal threats," coming from both pro-authoritarian elites and from grassroots populist forces.

Drawing insights from her country's experience, Manggiasih counsels her fellow activists in Myanmar to "keep building a strong civil society" by ensuring the "constant regeneration of committed activists." And while underground work may be required to escape repression, Manggiasih still insists that civil society should remain independent "even after the military junta leaves the stage" so it can fulfill its role of "building and maintaining democracy."

The role of civil society was also apparent in Brazil's own transition to democracy. In her article, Cecilia Lorio of the University of São Paulo notes that citizen groups were "extremely weak and fractionalized" at the beginning of the military dictatorship. But they eventually learned to use the splits within the regime, and "took advantage of the democratic space as it emerged to organize and to begin contesting power in important social institutions."

When democracy was finally restored in 1985, most civil society groups became supporters of the Workers' Party (PT). There was a lull, however, in grassroots organizing, when PT's leader, Lula da Silva, was elected president in 2003. This left a "lacuna on the ground," which was eventually filled by the forces of the populist right.

Convinced that the Brazilian case can "provide important points for consideration for democratic forces in Myanmar," Lero emphasizes the "role of an independent civil society that engages people in important matters of politics and governance." She further adds that while coalitions with political parties must be cultivated, "it is (also) important that civil society and social movements maintain independence and do not relax efforts at base-building."

The next article from Veronica Alporha focuses on the People Power Revolution in the Philippines and "the lessons that the world can draw both from its successes and failures." A historian by profession, Alporha argues that while People Power succeeded in overthrowing the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, it "did nothing to alleviate the growing social anxiety among ordinary Filipinos." This enabled Rodrigo Duterte, "a self-confessed murderer from Mindanao," to win the presidency in 2016.

Blaming oligarchs and drug dependents for the country's ills, Duterte has not only dismantled the institutional checks on executive power, but has also launched a bloody war on drugs that has killed tens of thousands of civilians. These developments, according to Alporha, are indications of the country's democratic backsliding. Nonetheless, she still insists that the Philippines remains a 'contested democracy,' where progressive forces continue to fight for the interest of "the oppressed, the powerless, and the marginalized," despite "unrelenting attacks on the Filipino people's political and economic freedoms."

This issue concludes with a think-piece from Ruben Carranza of the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ).

Recalling a meeting that he had with the leaders of Myanmar's main opposition National League for Democracy, Carranza stressed the importance of transitional justice to address the immediate needs of those who were victimized by the military dictatorship. He also pointed out that transitional justice is "broader than prosecuting human rights abusers and can be calibrated so that it can be politically feasible, practical and helpful."

At the same time, Carranza expresses hope in the NUG, since it shatters the alibi of the military that it alone can maintain "the post-colonial state that was created through the union of Myanmar's different ethnic groups." This hope, however, can only be fulfilled if the National Unity Government addresses "the economic and social grievances that led to the 1988 revolution and to the even older ethnic area conflicts."

While all the articles share a common concern for Myanmar, this issue also offers a larger perspective, examining the developments in this nation of 54 million people, in light of current global and regional dynamics, and using the lens of democratization.

Modest as this may be, this edition is our sincere response to Myanmar's call for solidarity as its peoples chart their way to democracy. And we hope that by doing so, we can help secure a future where democracy will have a home, not only in Myanmar, but in the whole of the region. ■



Image: www.opendemocracy.net



General Strike Committee (GSC) Manifesto

20 February 2021

1. Since the military seized state power in 1962, the internal unrest of our country has become worse, and in every aspect of social life such as the economy and education, Myanmar civilians have been experiencing horrendous suffering. The 8888 Uprising erupted in 1988 due to the general dissatisfaction of the people. But it was brutally crushed by a military coup. In 2010, the military approved the 2008 Constitution which gave the country a sham democracy, even though the charter itself was rejected by the Myanmar people.
2. On 1 February 2021, the military seized power from the legitimate government, claiming that there was massive vote rigging in the November 2020 elections. Numerous civilian leaders were also detained, including President U Win Myint and State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as several members of parliament, government officials, state employees, and political activists.
3. A day after the military coup, healthcare workers started the anti-authoritarian Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), which was quickly joined by other civil servants. Then, on 6 February 2021, people from all over the country took to the streets to protest the coup.
4. Now the anti-dictatorship movement is gaining momentum and needs to be strengthened. Therefore, to coordinate the various anti-military mass movements across the country, to fight against the military dictatorship and to repeal the 2008 Constitution, the General Strike Committee (GSC) was formed based on the common objective of forming a Federal Democratic Union.
5. At present, Myanmar citizens' anti-junta movements are gaining momentum and must be further developed. Thus, we intend to cooperate with anti-junta movements around the country in a balanced way, based on the three (3) common agreements as indicated below:
 1. To end the military dictatorship.
 2. To abolish the 2008 Constitution.
 3. To build a federal democratic union.

The General Strike Committee will carry out the following activities:

- A. Forming local strike committees.
 - B. Supporting CDM participants.
 - C. Joining the people's movements against the military junta.
 - D. Maintaining the tide of the revolution.
 - E. Representing people's movements as a collective organization.
6. The General Strike Committee acknowledges the results of the 2020 election as legitimate. We will fight against the military dictatorship. We will fight until the 2008 Constitution, which legitimizes military power, is finally abolished. We want a Federal Democratic Union. We will incessantly demand for the release of all arrested civilian leaders. ■



စစ်အာဏာရှင်စနစ်တိုက်ဖျက်ရေးအထွေထွေသပိတ်ကော်မတီ General Strike Committee (GSC)

ကြေညာချက်အမှတ် ၁/၂၀၂၁

နေ့ - ၂၀ ဖေဖော်ဝါရီ၂၀၂၁

၁။ ၁၉၆၂ ခုနှစ် စစ်အာဏာသိမ်းချိန်မှစတင်၍ မိမိတို့တိုင်းပြည်၏ ပြည်တွင်းစစ်မှာ ပိုမိုပြင်းထန်လာခဲ့ပြီး စီးပွားရေး၊ လူမှုရေး၊ ပညာရေးအစရိုးသဖြင့် ဘက်စုံနိမ့်ကျခဲ့ရပါသည်။ ပြည်သူလူထု၏ အထွေထွေမကျန်ပူးများကြောင့် ၁၉၈၈ ခုနှစ်တွင် ရှုစ်လေးလုံးအရေးတော်ပုံကြီးပေါ်ပေါက်လာခဲ့သော်လည်း စစ်တပ်၏အာဏာသိမ်းယူမှုဖြင့်သာအဆုံးသတ်သွားခဲ့ရပြီး စစ်အာဏာရှင်၏လက်အောက်သို့ ထပ်မံကျရောက်ခဲ့ရပြန်ပါသည်။ ၂၀၀၈ ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံအခြေခံဥပဒေကိုလည်း ပြည်သူလူထုကဆန့်ကျင်ကန့်ကွက်ခဲ့သည့်တိုင် အတင်းအဓမ္မအတည်ပြုခဲ့ပြီး ၂၀၁၀ အထွေထွေရွှေးကောက်ပွဲကိုကျင်းပကာ ပြည်သူလူထုအား ဒီမိုကရေစိအတုအယောင်ကိုပေးအပ်ခဲ့ပါသည်။

၂။ မြန်မာစစ်တပ်သည် ၂၀၂၀ ပြည့်နှစ် နိုဝင်ဘာလတွင်ကျင်းပဲခဲ့သည့်ရွှေးကောက်ပွဲ၏ မဲမသမာမှုများရှိခဲ့သည် ဟုအကြောင်းပြလျက် ငင်းတို့စိတ်တိုင်းကျရေးဆွဲထားခဲ့သော ၂၀၀၈ ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံအခြေခံဥပဒေကိုပင်မလိုက်နာနိုင်တော့ဘဲ ၂၀၂၁ ခုနှစ်၊ ဖေဖော်ဝါရီလ (၁) ရက်နေ့တွင် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၏ တရားဝင်အစိုးရထုမှ အာဏာ သိမ်းယူခဲ့ပြီး နိုင်ငံတော်သမွတ် ဦးဝင်းမြင့်နှင့် နိုင်ငံတော်အတိုင်ပင်ခံပုဂ္ဂိုလ် ဒေါအောင်ဆန်းစုကြည်အပါအဝင် အစိုးရအဖွဲ့ဝင်များ၊ လွတ်တော်အမတ်များ၊ ဝန်ထမ်းများ၊ အရပ်သားများနှင့် နိုင်ငံရေးတက်ကြွလှပ်ရှားသူများစွာကို ဖမ်းဆီးထိန်းသိမ်းခဲ့ပါသည်။

၃။ ထိုကဲ့သို့ အာဏာသိမ်းယူလိုက်သည့်နေ့ဗျားပင် ကျွန်းမာရေးဝန်ထမ်းများဦးဆောင်သည့်နိုင်ငံဝန်ထမ်းအများစုသည် အာဏာဖို့ဆန်ရေးလှုပ်ရှားမှု (Civil Disobedience Movement) ကို စတင်ဖော်ဆောင်ခဲ့ကြပါသည်။ ထိုနောက် ၂၀၂၁ ခုနှစ် ဖေဖော်ဝါရီလ (၆) ရက်နေ့မှစတင်၍ နိုင်ငံတွေမှုမှုပြည်သူများသည်လည်း စစ်အာဏာသိမ်းယူလိုက်သည့် စစ်အာဏာရှင်အုပ်စုအား ပြင်းထန့်စွာယဆန့်ကျင်ဆန္ဒပြဲခဲ့ကြပါသည်။

၄။ ယခုအခိုန်း စစ်အာဏာရှင်ဆန့်ကျင်ရေးလူထုလှပ်ရှားမှုသည်တော်ထိုးအရှိန်အဟုန်ကောင်းလျက်ရှိပြီး ထို့ထက်ပို၍အားကောင်းလာရန်လည်း လိုအပ်နေပါသည်။ သို့ဖြစ်၍ နိုင်ငံတွေမှုးလုံးတွင်ပြုလုပ်နေကြသော စစ်အာဏာရှင်ဆန့်ကျင်ရေးလူထုလှပ်ရှားမှုများကို ဟန်ချက်ညီညီပေါင်းဆောင်ရွက်နိုင်ရန်ရည်ရွယ်လျက် "၁) စစ်အာဏာရှင်စနစ်တိုက်ဖျက်ရေး" ၂) ၂၀၀၈ ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံအခြေခံဥပဒေဖျက်သိမ်းရေး ၃) ဖက်ဒရယ်ဒီမိုကရေစိ ပြည်ထောင်စုပေါ်ပေါက်ရေး" ဟူသည့်ဘုံသဘောတူညီချက်တို့အပေါ်အခြေခံကာ ဤ 'စစ်အာဏာရှင်စနစ်တိုက်ဖျက်ရေး အထွေထွေသပိတ်ကော်မတီ' အားဖွဲ့စည်းလိုက်ပါသည်။

၅။ ယခုအထွေထွေသပိတ်ကော်မတီသည် အောက်ပါလုပ်ငန်းစဉ်များအား ဆောင်ရွက်သွားမည့်ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

- (က) အသအလိုက် သပိတ်ကော်မတီများ ဖွဲ့စည်းရေး
- (ခ) CDM လူပုဂ္ဂိုလ် ပါဝင်သူများအားကူညီပံ့ပိုးရေး
- (ဂ) စစ်အာဏာရှင်ဆန်းကျင်ရေး လူထုတိုက်ပွဲများအား စုပေါင်းဖော်ဆောင်ရွက်ရေး
- (ဃ) တိုက်ပွဲအရှိန်အဟုန်အားထိန်းညိုရေး
- (င) လူထုလူပုဂ္ဂိုလ်များအား စုပေါင်းကိုယ်စားပြုရေး

၆။ အထွေထွေသပိတ်ကော်မတီသည် ၂၀၂၀ ဧပြီ ကောက်ပွဲ၏ရလဒ်အား ပြည်သူလူထု၏ ဆန္ဒအဖြစ် တရားဝင်မှု (legitimacy) အရ အသိအမှတ်ပြုပါသည်။ စစ်အာဏာရှင်စနစ်ကိုးတည်တိုက်ဖျက်မည့်ဖြစ်ကာ စစ်အာဏာရှင်စနစ်ကို တရားဝင်ခွင့်ပြုထားသော ၂၀၂၀ ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံအခြေခံဥပဒေအား အပြီးတိုင်ဖျက်သိမ်းနိုင်သည်အထိ ကြိုးစားသွားပါမည်။ ဖက်ဒရယ်ဒီမိုကရေစီပြည်ထောင်စုပေါ်ပေါက်ရေးကို အထူးလိုလာပြီး ဖမ်းဆီးခံခေါင်းဆောင်များ ပြန်လည်လွတ်မြောက်ရေးကို အစဉ်တစိုက်တောင်းဆိုသွားပါမည်။ ■



Dream, Vision and Struggle of the Youth for Myanmar

By: Ei Thinzar Maung

Since Myanmar is a developing country, only a small number of the world's young people would have heard of our nation. In fact, our country started to experience what technology development felt like only in the past decade. During this period, we faced many social challenges, as well as a terrible refugee crisis brought about by civil war and ethnic conflicts that have been going on since the country's independence. In addition, the country is now facing charges for genocide against the Rohingya people at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

By looking at these issues, it is apparent that Myanmar has a long and complicated history mired in political instability. Furthermore, our country experienced military coups four times. The first coup was in 1958, not long after independence. The second was in 1962, the third in 1988, and the fourth in 2021. However, we must



ensure that this latest coup will definitely be the last. We do not want another coup. This time, we need to get rid of the authoritarian system, put the military under civilian control, and ensure that power comes, not from the barrel of a gun, but from the people.

I would like to briefly describe the nature of the Myanmar military or Tatmadaw. The Myanmar military is the last remaining fascist military from the Second World War. It received its military training from fascist Japan with the goal of obtaining independence. Since then, the military has been committing murder, rape and looting in the ethnic regions, and has been building a dictatorship without any effort to reform and to democratize Myanmar's political landscape.

Myanmar experienced three other military coups before, and it is a relatively easy to estimate what the future of the country will look like. Therefore, it is not surprising that the country is facing a very long civil war and accusations of genocide at the ICC.

Our country is in a quagmire, but young people of Myanmar have never given up on anything related to our political situation. During the first military coup, student unions were at the forefront of the protests, and different nationalities took up arms to fight for their right to self-determination. Protests and the struggle of students and other young people are essential elements whenever one talks about military coups in Myanmar. It is not wrong to state that Myanmar's freedom is being built upon the blood and sweat of students and young people.

Why are we revolting against the fascist military? It is simple. We want to live like human beings. We want to breathe freely and build our own lives. We do not want to see refugee families fleeing from civil



war. We want to feel safe and sound in our homes. And we want to contribute as citizens of the world. We want democracy. We want to prove that we can gain democracy with the power of the youth, and show support to all the oppressed across the world. We do not want to take medicine bought at betel-nut shops anymore because we cannot afford to go to a clinic. We want to get adequate healthcare which we deserve. We want a safe transportation service system. We want a good education system, freedom of speech, freedom of expression and equality.

We can only build an equal society if we have all these. Our young people can build their own dreams freely only in such society. Every

youth wants job security, regardless of where she or he is an employee or an entrepreneur. Our society needs to be stable in terms of health, economy and politics so that we can fulfil our dreams. Only then can we create job opportunities. Without a stable health, economic and political situation, domestic and foreign investments will be low, and so will job opportunities.

Our young people need a good education system to stand in this challenging world. Our high school graduates can barely read and write. Many of them do not have much basic knowledge, skills and capabilities to face today's world. There are several high school graduates who do not even know how to open a computer. Such lack

of capability is not due to their fault, but because of our education system, which has been systematically decimated by the fascist military. This fascist education system not only fails to teach basic knowledge, but also encourages divisions among ethnic groups and people of different religions, and cause racial discrimination. Today's young people want to completely overhaul the education system, and replace it with a better democratic system.

Moreover, young people want to discard the horrendous governance system together with the military which have been committing unspeakable atrocities. Myanmar's young people had to endure the terrible services of corrupt governments in the past. Since bribery of officials are rampant, the living standard, thinking and social character of our people have been declining. Together with the lack of transparency and responsibility, government actions no longer represent the public; and the notion that the public is at the heart of the government apparatus is long gone. Therefore, the Myanmar youth are eager to completely overthrow the corrupt government in order to improve our society.

Lastly, safe and secure livelihoods are what the youth of Myanmar want the most. Young people are often viewed as valuable human resources of a country. However, it is important that there are safe and secure livelihoods with guaranteed social services in order for young people to become valuable and quality resources. Only then can young people not only improve their abilities but also contribute to the country.

In essence, we are revolting against the fascist regime today in order to fulfil our dreams, and achieve a better future. ■



မြန်မာပြည်အတွက် လူငယ်များ၏ အိပ်မက်၊ မျှော်ရည်ချက်နှင့် ရုန်းကန်ကြီးပမ်းမှုများ

ကျမတို့ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံက ဖွံ့ဖြိုးဆဲနိုင်ငံလေးတစ်ခုဖြစ်တာကြောင့် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံကို ကမ္ဘာပေါ်မှာရှိတဲ့ လူငယ်တွေအနေနဲ့ သိတဲ့သူလည်းရှိသလို မသိတဲ့၊ တစ်ခါမှ မကြားဖူးတဲ့လူငယ်တွေလည်း ရှိပါလိမ့်မယ်။ ဒီလို ဖွံ့ဖြိုးဆဲ ကျမတို့နိုင်ငံမှာ နည်းပညာဖွံ့ဖြိုးမှုဆိုတာဟာ လွှန်ခဲ့တဲ့ ဆယ်စုနှစ်က စပြီးမှသာ ရင်းနှီးအကျမ်းဝင်လာခါစပဲ ရှိပါသေးတယ်။ ဒီကြားထဲမှာ လူမှုရေးဆိုင်ရာ စိန်ခေါ်ချက်တွေအများကြီးလည်း ရင်ဆိုင်ခဲ့ရသလို လွှတ်လပ်ရေးရကတည်းက အစပျိုးလာခဲ့တဲ့ ပြည်တွင်းစစ်မီးနဲ့ လူမျိုးစုပိဋက္ခတွေကြောင့် စစ်ပြီးဒုက္ခသည်တွေ အများအပြား ထွက်ပြီးတိမ်းရှောင်နေရတဲ့ နိုင်ငံလည်းဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ဒီအပြင်ကိုမှ ရှိဟင်ဂျာတွေကို လူမျိုးတုန်းသတ်ဖြတ်မှုတွေကြောင့် ကမ္ဘာခုံရုံးမှာ တရားရင်ဆိုင်နေရတဲ့ နိုင်ငံလည်းဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

ဒါတွေကိုကြည့်ခြင်းအားဖြင့် မျက်မောက်ခေတ် ကျမတို့နိုင်ငံဟာ သမိုင်းကြောင်းသိပ်ရှုပ်ထွေးသလို နိုင်ငံရေးမတည်ပြုမှုဟာလည်း အတိုင်းသားပေါ်လွင်နေပါတယ်။ ထို့အတူ စစ်တပ်ရဲ့ အာဏာသိမ်းမှုဝဲကယက်ထဲမှာလည်း လေးကြိမ်တိုင်တိုင် ရင်ဆိုင်ခဲ့ရပါတယ်။ ပထမ အကြိမ် အာဏာသိမ်းမှု ကတော့ ၁၉၅၈ ကပါ။ လွှတ်လပ်ရေးရတာမကြာသေးခင်မှာပဲ အာဏာသိမ်းခံလိုက်ရတာဖြစ်ပြီး အဲနောက်မှာတော့ ၁၉၆၂ မှာ ဒုတိယအကြိမ်၊ ၁၉၈၈ မှာတော့ တတိယအကြိမ် ထပ်အသိမ်းခံခဲ့ရပါတယ်။

ဒီအနီးစပ်ဆုံး ၂၀၂၁ ကတော့ စတုတ္ထအကြိမ်သိမ်းခံလိုက်ရတာပါ။ ဒါပေမဲ့ ဒီအကြိမ်ဟာ နောက်ဆုံးအာဏာသိမ်းမှု ဖြစ်ဖို့လိုပါတယ်။ နောက်ထပ်အာဏာသိမ်းမှုတွေ ထပ်အလိုမရှိတော့ပါဘူး ဒီအကြိမ်မှာတော့ စစ်အာဏာရှင်စနစ်ကို အမြစ်ဖြတ်နိုင်ခဲ့ဖို့လိုပြီး တပ်ကို ပြည်သူလူထူးအမိန့်နာခံတတ်ဖို့ အာဏာက သေနတ်ပြောင်းဝက ထွက်တာမဟုတ်ဘဲ လူထုထံက ဆင်းသက်တာဆိုတာကို လက်တွေ့ပြကြဖို့လိုပါပြီ။ ဒီနေရာမှာ မြန်မာပြည်မှာရှိတဲ့ တပ်ရဲ့ သဘောသဘာဝကို အနည်းငယ်ပြောပြချင်ပါတယ်။ ကျမတို့နိုင်ငံမှာ တည်ရှိနေတဲ့ စစ်တပ်က ဒုတိယကမ္ဘာစစ်ကတည်းကနေ ယနေ့အချိန်ထိ ကမ္ဘာပေါ်မှာ ကျိုးရှိနေတဲ့ တစ်ခုတည်းသော ဖက်ဆစ်တပ်ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ လွှတ်လပ်ရေးရယူဖို့ဆိုပြီး ဖက်ဆစ်ဂျပန်တွေဆီမှာ စစ်ပညာသွားသင်တယ်။ ပြီးတော့ ပြည်တွင်းထဲပြန်လာပြီး အခုအချိန်အထိ ဒီမိုကရေစိစိချိန်၊ စံဆွဲန်းတွေနဲ့ ကိုက်ညီအောင် မပြုပြင်ခဲ့ဘဲ လူမျိုးစုပေသတွေမှာ လူသတ်၊ မှုဒ်န်းကျင့်၊ ခိုးဆိုးလှယက်ပြီး မြန်မာနိုင်ငံရေးစားပွဲဝိုင်းထဲအထိဝင်ပါပြီး စစ်အာဏာကိုတည်ဆောက်ထားတဲ့ ဖက်ဆစ်တပ်ပါ။

ဒီဖက်ဆစ်တပ်က လွန်ခဲ့တဲ့ နှစ်တွေမှာ သုံးကြိမ်တိုင်တိုင် အာဏာသိမ်းယူခဲ့တော့ ဒီနိုင်ငံအနာဂတ်က ဘယ်လိုဖြစ်မယ်ဆိုတာ အလွယ်တကူ ခန့်မှန်းလိုရတဲ့အနေအထားမှာ ရှိနေပါတယ်။ ဒါကြောင့် ရှေ့မှာပြောခဲ့တဲ့အတိုင်း ပြည်တွင်းစစ်မီးရှည်ကြာပြီး ကမ္ဘာခုံရုံးမှာ လူမျိုးတုန်းသတ်ဖြတ်မှုနဲ့ တရားရင်ဆိုင်နေရတာတော့ မဆန်းတော့ပါဘူး။

ဟုတ်ပါတယ်။ ကျမတို့တိုင်းပြည်က စိတ်ပျက်စရာကောင်းတဲ့ အခြေအနေမျိုးတွေနဲ့ ရင်ဆိုင်နေရတယ်။ ဒါပေမယ့် ဒီတိုင်းပြည်မှာ ဖြစ်နေတဲ့ နိုင်ငံရေးအခြေအနေတွေနဲ့ပတ်သက်ပြီး လူငယ်တွေက ဘယ်တော့မှ လက်လျှော့တာမျိုးမရှိပါဘူး။

ပထမအကြိမ်အာဏာသိမ်းမှု

ဖြစ်ကတည်းက

ကျောင်းသားလူငယ်တွေ့ဦးဆောင်တဲ့ ကျောင်းသားသမဂ္ဂတွေက ရှေ့ဆုံးကြိုးဆောင်ပြီး ရဲ့ရုံး ဆန့်ကျင်ခဲ့ကြသလို လူမျိုးစုအသီးသီးကလည်း ကိုယ့်ကံကြမှာကိုယ် ပြုဌာန်းနိုင်ရေးအတွက် လက်နက်ကိုင်တို့က်ပွဲဝင်ခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။ ဒီနေရာမှာတွေ့ရတာက မြန်မာပြည်အာဏာသိမ်းခံရမှု အကြောင်းကိုပြောတိုင်း ကျောင်းသားတွေ၊ လူငယ်တွေရဲ့ အာဏာရှင်ကို ဆန့်ကျင်တို့က်ပွဲဝင်မှု ရှုန်းကန်လှပ်ရားမှုတွေက မပါမဖြစ် အကြောင်းအရာတွေဖြစ်တယ်။ မြန်မာပြည် လွှတ်လပ်ရေးကို ကျောင်းသားတွေ၊ လူငယ်တွေရဲ့အသွေးအသားတွေနဲ့တည်ဆောက်ထားတယ်လို့တောင် တင်စားလို့ရပါတယ်။

ဒီအတွက် အခုအချိန်မှာရော ဘာလို့ ဖက်ဆစ်တပ်ကိုတော်လုန်ကြတာလဲ။ ရှင်းပါတယ်။ ကျမတို့ လူလို ပိုပိုသနချင်တယ်။ ကျမတို့ လွှတ်လွှတ်လပ်လပ် အသက်ရှုံးချင်တယ်။ ကိုယ့်ဘဝကို ကိုယ့်ဘာသာတည်ဆောက်ခွင့်ရချင်တယ်။ ပြည်တွင်းစစ်မီးတောက်လောင်ပြီး စစ်ဘေးဒုက္ခသည်တွေထပ်မဖြစ်ချင်တော့ဘူး။ ကိုယ့်အိမ်မှာကိုယ် နွေးနွေးထွေးထွေးနေချင်တယ်။ ဒီစကားတွေနဲ့အတူ ကျမတို့လူငယ်တွေရဲ့ကြီးကြီးကျယ်ကျယ် ရည်မှန်းချက်ကြီးကိုပြောရရင် ကျမတို့ဟာ ကမ္ဘာကြီးကို ကူညီနိုင်တဲ့သူတွေဖြစ်ချင်တယ်။ ကျမတို့ဒီမိုကရေစီရချင်တယ်။ ဒီမိုကရေစီအောင်ပွဲကို လူငယ်တွေရဲ့အင်အားနဲ့သက်သေပြုပြီး ကမ္ဘာအရပ်ရပ်က ကျမတို့လို့ အဖိန့်ပံ့ဘဝတွေကို ခွန်အားပေးချင်တယ်။ ငယ်ငယ်တုန်းကလို ဆေးခန်းပြစရာ ပိုက်ဆံမရှိလို့ လမ်းထိပ်ကွမ်းယာဆိုင်က ကြံရာဆေး ဝယ်မသောက်ချင်တော့ဘူး။ ကျမတို့ဟာ ကျမတို့နဲ့ထိုက်တန်တဲ့ လုံလောက်တဲ့ ကျိုးမာရေးစောင့်ရှုဌာက်မှုစနစ်ရချင်တယ်။ လုံခြုံစိတ်ချရတဲ့ သယ်ယူပို့ဆောင်ရေးစနစ်နဲ့ ဝန်ဆောင်မှုကို အလိုဂျိတယ်။ စနစ်ကျ ကောင်းမွန်တဲ့ ပညာရေးစနစ်နဲ့အတူ လွှတ်လပ်စွာရေးသားခွင့်၊ ထုတ်ဖော်ပြောဆိုခွင့်နှင့် တန်းတူညီများကို ကျမတို့အလိုဂျိပါတယ်။

ဒီလိုအခွင့်အရေးတွေရရှိမှုသာ တန်းတူညီများတဲ့ လူအဖွဲ့အစည်းကို တည်ဆောက်နိုင်မှုဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ဒီလိုတန်းတူညီများတဲ့ လူအဖွဲ့အစည်းအတွင်းမှာပဲ ကျမတို့လူငယ်တွေဟာ မိမိတို့ရဲ့ ကိုယ်ပိုင်အိပ်မက်ကို လွှတ်လပ်စွာ အကောင်အထည်ဖော်နိုင်မှုဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ လုပ်ငန်းခွင်အတွင်းမှာဖြစ်စေ၊ ကိုယ်ပိုင်စီးပွားရေးလုပ်ကိုင်ချင်တဲ့လူငယ်ဖြစ်စေ လူငယ်တိုင်းဟာ မိမိတို့ အလုပ်အကိုင် အကျိုးစီးပွားလုံခြုံစိတ်ချမှုကို လိုလားပါတယ်။ မိမိတို့ အိပ်မက်တွေ အကောင်အထည်ဖော်နေတဲ့အချိန်မှာ မိမိတို့လူနေမှုပတ်ဝန်းကျင်ကလည်း ကျိုးမာရေးအရဖြစ်စေ၊ စီးပွားရေးအရဖြစ်စေ၊ နိုင်ငံရေးအရဖြစ်စေ တည်ပြုမှုကောင်းမွန်နေဖို့လိုပါတယ်။ သို့မား အလုပ်အကိုင်အခွင့်အလမ်းတွေကို ကောင်းမွန်စွာဖော်ပြုပြီး တည်ပြုမှုကောင်းမွန်တဲ့ ကျိုးမာရေး၊ စီးပွားရေး၊ နိုင်ငံရေးအရဖြစ်စေ နိုင်ငံရေးအခြေအနေတွေမရှိရင်တော့ ပြည်တွင်းပြည်ပရင်းနှီးမြှုပ်နှံမ အားနည်းတဲ့အလောက် အလုပ်အကိုင်အခွင့်အလမ်းတွေဟာ ရားပါးလာမှုဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

နောက်တစ်ချက်အနေနဲ့ ကျမတို့လူငယ်တွေဟာ မျက်မောက်ခေတ် ကမ္ဘာကြီးအတွင်း အများနည်းတူရင်ဘောင်တန်းနှင့်ဖို့ ကောင်းမွန်တဲ့ ပညာရေးစနစ်ကို အလိုရှိပါတယ်။ ကျမတို့ နိုင်ငံမှာ အထက်တန်းအောင်မြင်ပြီးတာတောင် ရေးတတ်၊ ဖတ်တတ်ရုံကလွှပြီး အခြေခံဟုသုတေသနားနည်းတဲ့လူငယ်တွေ၊ နိုင်ငံတကာနဲ့ ဆက်သွယ်ဖို့ အရည်အသွေးမပြည့်မိတဲ့လူငယ်တွေ အများကြီးပါ။ ယုတ္ဓအဆုံး ကွန်ပျူးတာ အဖွင့်အပိတ်တောင် မလုပ်တတ်တဲ့ အထက်တန်းအောင် လူငယ်တွေရှိပါတယ်။ ဒီလိုဖြစ်ရတာကလည်း သူတို့ရဲ့ အားနည်းချက်ကြောင့် လုံးဝမဟုတ်ဘဲ စနစ်တကျ ဖျက်ဆီးခံထားရတဲ့ မြန်မာပြည်ရဲ့ ဖက်ဆစ်ပညာရေး စနစ်ဆိုးကြောင့်ဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ ဒီဖက်ဆစ်ပညာရေးစနစ်ဆိုးမှာ အခြေခံ ဗဟိုသုတေသန ခေါင်းပါးမှုအပြင်ကို ဘာသာကွဲများ၊ တိုင်းရင်းသားများအပေါ် သွေးခဲ့ဆက်ဆံခြင်း၊ လူတန်းစားခဲ့ခြားဆက်ဆံခြင်းများလည်း ပါဝင်တာကြောင့် မျက်မောက်ခေတ် မြန်မာလူငယ်တွေဟာ ပညာရေးစနစ်ကို အလုံးစုံပြောင်းလဲပစ်လိုပြီး ကောင်းမွန်တဲ့ ဒီမိုကရေစီ ပညာရေးစနစ်ကို ဆာတ်တောင့်တနောက်ပါတယ်။

ဆက်လက်ပြီး အထက်ကဖော်ပြခဲ့သလို အကျင့်ပျက်ခြစားမှုတွေနဲ့ ပြည့်နက်နေတဲ့ စစ်တပ်နဲ့အတူ ဆုံးဝါးတဲ့ အုပ်ချုပ်မှုစနစ်ကို လူငယ်တွေဟာ ဖြုတ်ချေပြောင်းလဲလိုနေပါတယ်။ မြန်မာလူငယ်တွေဟာ လွှန်ခဲ့သောနှစ်တွေကတည်းက အကျင့်ပျက်အစိုးရရဲ့ ဆုံးဝါးတဲ့ ဝန်ဆောင်မှုစနစ်တွေကို ခါးစည်းခံခဲ့ရပါတယ်။ တန်းစီရမယ့်နေရာတွေမှာ ငွေကြေးပါဝါသုံးပြီး ကြိုတင်နေရာဦးရတာတွေ၊ အထက်လူကြီးကို လာဘ်ထိုး နေရာရအောင်ယားခဲ့ရတာတွေကြောင့် လူမှုစရိတ်တွေဟာလည်း ယိုယွင်းလာပြီး လူနေမှုအဆင့်အတန်းနဲ့အတူ အတွေးအခေါ်များဟာလည်း နိမ့်ပါးလာခဲ့ရပါတယ်။ ထိုအတူ ပွင့်လင်းမြင်သာမှုမရှိခြင်း၊ တာဝန်ယူမှုမရှိခြင်းနဲ့အတူ အစိုးရအဖွဲ့ခဲ့လုပ်ဆောင်ချက်တွေဟာ ပြည်သူလူထုကို ကိုယ်စားပြုမှုပျောက်ကွယ်ပြီး ပြည်သူသာလျှင် အုပ်ချုပ်ရေး ယန်ရားရဲ့ အချုပ်အခြာဖြစ်တယ်ဆိုတဲ့ အခန်းကဏ္ဍဟာ မေးမိန်လာခဲ့ရပါတယ်။ ဒါ့ကြောင့် မျက်မောက်ခေတ်မှာ နိုင်ငံတကာနဲ့အတူ ရင်ဘောင်တန်း စိန်ခေါ်လိုတဲ့ မြန်မာလူငယ်တွေဟာ မိမိတို့ လူမှုဝန်းကျင်ကို မြေလှန်ပြောင်းလဲနိုင့်ဖို့ အကျင့်ပျက် အစိုးရကို ဖြုတ်ချေပြောင်းလဲဖို့ အာသီသပြင်းပြုလျက်ရှိပါတယ်။

နောက်ဆုံးအနေနဲ့ မြန်မာလူငယ်တွေ အလိုအရှိဆုံးအရာက လုံခြုံပြီး အာမခံချက်ရှိတဲ့ လူနေမှုဘဝပဲဖြစ်ပါတယ်။ လူငယ်ဆိုတာ နိုင်ငံတစ်နိုင်ငံရဲ့ လူသားအရင်းအမြစ်အဖြစ် ရှုမြင်ခံရပါတယ်။ ဒါပေမယ့် လူငယ်တွေဟာ တန်ဖိုးရှိပြီး အရည်အသွေးပြည့်ဝတဲ့ အရင်းအမြစ်ဖြစ်ဖို့ အတွက် လုံခြုံစိတ်ချေရတဲ့ လူနေမှုဘဝနဲ့အတူ တိကျတဲ့ အာမခံချက်ရှိတဲ့ လူမှုဝန်ဆောင်မှုတွေအားဖြင့် အထောက်အပံ့ပေးနိုင့်ဖို့ လိုအပ်ပါတယ်။ သို့မှာ လူငယ်တွေဟာ မိမိအရည်အသွေးကို အပြည့်အဝ မြှုင့်တင်နိုင်မှာဖြစ်သလို တိုင်းပြည်အတွက်လည်း ပြန်လည်အကျိုးပြုနိုင်မှာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

ဒါကြောင့် အထက်ကဖော်ပြခဲ့တဲ့ လူငယ်တွေရဲ့ တောင့်တမ္မတွေပြည့်ဝဖို့နဲ့ ကောင်းမွန်တဲ့ အနာဂတ်သစ်တွေဆီ ချိုတက်ဖို့ အခုချိန်မှာ ကျမတို့ဟာ ဖက် ဆစ်စစ်တပ်ကို မြေလှန်ပြောင်းလဲနိုင်အောင် ကြိုစားပြီး တွန်းလှန်နေကြတာဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

Anti-Fascist Resistance Day and a New Society

By: Maung Saint

27 March 1945 — the day the Burma Independence Army (BIA) was established.

This prominent date of the independence movement was renamed “Tatmadaw Day” (Armed Forces Day) — as if to honor the military — by the so-called “socialist” and power-thirsty dictator, Nay Win who staged a coup d'état in 1962.

However, for us, 27 March is Revolution Day. In the past though, some described it as the day of patriotic uprising and was also called the *Anti-Fascist Resistance Day*, to mark the beginning of armed resistance against Japanese occupation. But today, we consider 27 March as the day we rebel against the fascist military which kills and oppresses everyone except its supporters. And what makes this day even more special compared to the past is that it is the *Anti-Fascist Resistance Day* of the Spring Revolution which fights for freedom and equality.





On 27 March of this year, Anti-Fascist Resistance Day, the fascist army held a massive military parade in the capital, Naypyitaw. Despite this massive show of force, thousands of soldiers and police had to be deployed not only throughout Naypyitaw, but in each and every city of Myanmar.

We, the comrades of the General Strike Committee, were so eager to march on the streets that day. Police and soldiers were already stationed at our planned location, so we undertook a successful guerrilla strike with the slogan, "Uproot the Fascist Military," just a street away from the original site. We had to flee while dispersing after the strike since we were besieged by soldiers.

After successfully retreating, we gathered up again at a restaurant and discussed what we would do next. That's when we heard gunshots — not very far from where we were sitting. In the nearby ward, soldiers were shooting protesters with rubber bullets, and all that protesters had were a few Molotov cocktails. We went into the crowd as we thought we should go and help. The comrades there were quite happy to see the 20 of us joining in with them. The reinforcements are here!

The happiness didn't last long as soldiers soon started firing us with rubber bullets. While we were dodging the bullets, someone fell

down beside me and was drenched in blood. When I looked at him more closely, his calf had been blown and the bone inside was already broken and had dropped off. As I was holding him, another one near me got shot in the chest, and a third one in the leg. We tried to call an ambulance but we couldn't. As a last resort, we took those three in a private car to a small secret medical corner in the vicinity.

When we got there, there were already many people from other demonstrations and protests who were also shot. There were also people who died at the protest area as they got shot in the head. Among the three that I took there, one had to replace two of his rib bones with steel. One of the two people that were shot in the leg survived with only minor surgery, but the other had his right leg amputated. He is a biker delivery man at a food delivery service. It was so painful to witness this.

The comrade who had his leg amputated has a younger brother. He was there with tears in his eyes, and I was blinded by rage that I did not know what to do. Molotov cocktails were the only instruments of resistance that the protesters had that day. We did not even had time to light those Molotovs. With no weapons to fight back, we were shot to death with live bullets. On that day alone, more than 100 people were killed all across the country.

Like this food delivery biker, many comrades gave their limbs and lives. According to a report of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) that was released on 4 August 2021, the junta has already killed 946 people. Earlier this week at a guerilla strike, two people were shot dead in Mandalay after soldiers fired live ammunition on a crowd of about 30 protesters. With bitterness and resentment, the younger brother of the comrade



who had his leg amputated had left the city to undergo training for armed struggle. So were the comrades around me who also headed to the borders for military training with the belief that armed struggle is justified since the junta is oppressing us to death using weapons that are supposed to be used to protect people, since they were bought using taxes from the people. The junta's inhumane oppression and unjustified killing of civilians are pushing the Myanmar youth to the path of armed resistance. On the other hand, even in this situation, it is surprising that young people from numerous cities are still marching and protesting on the streets non-violently.

Armed rebellion is not new to the Myanmar people. Since independence in 1948, ethnic minority groups have been taking up arms, believing that independence has not been fair for the minorities. After 1962, the junta then continued suppressing the ethnic minorities and instilled the majority Bamar ethnic supremacy upon the people. The military, largely led by the Bamar, openly commit arson, murder and rape in the ethnic areas.

A Federal Democratic Union is the solution to end armed rebellion and to ease the pain of centuries-old wounds. This is so because all the ethnic armed groups (EAOs), the non-violent protesters of the still ongoing Spring Revolution, and the youth who left the cities for military training demand only one thing — a Federal Democratic Union.

Wars will end and the people will be liberated only when federal democracy is achieved.

We believe that, since that day, we can have "*A New Society with the Freedom, Equality, and Solidarity*" that we long for. ■

ဖက်ဆစ်တော်လှန်ရေးနေ့နဲ့လူမှုလူဘောင်သစ်



BIA ကိုစတင်တည်ထောင်တဲ့နေ့။ လွှတ်လပ်ရေးကြီးပမ်းမှုမှာ အရေးပါခဲ့တဲ့နေ့ ဒီနေ့ကို တပ်မတော်ကြီးက မောင်ပိုင်စီးလို့ ၁၉၆၂မှာ အာဏာသိမ်းခဲ့တဲ့ ဆိုရှယ်လစ်ပါတီအမည် အာဏာရူးနေဝါဒ "တပ်မတော်နေ့"လို့ အမည်ပေးခဲ့လေတယ်။

ငါတို့အတွက်တော့ ဒီနေ့ဟာ တော်လှန်ရေးနေ့ပဲ။ အရင်ကတော့ မျိုးချစ်စိတ်ကို ဦးစားပေးစည်းရုံးတော်လှန်ခဲ့ကြတဲ့နေ့လို့ တချို့က ပြောကြပေမယ့် ဖက်ဆစ်ဂျပန်ကို လက်နက်ကိုင် စတင်ပုန်ကန်ခဲ့တဲ့နေ့မို့ ဖက်ဆစ်တော်လှန်ရေးနေ့လို့လည်း ခေါ်ကြပြန်ပါတယ်။ ဒီနေ့ကာလမှာတော့ ငါထောက်ခံသူ ငါအသိုင်းဂိုင်းကလွှဲ ကျန်တဲ့သူမှုန်သမျှ သတ်မယ်၊ ဖြတ်မယ်၊ ဖိနိုပ်မယ်ဆိုတဲ့ ဖက်ဆစ်စစ်တပ်ကို တော်လှန်နေရတဲ့နေ့ပေါ့။ အရင်ကထက် ပို့ပြီး တိုးတက်လာတာကတော့ လွှတ်လပ်ခွင့်၊ တန်းတူခွင့်တွေအတွက် တော်လှန်နေကြတဲ့ နေ့ဦးတော်လှန်ရေးကာလထဲက ဖက်ဆစ်တော်လှန်ရေး နောစ်နေ့အဖြစ် ထူးခြားနေတာပါပဲ။

ပြည်သူတွေဟာ ဖက်ဆစ်တွေ အာဏာသိမ်းပြီး ဖေဖော်ဝါရီလ ၁ရက်နဲ့ နောက်ပိုင်းကတည်းက လမ်းမပေါ်မှာ နည်းလမ်းပေါင်းစုံသုံးပြီး သန်းချီစုံဝေး တက်ခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။ ဖြိုခြားသတ်ဖြတ်မှုတွေကတော့ ဖေဖော်ဝါရီနောက်ဆုံးအပတ်မှာတင် စပြီးတော့ ရှိလာခဲ့တာပါ။ မတ်လတလလုံးမှာ ဖက်ဆစ်စစ်တပ်ရဲ့သတ်ဖြတ်မှုတွေကြောင့် ကတ္တရာလမ်းအနက်ရောင်တွေဟာ ရဲရဲနိုးရပါတယ်။ စာတင်ညွှန်းဆိုတာမဟုတ်ဘဲ တော်လှန်သူတွေရဲ့ခန္ဓာကိုယ်က ထွက်လာတဲ့သွေးတွေနဲ့ ရဲရဲနိုးရတာပါ။ ဖက်ဆစ်တော်လှန်ရေးနဲ့ မတ်လ ၂၂ရက်နေ့မှာ စစ်ရေးပြုအမ်းအနားကို ဖက်စစ်စစ်တပ်က နှစ်စဉ်ကျင်းပနေကျအတိုင်း ကျင်းပပြီး နေပြည်တော်မှာ အကြီးအကျယ်ဆင်နဲ့နေပါတယ်။ အဲဒီပြယ်လုံးကို တဖက်မှာပြထားပေမယ့် မြို့အသီးသီးက လမ်းပေါ်လှပ်ရားမှုတွေကို ဖြိုခြင်းဖို့ရာ စစ်သားနဲ့ရဲတွေကို မြို့အနှံ့မှာ ချထားပါတယ်။ အဲဒီနေ့ လမ်းပေါ်ချို့တက်ကြဖို့အတွက် ကျနော်တို့ အထွေထွေသပိတ်ကော်မတီက ရဲဘော်တွေဟာ အားတက်သရော ဖြစ်နေခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။ စီစဉ်ထားတဲ့နေရာမှာ စစ်သားတွေ၊ ရဲတွေ နေရာယူထားပြီးဖြစ်နေလို့ အဲဒီလမ်းရဲတလမ်းကျော်မှာ “ဖက်ဆစ်စစ်တပ်အမြစ်ဖြတ်” ဆိုတဲ့ ကြွေးကြော်သံ့အတူ ပြောက်ကျားသပိတ်ကို ဖိနှိပ်မှုတွေကြားကနေ အောင်အောင်မြင်မြင်နဲ့ တိုးထွက်ခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။ သပိတ်အပြီး လူစုခဲ့ချိန်မှာ စစ်သားတွေရိုင်းလာလို့ တနေရာစီခဲ့ပြီး ပြေးလွှားခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။

ဘေးကင်းတဲ့တနေရာကိုအရောက်မှာ ဆိုင်တဆိုင်မှာ ကျနော်တို့ လူပြန်ပြုပြည်သူတွေကို စာတွေဆက်လုပ်မလဲ ဆွေးနွေးတိုင်ပင်ကြပါတယ်။ အဲဒီအချိန်မှာပဲ ကျနော်တို့ ထိုင်နေတဲ့ ဆိုင်အနီးအနားမှာ ပစ်ခတ်သံ့တွေကြားနေရပါတယ်။ ဟုတ်ပါတယ်။ အဲဒီအနားက ရပ်ကွက်က ဆန္ဒပြပြည်သူတွေကို စစ်သားတွေက ရာဘာကျည်တွေနဲ့ ပစ်ခတ်နေတာပါ။ ဆန္ဒပြပြည်သူဘက်မှာတော့ မို့လို့တော့မ်းအနည်းငယ်သာ ပါပါတယ်။ ကျနော်တို့တွေ သွားကူးသင့်တယ်ဆိုပြီး အဲဒီလူအုပ်ထဲကို ရောက်သွားခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။ ကျနော်တို့ အယောက် ၂၀လောက်ရှိတဲ့လူအုပ်ဝင်လာချိန် အဲဒီက ရဲဘော်တွေ အတော်ပျော်သွားခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။ စစ်ကူးတွေ ရောက်လာပြီပေါ့များ။

ပျော်နေတုန်းမကြာခင်မှာပဲ ကျနော်တို့ကို ရာဘာကျည်နဲ့ ဆက်တို့က်ပစ်ပါတယ်။ ကျနော်တို့ ငံ့ရောင်နေတုန်းပဲ ကျနော်ဘေးမှာ သွေးတွေနဲ့ တယောက် လဲကျသွားခဲ့တယ်။ ကျနော်ကြည့်လိုက်တော့ သူ့ခြေသလုံးက ပွင့်ထွက်ပြီး အရိုးပါ ကျိုးကျနေခဲ့ပါပြီ။ အဲတယောက်ကို ပွဲချို့နေတုန်း ကျနော်ဘေးမှာ ရင်ဘတ်ကိုထိပြီး တယောက် လဲကျနေတယ်။ နောက်တယောက် ခြေထောက်ထိထားတယ်။ ကျနော်တို့ ဆေးရုံးကားခေါ်ဖို့လုပ်တယ်။ ဘယ်လို့မှုမရတဲ့အဆုံး ၃ယောက်လုံးကို ရပ်ကွက်ထဲက ကားလေးတွေရဲ့အကူအညီနဲ့ပဲ နီးစပ်ရာမှာ ခိုးဖွင့်ထားတဲ့ ဆေးရုံးအသေးစားလေးဆီ ခေါ်သွားခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။

အဲဒီအရောက်မှာ တဗြားနေရာတွေကနေ လာတဲ့ သေနတ်မှန်ထားသူတွေ မနည်းမနောပါပဲ။ ဆန္ဒပြားနေရာမှာတင် ခေါင်းကို ကျည်ဆန်မှန်ပြီး ပွဲချင်းပြီးသေသွားသူတွေလည်း ရှိနေပါတယ်။ ကျနော်တို့ ခေါ်သွားတဲ့ သုံးယောက်မှာ တယောက်က ရင်ဘတ်ပေါ်က အရိုးစတီးရိုး ၂ချောင်း ထည့်ရပါတယ်။ ခြေထောက်မှန်တဲ့ ၂ယောက်မှာ တယောက်က အသေးစားခွဲစိတ်မှန်တင် အဆင်ပြေားပြီး ကျိုးတယောက်ကတော့ ခြေထောက် ဖြတ်ပစ်လိုက်ရပါတယ်။

ညာခြေထောက်ပါ။ သူက Food Delivery service တရာ့မှာ စက်ဘီးနင်းပြီး Delivery လုပ်တဲ့သူပေါ့။ နာကျင်လိုက်ရတာများ။ ခြေထောက်ဖြတ်လိုက်ရတဲ့ ရဲဘော်မှာ ညီလေးတစ်ယောက်ရှိတယ်။ သူမှာလည်း မျက်ရည်စတွေနဲ့။ ကျနော်လည်း ဘာလုပ်ရမှန်းမသိအောင် မွန်ထွန်ခဲ့ရတယ်။ အဲဒါနောက ဆန္ဒပြသတွေရဲလက်ထဲမှာ မိုလိုတော့ဗုံးအနည်းငယ်ပဲ ရှိခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။ အဲဒါမိုလိုတော့ဗုံးတွေကိုလည်း မီးညိုချိန် မရခဲ့ကြပါဘူး။ ကျနော်တို့ ဘာလက်နက်မှုမရှိဘဲ ကျည်အစစ်နဲ့ ပစ်သတ်ခြင်းကို ခံခဲ့ကြရတယ်။ အဲဒါနောက တနိုင်ငံလုံးအတိုင်းအတာနဲ့ အသက်ပေးလိုက်ရသူ ၅၀ကော်ချုပ်တယ်လို့လည်း သိခဲ့ရတယ်။

Food Delivery စက်ဘီးနင်းတဲ့ ညီလေးလိုပဲ။ ခြေထောက်တွေလက်တွေ ပေးလိုက်ရသူတွေ၊ အသက်ပေးလိုက်ရသူတွေ မနည်းမနောပါပဲ။ AAPP ရဲ့ပြောတ်လ ၈ ရက်နေ့ထုတ်ပြန်ချက်အရဆိုရင် ယနေ့အထိ ပစ်ခတ်သတ်ဖြတ်ခံရသူ ၉၄၆၇ဦး ရှိခဲ့ပါပြီ။ ခုတပတ်အတွင်းမှာတောင် ပြောက်ကျားဆန္ဒပြကြတဲ့ လူ၃၀၀နဲ့ကျင်လူ၂၁၀အုပ်ကို ပစ်ခတ်ဖမ်းဆီးခဲ့လို့ မန္တလေးမှာ ၂ ယောက် သေဆုံးခဲ့ရပြန်ပါတယ်။ ခြေထောက်ဖြတ်ခံလိုက်ရတဲ့ ရဲဘော်ရဲ့ညီလေးလည်း အဲဒါနာကျည်းချက်တွေနဲ့ပဲ မြို့ပြကိုစွန်းဆွဲပြီး လက်နက်ကိုင်တော်လှန်ရေးအတွက် တောထဲကိုရောက်သွားခဲ့ပြီ။ ဖိန့်ပုံသူတွေက အသေအလဲ ဖိန့်ပေါ်နေတဲ့အတွက် ကျနော်အနားက ရဲဘော်တွေလည်း လက်နက်ကိုင်တော်လှန်တာဟာ တရားတယ်ဆိုတဲ့ ခံယူချက်နဲ့ လက်နက်ကိုင်ဖို့အတွက် တောထဲရောက်သွားကြပြီ။ အာဏာသိမ်းစစ်တပ်ရဲ့လူမဆန့်စွာ ဖိန့်ပုံသတ်ဖြတ်မှုတွေဟာ လူငယ်တွေကို လက်နက်ကိုင်တော်လှန်ဖို့ကို တွန်းအားပေးချက်တစ်ခု ဖြစ်နေတာပါပဲ။ တခြားတဖက်မှာလည်း ဒီလိုအခြေအနေတွေမှာတောင် အမြိုမြိုအနယ်နယ်က လူငယ်တွေဟာ မြို့ပေါ်တွေမှာ အကြမ်းမဖက်ဘဲ ဆက်လက် ဆန္ဒပြချိတ်ကော်ကြတာဟာ အံ့အားသင့်စရာပါပဲ။



လက်နက်ကိုင်တော်လှန်ရေးဆိုတာလည်း ခုမှစခဲ့တာတော့ မဟုတ်ပါဘူး။ ၁၉၄၈ လွှတ်လပ်ရေးရပြီးစကာလတွေမှာကတည်းက လူမျိုးစုတွေဟာ သူတို့ လူနည်းစုတွေအတွက် မျှတတဲ့ လွှတ်လပ်ရေးမဟုတ်ဘူးဆိုပြီး လက်နက်စကိုင်ခဲ့ကြတာပါ။ ၁၉၆၂ နောက်ပိုင်းမှာလည်း အာဏာသိမ်းစစ်တပ်ဟာ လူနည်းစုလူမျိုးစုတွေအပေါ်ဖိန္ဂိုပ်မှုအပြင် လူများစုဖြစ်တဲ့ ဗမာလူမျိုးကြီးဝါဒကို သွာ်သွင်းခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။ လူမျိုးစုအောင်တွေမှာ ရှာမီးရှိတဲ့အလုပ်တွေနဲ့ လူသတ်မှတ်မီမံကျင့်တဲ့လုပ်ရပ်တွေကို လူအများစုဖြစ်တဲ့ ဗမာတွေနဲ့ပဲ ဖွဲ့စည်းထားတဲ့ စစ်တပ်ဟာ ပြောင်ပြောင်တင်းတင်း ကျူးဗွန်ခဲ့ကြပါတယ်။ ဒီအနာတွေကို ဖြေဖျောက်ဖို့ရာ၊ လက်နက်ကိုင်တော်လှန်ရေးကို အဆုံးသတ်ပေးနိုင်ဖို့ရာအဖြေဟာ ဖက်ဒရယ်ဒီမိုကရေစီပြည်ထောင်စုတရပ် လိုအပ်နေတာပါပဲ။ ဘာလို့လည်းဆိုရင် လက်ရှိလူမျိုးစုလက်နက်ကိုင်တွေ တောင်းဆိုနေတာရော၊ လက်ရှိနော်းတော်လှန်ရေးမှာ မြို့ပြက အကြမ်းမဖက် ဆက်လက်သပိတ်မှာက်နေကြသူတွေရော၊ လက်နက်ကိုင်လမ်းစဉ်အတွက် တော့ကို ဝင်သွားတဲ့သူတွေရောရဲ့တောင်းဆိုချက်ဟာလည်း ဖက်ဒရယ်ဒီမိုကရေစီပြည်ထောင်စုပါပဲ။

ဖက်ဒရယ်ဒီမိုကရေစီပြည်ထောင်စုရှု စစ်ပွဲတွေလည်းချုပ်ပြိုမ်းလိမ့်မယ်။ လူထုကလည်း လွှတ်မြောက်လိမ့်မယ်။ ကျနော်တို့လို့ချင်တဲ့ Freedom, Equality and Solidarity ဆိုတာတွေနဲ့ လူမှုလူောာင်သစ်ကို ကျနော်တို့ရရှိမယ်လို့ ယုံကြည်မိပါတယ်။

မောင်စိမ့်

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How Does Democratization Occur?

By: Francis Isaac

Like most problems in political science, this particular question has no simple or straightforward answer. But since the early 1990s, a growing number of scholars have adopted the notion that democratization occurs in the form of a wave.

This concept was first proposed by famed academic Samuel Huntington in a lecture at the University of Oklahoma in November 1989. Two years later, he released the book *The Third Wave*, which was an expansion of his initial ideas. Considered as a contemporary classic in political science, Huntington's work argued that a democratic wave is "a group of transitions from nondemocratic to democratic regimes that occur within a specified period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during that period of time" (1991b: 15).

The book further pointed out that "three waves of democratization have occurred in the modern world," with each succeeding wave affecting more countries than the previous one (*ibid.*: 15). The first wave lasted from 1828 to 1926, which began with the introduction of universal manhood suffrage in the United States and the gradual expansion of voting rights across Western Europe and in parts of Latin America.

The second wave, on the other hand, began in 1943, as Allied troops fought to liberate more than 40 countries from fascist occupation. When the Second World War ended two years later, most of the great powers were thoroughly exhausted, and were no longer capable of sustaining their vast overseas empires. This led to a long process of decolonization which persisted until 1962, as former colonies in Asia and Africa gained independence while initially adopting Western-style liberal institutions.

Ironically, the last wave that followed had an "implausible beginning," as Huntington pointed out, since it was rooted in a military coup that sought to overthrow Portugal's 48-year-old dictatorship (*ibid.*: 3). Led by a group left-leaning young officers called the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), the coup generated enthusiastic public support, with thousands of civilians pouring out on the streets of Lisbon to fraternize with the rebels. By the evening of 25 April 1974, the regime had completely collapsed, and the MFA formed an interim government which organized the country's first free elections exactly one year later.

Asia's Democratic Wave

Known as the Carnation Revolution, this civilian-backed military uprising was fueled by domestic factors, such as the growing disenchantment of the middle class and the adverse impact of Portugal's colonial wars.

But it also triggered a global democratic wave which, according to Huntington, “moved across southern Europe, swept through Latin America, moved on to Asia, and decimated dictatorship in the Soviet bloc” (*ibid.*: 25). In the Asian region alone, democratic transitions occurred in at least eight countries, beginning in the Philippines with the ouster of ailing dictator Ferdinand Marcos in February 1986.

By the following year, the wave had swept across East Asia, ending dictatorships in Taiwan and South Korea. Mongolia also followed suit, when its leaders decided to abandon Soviet-style one-party rule and hold multiparty elections in July 1990.

The wave then traveled westward to Nepal, where a massive protest movement called the *Jana Andolan* (People's Movement) forced King Birendra to renounce his absolutist rule while retaining the throne as constitutional monarch.

By 1992, the wave had moved back to Southeast Asia with Thai protesters ousting General Suchinda Kraprayoon as prime minister. A year earlier, Cambodia's warring political factions signed the Paris Peace Accord, which ended the country's two-decade civil war and paved the way for democratic elections in May 1993.

Asia's democratic wave finally reached its peak in May 1998, when severe economic hardship and widespread public anger forced Indonesian dictator Suharto to resign from the presidency after 31 years in power.

Typology of Democratic Waves

Without doubt, Huntington has provided a framework that allows us to better understand the dynamics involved in democratic transitions.

As Jørgen Møller and Svend-Erik Skaaning attest, “Huntington's wave metaphor is both appealing and easy to grasp,” helping scholars to shed new light on recent political developments across the world (2013: 105). Andrew Pierre also praised Huntington's book for its “magnificent explanation of the political, economic, social and cultural roots of the democratic process,” adding that *The Third Wave* provides “some of the best conceptual analysis of contemporary political science” (1992: 190).

Because of the impact of Huntington's book, other scholars have built on his ideas to develop new concepts and draw out new insights. One recent example is Seva Gunitsky who devised a “four-part typology of democratic waves” to determine the manner and form of how democratization spreads across countries (2018: 634). He did so by asking two important questions: First, has a democratic wave been triggered by external influences? And second, how has the timing and duration of a democratic wave been affected by external influences?

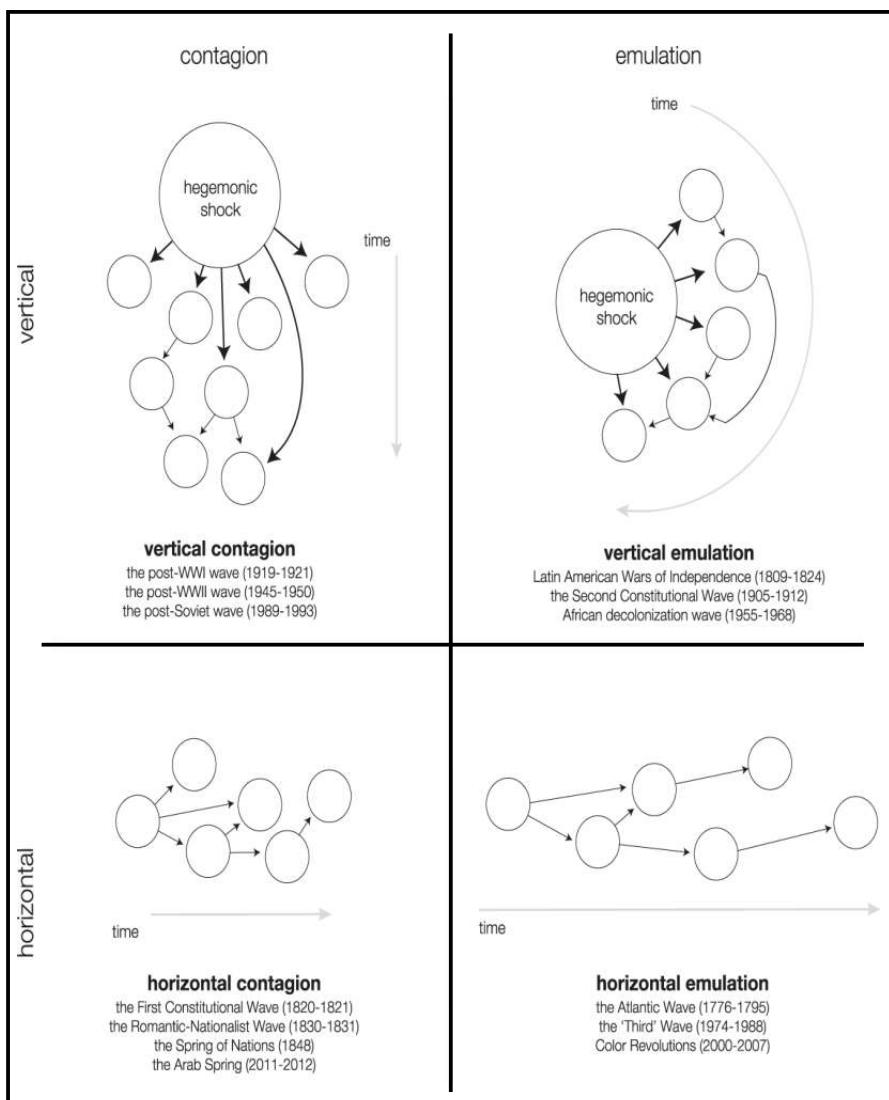
For Gunitsky, “external influences” pertain to “major disruptions in the international system” when a global or regional power either collapses, or at the very least, suffers a major debacle (*ibid.*: 637). Such incidents not only disrupt the world order but can also lead to increased demands for democratization among less powerful nations. If an external influence triggers a democratic surge, we then have a *vertical wave*, since it stemmed from a major top-down realignment in the international system. Gunitsky, however, warns that this type of wave often ends in failure, as countries eventually experience either partial reversal or outright authoritarian resurgence.

Horizontal waves, on the other hand, are not driven by external forces but by “neighborhood linkages” (*ibid.*: 634). These are domestic attributes that are common among neighboring countries, such as strong cultural similarities and shared historical grievances. Because of these linkages, a spark in one country can quickly spread across a particular region, even in the absence of any major shift in the international system.

Image: www.trtworld.com



Figure 1: **Typology of democratic waves**



Source: Gunitsky (2018)

A democratic wave can also be classified according to its length or duration. Short, sweeping surges are called *contagions*, and these could last up to three years, on average (ibid.: 634). Rarely generated by internal causes, waves of this kind take the form of an epidemic that can quickly cut across national boundaries in a matter of months, if not weeks (ibid.: 641).

And finally, we have *emulation* — a type of democratic surge that is more protracted and often prompted by domestic factors.

According to Gunitsky, an emulation can stretch for a considerable length of time and can even unfold for 13 years or more (ibid.: 641).

Wave of Autocratization

By developing his own analytical tool, Gunitsky has deepened our initial understanding of democratic waves. Huntington, however, observed that the previous two surges were each followed by “reverse waves,” with some of the new democracies sliding back to authoritarian rule.

The first reverse wave began in 1922 with Benito Mussolini's infamous March on Rome, and ended 20 years later, when the tide of the Second World War turned decisively in favor of the Allies. Then, in 1962, the Peruvian military overthrew their country's civilian government to prevent leftwing intellectual Victor Raul Haya from assuming the presidency. This event marked the beginning of the second reverse wave, which affected nearly four dozen countries in four different continents.

Though Huntington's book was released as the Soviet empire was beginning to collapse, the author still warned that a third reverse wave could occur if stable governments are not immediately established and if deep-seated poverty remain unaddressed. Unfortunately, a growing number of experts now believe that this much-feared scenario is already under way. In his latest book *Ill Winds*, Larry Diamond claims that we are now in the midst of a democratic recession, marked by the global decline of American influence and the growing assertiveness of authoritarian regimes.

A similar conclusion was also made by the Swedish-based think-tank Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem). Formed in 2014, V-Dem has identified four types of political regimes based on the actual presence of democratic processes and institutions. First on the list is *liberal democracy*, which regularly holds free, fair and competitive elections, with appropriate institutional constraints on the executive. Next is *electoral democracy*, which undertakes *de facto* free and fair multiparty elections, but offers not much else. Third is *electoral autocracy*, which holds *de jure* multiparty elections, but where political freedoms are significantly constrained. And last, *closed autocracy*, wherein formal multiparty elections are palpably absent.

Using more than 50 indices to measure various aspects of democracy, V-Dem saw 2018 as a historic turning point that marked the beginning of the “third wave of autocratization.” A process that is now occurring in almost every part of the globe, autocratization involves “any substantial and significant worsening on the scale of liberal democracy,” which “covers both erosion in democratic countries (democratic backsliding), breakdown of democracy, as well as worsening of conditions in electoral authoritarian countries” (2019: 14).

It has also been accelerating at an alarming rate, resulting in significant democratic decline in the past three years. According to V-Dem, the world was still fairly free when the autocratic wave began in 2018, with democratic countries being in the majority.

But by the following year, the situation changed drastically due to the loss of eight democracies. Included in the list is the Philippines, which shifted from an electoral democracy to an electoral autocracy under its populist president, Rodrigo Duterte. This increased the number of autocracies to 92, slightly outnumbering the world's remaining 87 democracies.

Thankfully, 2020 saw significant improvements in several small countries in Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean. Because of these developments, the number of democracies again rose to 92, with V-Dem classifying 60 countries as electoral democracies and the other 32 states as liberal democracies.

Yet, in spite of their slightly reduced numbers, autocracies still control 68% of the world's population, due in part to the loss of India and its 1.3 billion inhabitants. Autocracies also include several highly populated countries such as China, Russia and Pakistan which, if combined, would constitute roughly 22% of the global population.

Democratic Consolidation

Though it continues to gain momentum, the global autocratic wave is also generating stiff resistance from pro-democracy forces in different parts of the world. In fact, shortly before the pandemic, the world witnessed the number of mass mobilizations rise to an all-time high, prompting V-Dem to declare 2019 as “the year of global protests” (2020: 21).

Image: businessmirror.com.ph





Image: www.usnews.com

And despite the subsequent lockdowns, activists have persisted in their demand for greater democracy, using alternative ways to draw attention to their cause. Since February of this year, for example, people have been pouring out on the streets of Myanmar to protest the recent military coup that ended the country's decade-long transition to democracy.

If these scattered movements continue to grow, they could eventually halt the current autocratic surge and start a new wave of democratization. But no matter how long or extensive it may be, a wave alone will not guarantee the long-term survival of democracy. If a country is to be fully democratic, then it must develop the internal conditions that would allow for fair elections, the rule of law and peaceful transfers of power.

Huntington was aware of this challenge and wrote about the subtle distinction between democratic transition and democratic consolidation. In his article for the magazine *Foreign Affairs*, Huntington commented that a democratic wave can create “an external environment conducive to democratization.” But “it cannot,” he conceded, “produce the conditions necessary for democratization within a particular country” (1991a: 16).

Scholars Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan also held similar views, arguing that democracy cannot be completely consolidated unless it becomes “the only game in town” (1996: 15). This not only means establishing clear electoral rules, but also having a set of norms and institutions that could nurture civic-mindedness and reinforce democratic processes.

In a much-cited essay published in 1996, the two authors identified five conditions that must be met for the consolidation of democracy. *First*, there must be an autonomous civil society wherein citizens can freely organize voluntary groups or associations to promote their interests. *Second*, a dedicated arena for political competition should exist where parties and candidates all have an equal chance of gaining power. *Third*, individual rights and liberties must be firmly protected by subjecting all instruments of the state to the rule of law. *Fourth*, there should be an existing state bureaucracy that can be relied upon by any democratically elected government. *And finally*, there has to be an institutionalized “economic society” that is fairly regulated by the state, since democracy is incompatible, not only with a command economy, but also with a purely market-driven system.

Conclusion

By outlining these five conditions, Linz and Stepan were able to characterize democracy as an “interacting system” of “five interrelated arenas” that must work in concert so that the whole can function properly (*ibid.*: 22). They also hinted at the difficulty of sustaining democracy, as well as the immense effort that must be exerted in building its underlying institutions. Larry Diamond noticed similar challenges in a separate study, claiming that no democratic regime can likely survive “unless a country’s people and politicians are unconditionally committed to democracy as the best form of government” (2019: 16).

Progressives can help overcome these difficulties by planting the seeds of a future democratic society. This can be done by fostering a culture of democracy within their own movements, while managing whatever differences that they may have with their allied organizations. For this reason, regular assemblies should be encouraged, so that members can elect their leaders and discuss important policy decisions. Activists must also inculcate norms and principles that protect minority rights, while holding party executives answerable for all their actions. They must also abide by the outcome of elections and defend its sanctity at all times, regardless of the cost. And lastly, democrats must extend mutual solidarity with fellow activists abroad, so that they can amplify their voices, multiply their strength, and create the political ripples that will pave the way for the next great democratic wave.

If they succeed in developing a set of standards founded on dialogue, accountability and participation, then progressives will be better prepared to govern democratically the moment they gain power. Of course, the task of building a robust democracy will not be accomplished overnight. But as Nelson Mandela aptly reminds us, there is no easy walk to freedom. ■



Image: www.bbc.com

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Patterns of Autocratization in Asia

Populist Assault, Military Comeback and One-Party State Tightening

By: Nathan Gilbert Quimpo

For some time now, democracy has been in serious decline worldwide. This seems to be the common assessment of the world's foremost democracy think tanks. *Democracy Index 2020*, published by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2021), showed the worst average global score for the state of democracy since the annual index was introduced in 2006. Freedom House's 2021 report has assessed "the 15th consecutive year of decline in global freedom," pointing out that nearly 75% of the world's population live in a country that experienced deterioration last year (Repucci and Slipowitz 2021: 1). The number of free countries has declined to its lowest level (from 89 in 2005 to 82 in 2020), while the number of "not free" countries has risen to its highest level (from 45 to 54), and "partly free", slightly up (from 58 to 59). In its 2021 assessment, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute has contended that the current wave of

autocratization, said to have begun in 1994, has been accelerating, and that autocracies are now home to 68% of the world's population — up sharply from 54% last year. In 2020-21, the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated democracy's decline, as autocratic and autocratizing rulers took advantage of the pandemic to impose restrictions on individual freedoms and civil liberties, silence their critics, undermine institutions of accountability, and consolidate power.

Among the global regions, Asia figures prominently in the acceleration of global democratic regression or autocratization in recent years. For the first time ever, India, the world's most populous democracy, has been downgraded to "partly free" in Freedom House's annual ratings, and worse, to "electoral autocracy" in the V-Dem Institute's report. Myanmar has returned to military rule after the country's top generals deposed the democratically elected government

in a coup d'état in February and imposed a one-year state of emergency. In China, the world's biggest dictatorship, autocratization has been deepening as the government has been committing grave atrocities against the Uighurs and other Turkic communities in Xinjiang, even as it has intensified its crackdown on the opposition in Hong Kong, and tightened controls over the media and imposed more restrictions on civil liberties in all of China. In a positive development, however, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan moved from the "flawed democracy" to the "full democracy" category in the Democracy Index, the only countries in the world to be upgraded in such manner.

Patterns of Autocratization in Asia

Given its size and population, Asia is a global region that always bears close watching in assessing the state of — and arguably, the balance between — democracy and



Image: www.cfr.org

authoritarianism worldwide. After all, Asia has four of the world's five most populous countries: China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan. India's descent to "electoral autocracy" accounted largely for the sharp rise in the global percentage of people living under autocracy in the V-Dem Institute's report.

In the current global decline of democracy, however, Asia needs to be more intently observed on its patterns of autocratization — the different ways in which Asian autocrats or autocratizing rulers employ or combine old and/or new tactics in accessing, consolidating and expanding power.

The term *autocratization* is favored here over *democratic regression* and *backsliding*. Anna Lührmann and Staffan I. Lindberg (2019: 1096-98) view *autocratization* as being the "antipode of democratization" and

define it as "substantial de-facto decline of core institutional requirements for electoral democracy." Unlike *democratic regression* and *backsliding*, which can only be applied to democracies, *autocratization* can be applied to both democracies and autocracies as the autocratization process can take place in both democracies and autocracies.

According to Lührmann and Lindberg, the current wave of autocratization features democratic erosion as the most common means of autocratization. This contrasts with previous waves of autocratization in 1926-42 and 1961-77, which were dominated by illegal power grabs such as military coups, foreign invasions and self-coups (*autogolpe*). In the democratic erosion route, a ruler with autocratic ambitions gains power lawfully, such as through elections. Once in power, he or she

gradually undermines democratic norms while maintaining democratic institutions. Electoral autocracy has now become the most common regime type. Today's accelerated autocratization, notes the V-Dem Institute in its 2021 report, typically proceeds along the following pattern: "Ruling governments first attack the media and civil society and polarize societies by disrespecting opponents and spreading false information, then undermine elections" (2021: 7).

Accelerated autocratization in Asia, however, exhibits a bit of interesting variation. As in the rest of the world, democratic erosion is the prevalent method of autocratization in the region. In recent years, a particular type of democratic erosion — assault by authoritarian populists — has had a profound regressive impact on democracy in Asia, as it has had in the United States, Europe and Latin America. Military comeback is another trend in Asian autocratization, taking the form, not just of old-style illegal power grab (coup d'état), but also of growing military involvement in the running of government. A third pattern is the tightening of control and repression in one-party states, particularly those run by communist parties, and, in China's case, the active promotion of autocracy to other countries.

Assault by Authoritarian Populists

In some ways, democratic erosion by authoritarian populists in Asia has followed the same pattern in other global regions. Asia's populist leaders, just like their counterparts elsewhere, have convincingly won elections by demagogically portraying themselves as truly representing the "pure people" and fighting "the corrupt elite." Then claiming to be backed by a broad popular mandate, they have

proceeded to pursue policies and measures clearly violative of democratic norms, and to increasingly adopt more authoritarian methods. The ideological or social underpinnings of Asian authoritarian populism, however, differ from those in other regions, and, reflecting the great cultural and ethnic diversity of the region, even vary from country to country.

In India, a polarizing majoritarian form of religious nationalism — Hindutva — has driven populist Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Whipping up pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim sentiments, a BJP-led alliance won a sizeable majority in parliament in both the 2014 and 2019 national elections. Over the past several years, the Modi government has undertaken various discriminatory policies against Muslims (such as on citizenship matters and on revoking the Jammu-Kashmir state's autonomy), contravening India's constitutional commitment to pluralism and secularism. These moves have fueled widespread protests across the country, but at the same time, fomented strong anti-Muslim feelings that have led to riots and mob attacks against Muslims, including lynching. Dalits ("untouchables") and tribal communities also continue to experience attacks, displacement or discrimination. In recent years, the government has intensified its harassment, intimidation, arrests and prosecution of activists, journalists, academics and other critics, using laws on sedition, defamation and terrorism against them (Repucci and Slipowitz 2021; HRW 2021a). Due in large part to the Modi regime's excesses, India dropped 23-percentage points in the V-Dem Institute's Liberal Democracy Index, the steepest fall in Asia and one of the sharpest declines among all countries over the 2010-2020 period (V-Dem 2021).

In Sri Lanka, majoritarianism, which has long bedeviled relations between the country's Sinhalese and Tamil communities, has also fueled authoritarian populism. The return of the populist Rajapaksa brothers to power has marked the resurgence of ethno-religious (Sinhalese Buddhist) nationalism in national politics (Fernando and Shah 2020; DeVotta 2021). Former Defense Minister Gotabaya Rajapaksa was elected President in November 2019 and he appointed his brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa, who held the presidency in 2005-2015 and the prime ministership briefly in 2004-5 and in 2018, as Prime Minister once again. The Rajapaksas' party, Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), and its allies won a supermajority in parliament in the August 2020 elections. The new parliament quickly passed a constitutional amendment expanding presidential powers, including the appointment of electoral, human rights and anticorruption commissions. The Rajapaksa brothers, who had overseen the brutal end phase of the country's 26-year civil war in 2009, have sought to stifle inquiry about that phase, in which 40,000 people, mostly Hindu Tamil civilians, had been killed and for which the government has been accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Early this year, the government withdrew its commitments to the United Nations Human Rights Council for truth and accountability on the civil war. Since the Rajapaksas' comeback, human rights victims, activists, lawyers and journalists have undergone increased surveillance, intimidation and threats.

In contrast to Modi's and the Rajapaksas', the authoritarian populism of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is not ideologically driven. It is what sociologists refer to as "penal populism" — efforts by

political elites to satisfy the demand of citizens to be "tough on crime" (Curato 2016: 94). Since Duterte came to power in 2016, the Philippines has experienced a steep democratic decline. Human rights violations have soared, as Duterte has securitized the country's illegal drugs problem, and his "war on drugs" has resulted in the extrajudicial killings of thousands of suspected drug dealers and users. Duterte has harassed and persecuted his opponents through arrests and detention, prosecution or removal from office. In vituperative attacks against opposition leaders and other critics, he has often resorted to insults, profanities and threats. He has tried to stifle media freedom, shutting down the country's biggest broadcasting company, harassing investigative journalists and limiting access to information. Duterte-linked trolls have spread lies, fake news and political propaganda and hounded critics through social media. Over the past year, his government's "anti-terrorist" and "red-tagging" campaigns have led to a rise in summary executions of leftist activists.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the populist-led governments of India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines engaged in such abuses as crackdowns on dissent; restrictions on regular and social media; restrictions on protests; arbitrary arrests and detention; and police brutality. In India, an ill-planned lockdown stranded or displaced millions of migrant workers, while in the Philippines, the government stepped up its bloody "war on drugs." In both India and Sri Lanka, minorities, particularly Muslims, were scapegoated and accused of being "super-spreaders," and they became victims of hate campaigns. In the light of recent COVID-19 surges and economic downturns, the popularity of Modi and the



Image: www.nytimes.com

Rajapaksas has plummeted (Biswas 2021; Saravanamuttu, 2021). Duterte remains hugely popular, but he is prohibited from running for reelection in 2022.

Military Comeback

At first glance, the military coup in Myanmar would seem to be a throwback to the bad old days of the Cold War, when military dictators or juntas held sway in a good number of countries in Asia. A closer look at military involvement in politics in several Asian countries, however, would indicate that the armed forces are not fixated on returning to old-style military rule. In Thailand and Myanmar, they are angling for a quasi-military or mixed military-civilian regime that would have some democratic trappings such as a constitution and semi-competitive elections and that could be passed off as a democracy.

In some other countries, the military has succeeded in having its role expanded far beyond national defense, perturbing the civil-military balance.

Thailand, the country which has had the most military coups in modern history, is once again attempting a military-civilian formula, with elections a bit more competitive than those during the military-monarchist governments of 1977-91. After the military ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra through a coup in September 2006, a new constitution was drawn up. Despite the concerted efforts of the military and monarchist forces, however, pro-Thaksin parties still won the national elections in 2007 and 2011. The military staged another coup in 2014, shortly after the Constitutional Court removed Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's sister. The

2017 constitution ensured that the military would continue to play a key role in the country's politics, giving it the power, among others, to appoint all 250 members of the Senate, parliament's upper house. Following the 2019 national elections, coup leader General Prayut Chan-o-cha was elected prime minister, thanks in large part to the Senate vote chunk. Since February 2020, students and anti-government groups have conducted massive protests all over the country amid the pandemic. Starting in July 2020, protesters have also called for reform of the monarchy. Thai police have forcibly broken up some protests and conducted mass arrests. Government efforts at burnishing its new order appear to have failed. Freedom House still rates Thailand as "not free," V-Dem still considers it a "closed autocracy."

Myanmar's military, which has ruled the country for nearly half a century (1962-2011), appear to be following the lead of their counterparts in Thailand, also after failing in their initial program of liberalization. In 2003, the military embarked on a roadmap to "discipline-flourishing democracy." This led to a new constitution in 2008, which provided for a return to democratic processes, but which also reserved 25% of the seats in parliament for military officers. In November 2010, a military-backed party, Union Solidarity Development Party (USDP), scored a sweeping victory in national elections boycotted by the main opposition party, National League for Democracy (NLD). After Myanmar shifted to a mixed military-civilian regime in 2011, however, the military's political clout eroded. NLD scored a series of landslide victories, first in the by-elections of 2012, and then in the national elections of 2015 and 2020. Claiming massive electoral fraud in the 2020 elections, the military seized power and jailed top government officials, including NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Massive protests erupted in major cities. With the military opening fire on protesters, hundreds have been killed and thousands wounded. After the failed "discipline-flourishing democracy," the military appears to be devising a new military-civilian formula. Coup leader Min Aung Hlaing has declared that the military will form a "true and disciplined democracy" and hold "free and fair" elections after the state of emergency (Cuddy 2021).

In Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia, which were under military rule for long periods before, democratic erosion has not been as severe in recent years as in India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. A worrisome development in the former three, however, is that to

prevent the military from becoming restive, their elected governments have coddled generals and retired officers through various perks or large military budgets, and through an increased military role in governance. COVID-19 helped expand such a role further as the governments concerned deployed military personnel to enforce health protocols all over the country. The military's expanded role in public life reverses some of the military reforms that have been undertaken over the last few decades, and it increases the chances for an illegal power grab, possibly close to the Thailand or Myanmar scenario, in the not-too-distant future.

Tightening of Controls

Among the most closed autocracies in the world are one-party states run by Stalinist communist parties. Since the end of the Cold War, their number has dwindled to five, with four being in Asia (China, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam). The global acceleration of autocratization is now witnessing the deepening of autocracy in Asia's one-party states, as the ruling communist party in each country has been tightening its control and intensifying repression.

In China, the government's moves over the past several years have been particularly harsh and extreme. In Xinjiang region, hundreds of thousands of Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims have undergone arbitrary arrest, detention, imprisonment and/or forced labor, and entire communities have been subjected to mass surveillance, bans on ordinary religious expression and political indoctrination. Freedom House and Human Rights Watch (2021b) have condemned the repression in Xinjiang as "totalitarian atrocities" (Repucci 2020) and "crimes against humanity" respectively. In Hong

Kong, after forcible dispersals, crackdowns and arrests failed to fully quell waves of large-scale pro-democracy protests in 2014, 2017 and 2019, Beijing imposed a draconian "National Security Law" in June 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The law grants sweeping new powers to security forces and puts greater restrictions on civil liberties. In all of China, mass protests continue to be suppressed; media and internet censorship has become much more encompassing and sophisticated. According to Reporters without Borders (2020, 2021), China has been the world's biggest jailer of journalists in the last few years. But many ordinary netizens have been arrested and detained too for critical comments on online posts and private chat messages. China monitors its citizens through a state-of-the-art total surveillance system first developed in Xinjiang and now employing hundreds of millions of monitoring cameras nationwide. Soon after the outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan, the government withheld or censored information on infections, downplayed the gravity of the epidemic and at times adopted overly harsh lockdown measures (HRW 2021a).

Apart from deepening autocracy at home, China is extending its repressive reach abroad and promoting autocracy worldwide. Through digital threats, spyware, mobility controls, coercion and even direct attacks, Beijing monitors, harasses and intimidates dissidents and other critical voices abroad (Schenkkan and Linzer 2021). Chinese surveillance and public security technology have been exported to many countries, including those with appalling human rights records (Greitens 2020). In the United Nations, Beijing's representatives have been working to erode human rights standards and reshape norms and practices globally. Major



Image: www.nytimes.com

transnational initiatives geared for developing countries such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) promote Beijing's model of authoritarian development (Richardson 2020).

The one-party states of Laos, North Korea and Vietnam have continued to sharply restrict the civil liberties and political rights of their citizens, prohibited independent media outlets, and jailed dissidents and critics. Social media, which has a fast-growing audience in Vietnam and Laos, has emerged as a focal point for government repression. Over the past year, the Vietnamese government has succeeded in pressuring Facebook and Google (which owns YouTube) to remove online material of peaceful dissent and expression deemed "anti-state" by the authorities (Amnesty International 2020). Recently, the Lao government, likewise aiming to

crack down on similar material, established a task force to monitor social media use (Strangio 2021). North Korea has not followed suit, as social media has hardly penetrated the totalitarian state.

Conclusion

Recent developments related to patterns of autocratization in Asia may help provide some insights into the status and prospects of the current global wave of autocratization. The sharp drop in the popularity of Modi and the Rajapaksas is indicative of the global waning of authoritarian populism, with populist rulers in Asia and elsewhere being castigated for their mishandling of the COVID pandemic and of the economy and their resort to repression. Military comebacks in Asia have been more in the nature of working towards certain degrees of power and privilege for the military in eventual

electoral autocracies — currently the world's most common regime type — which are, however, of unclear form and uncertain stability. The most worrisome trend of autocratization in Asia, however, has to do with what is happening in its one-party closed autocracies — the tightening of controls and repression in these states and China's high-tech "autocracy promotion" worldwide. Perhaps above all other developments, this could considerably hold up the reversal of the current global wave of autocratization. ■

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ASEAN's Democracy Problem

By: Aries A. Arugay

Democracy in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region has always been in deficit. But the February 2021 coup of Myanmar's Tatmadaw showed that democracy can still breakdown in the supposed archaic fashion of a military coup rather than through gradual erosion as seen in other countries in the region. This gives a gloomier future for democratization in ASEAN as fledgling and transitioning democracies can either experience sudden death or slow decay. Pro-democratic forces in the region will have a tougher challenge of putting ASEAN on a democratic path in the years to come.

The domestic environment that is not conducive for democratization is compounded by the very nature of ASEAN as a regional organization. Unlike other regional integration projects, ASEAN has remained steadfastly committed to the principle of non-interference — a norm among member-states not

to 'pass judgment' on each other's domestic affairs as long as it does not impair bilateral or multilateral relations in the region. Consequently, there has been little intra-regional pressure to democratize, and any regime change that occurs in Southeast Asia tends to elicit muted reaction from fellow ASEAN member states. The practice of this non-interference norm and the sheer majority of authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia means that any external pressure to democratize will not happen as a result of "democratic diffusion" or "international linkage" as has been witnessed in Latin America or Eastern Europe (Levitsky and Way 2010).

Southeast Asia is a region of majority authoritarian and minority low-quality democratic regimes. There seems to be no other region where the twin worlds of authoritarianism and democracy have mutually coexisted. Seven out

of the eleven states — Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, can be broadly classified as authoritarian regimes, but they vary significantly on the degree of political contestation. For young democracies in Southeast Asia, the fault line is still between countries in transition and those having established electoral democracies, rather than between consolidating and consolidated democracies. Despite the long road to democracy in some countries like Thailand and the Philippines, their checkered histories with democratization include multiple episodes of coups d'état, uprisings and poorly functioning democratically elected governments in the interregnum. For newer democracies like Indonesia and Timor-Leste, the former has achieved a sufficient level of democratic stability and has institutionalized competitive free and fair elections and could be regarded as having an established electoral democracy, while the

latter's democratic path continues to unfold. Populist entrenchment in these states has added pressure in making democracy "the only game in town."

The possibility of a democratic regression or breakdown is never too remote for those living in Southeast Asia. Dan Slater (2013) refers to these states' fledgling, non-consolidating status as "democratic careening" — the intermediate state of suspended regime animation between collapse and consolation where regime movement is highly unpredictable and the outcome uncertain.

Democratization in the region has reached the glass ceiling allowed by its ruling elite. While all democracies in ASEAN (with the exception of Thailand) have found a reasonably stable general consensus on the primary role of elections as means of transferring power, little progress has been made in making democracy meaningful through building popular, accountable, and responsive political institutions. Elites have maintained formidable barriers for grassroots civil society, social movements, progressive political groups, and other sociopolitical actors. Oligarchic monopoly of the political arena has prevented regime consolidation, making democracy an untenable equilibrium in the region. Without the social requisites that made previous democratization waves successful, they become vulnerable to populist challenges, military adventures, and regime destabilization. Without political will to strengthen institutions supported by a democratic reform coalition of both elites and nonelites, an electoral democracy without substance will likely remain the norm in the region. This requires a transformation on how elites perceive their interests and a change in their relations with

empowered sociopolitical actors unleashed by the democratization process itself.

Authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia, however, have experienced more electoral contestation, yet they are not indicative of any movement towards democratic transition. Across both single-party states and competitive electoral regimes, more competition in the electoral arenas can be attributed to both elite-engineered mechanisms as well as bottom-up pressure from better organized and in some cases

more mobilized opposition. The monumental concern of all authoritarian elites is regime survival. As such, autocrats from various types of authoritarian regimes build nominally democratic institutions, such as elections, legislatures and political parties, and even invented new ones in order to maintain their rule. Unfortunately, the institutionalization of key political institutions in authoritarian states should not be taken as an indication of an impending democratic transition.

Image: www.politico.eu

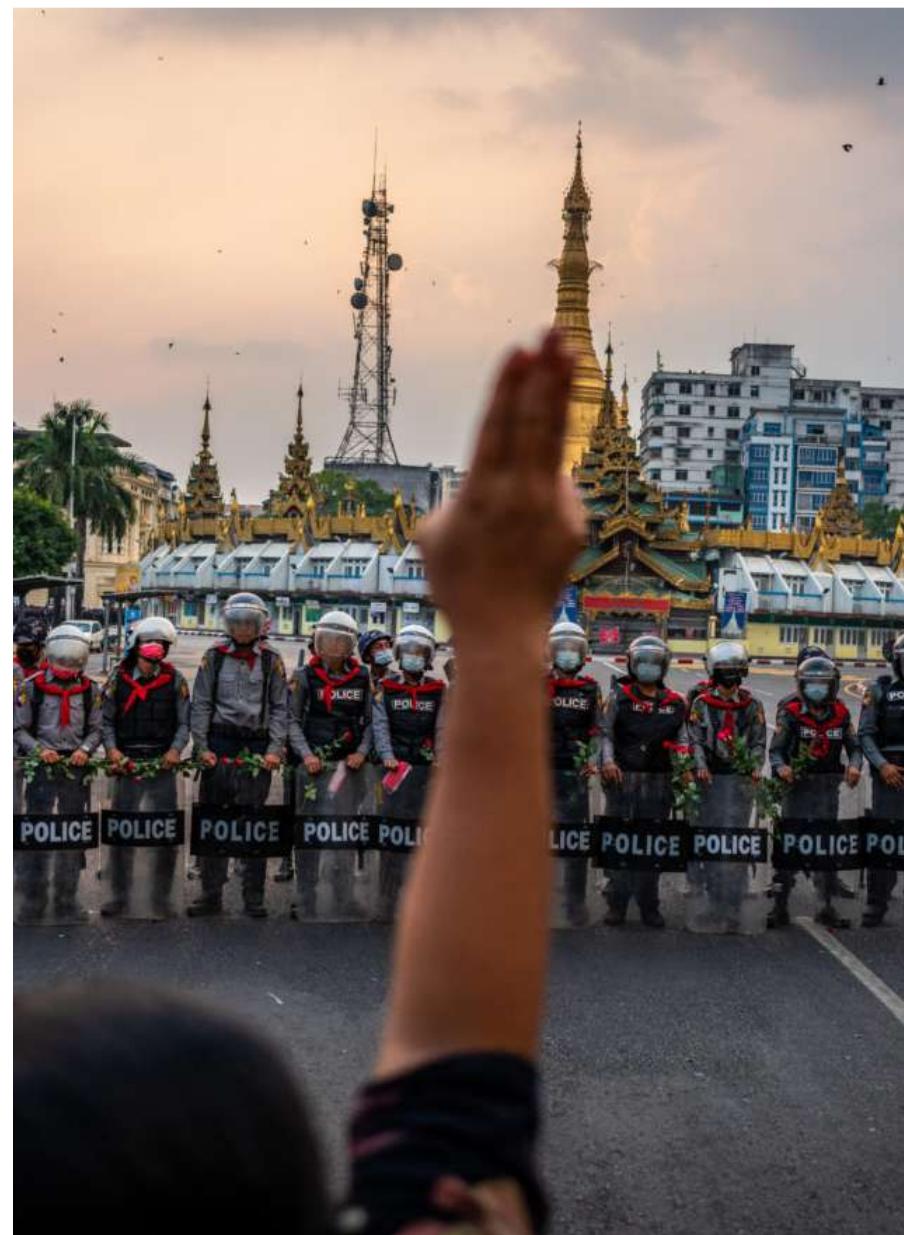
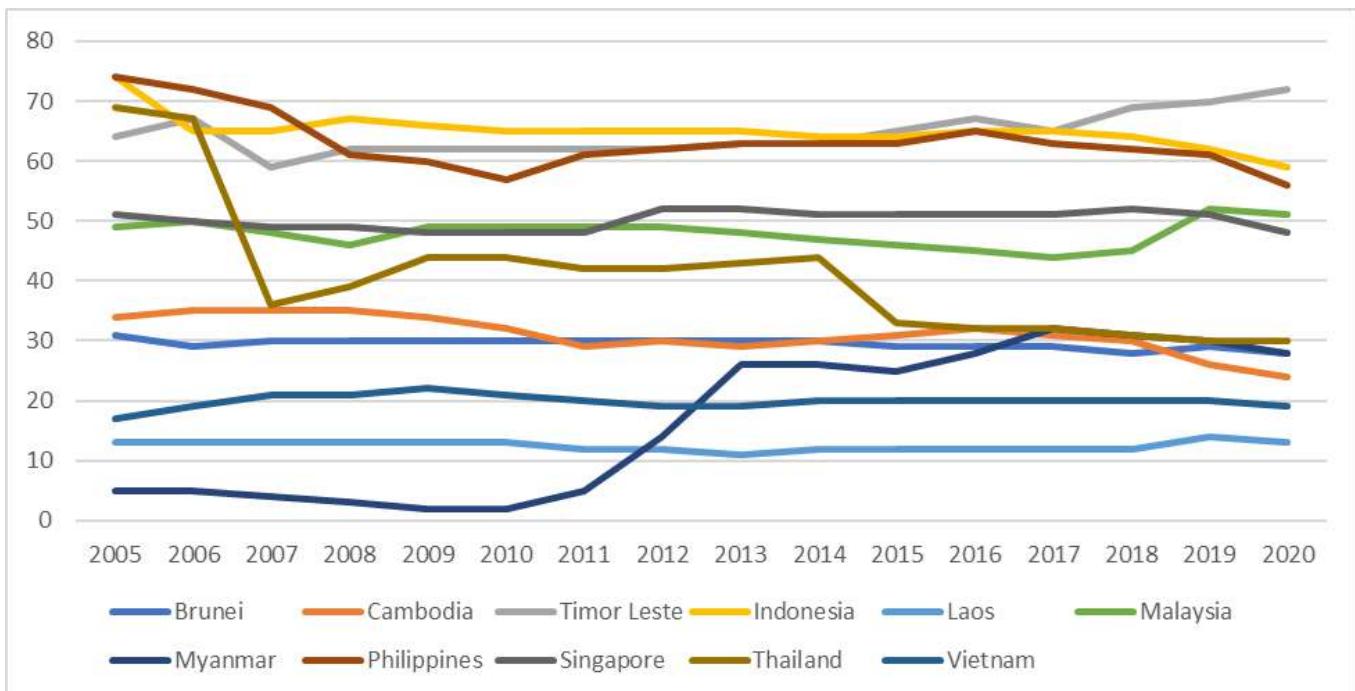


Figure 1: Levels of freedom in the ASEAN region, 2005 - 2020



Source: Freedom House aggregated scores by sub-category (Full Score: 100)

Democracy's Lost Decades in the ASEAN Region

On the surface, it seems there has been little change in the political regimes of Southeast Asia since the 2000s in terms of improving democracy. However, scores from international nongovernmental organization Freedom House on the two key categories that determine the overall level of freedom — political rights and civil liberties — show a wide range of variation across states. These scores cover all eleven nations of the region, from 2006 to 2016. Brunei, Laos and Vietnam, experienced some minor change in the rankings of their political rights and civil liberties in the past decade. Among the countries with the same governments in power (i.e., Singapore, Malaysia and Cambodia), all have experienced a moderate decline or gain in freedom over time. Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines have all witnessed a drop in the levels of political rights and civil liberties in

2016 compared to the prior decade. The most stunning positive gain in overall freedom was by Myanmar, whose rankings started at a near zero level in 2005 but ended the year 2016 with the same level of political rights and civil liberties as Cambodia and Thailand.

The variety of regime dynamics and the dominance of authoritarianism in this region of 662-million people has confirmed a pattern that has mystified scholars of comparative political regimes: there is no “wave” of democratization in Southeast Asia. This ‘regional exceptionalism’ is baffling despite the global spread of democratic norms and the entrenchment of democracy promotion by democratic states and international organizations.

The Limits of Democratization in Southeast Asia

In the minority of states in the region, Southeast Asian democratization were not mainly driven by macro-structural factors

such as modernization, economic growth, colonial legacies, and previous democratic experience. It can be said that modernized societies and affluent economies in the region featured authoritarian resilience. Economic conditions did not totally determine regime outcomes nor did their colonial past. Democracy became the alternative regime only when authoritarianism was no longer feasible as a mode of governance.

Transitions from authoritarianism in the Philippines in 1986, in Thailand in 1992, and arguably 1998 in Indonesia were all part of Huntington's so-called third wave (1991). In all three instances, there were elements of regime rupture or replacement (Linz and Stepan 1996) as broad protest movements helped overthrow the sultanistic regimes of Marcos and Suharto, and the military junta in Thailand. But rather than a complete break from its authoritarian past, the transitioning regimes in the three countries handed power back to the

old elites previously displaced by the deposed dictators. It was also not difficult to politically accommodate defectors linked with the previous regime and maintain economic relations with the oligarchs who propped these autocracies in the first place (Boudreau 2009).

The disappointing outcome of Southeast Asia's democratic transitions were not surprising to those familiar with the region's politics. After all, none of the democratizing states had the social requisites of democracy espoused by modernization theory (Przeworski et al. 2000). Unlike their neighbors such as Taiwan and South Korea, democratization in the Philippines and Indonesia resulted from deep economic crisis and fiscal bankruptcy. Suharto's durable dictatorship became the ultimate political victim of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, while Marcos was instrumental in the Philippines' massive foreign debt where fixed repayments during Corazon Aquino's administration became one of the few stable economic policies carried out until today. These gave post-Marcos governments little room to expand social services, undertake the modernization of its security forces, and build important infrastructure projects. Only in Thailand did the logic of modernization seem to have gained some traction. The emergence of a sizeable middle class because of sustained economic growth led to public pressures for democratization (Morley 2015).

The weak impact of structural factors provides much leverage for agency-based explanations of democratization outcomes in the region. Elite consensus and unity towards democracy as the "only game in town" were palpable in Southeast Asia. Democracy became the regular arena where contestation among elites were

expected to take place. Political institutions were created around this consensus as political parties featured less ideological rivalries or policy differences and more factions and cliques of the political class. No clear political pacts were formally signed around democracy among Southeast Asia's elites unlike their counterparts, for example, in Latin America. The inability of the elites to create viable vehicles of representation and participation to provide a formidable institutional shell to protect this democratic consensus limited the potential for democratization felt by the grassroots. Popular grievances, accountability demands, and the clamor for involvement in policy processes and governance all fell on the deaf ears of the elites who were busy protecting their interests more than enacting progressive reforms.

As the political systems in the region failed to provide space to a more diverse set of political actors, Southeast Asian electorates were forced to choose from undifferentiated, ideologically thin, and unresponsive cliques of political elites. With limited choices come dissatisfaction with existing members of political society. In fact, it is the elites and the middle classes who have demonstrated a rather feeble and contingent commitment to democracy. This was seen in the turbulent period of the Philippines from 2000-2010 and Thailand from 2003 onwards. The extra-constitutional removal of President Joseph Estrada in 2001, the military coup against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006 and his sister Yingluck Shinawatra in 2014, as well as various attempts to unseat their successors featured the maneuverings and antics of the elites who were disgruntled with the populist mode of leadership as well as how these deposed rulers threatened their political interests. The elites, in cooperation with

some of their allies in civil society, did not hesitate to court veto players such as the military, legislators, judges, and other political institutions to remove elected governments by means fair or foul (Sinpeng and Arugay 2015). Such developments are made additionally interesting by the fact that elites turned to military intervention, disregarding constitutionalism and the rule of law, in the name of defending democracy (Arugay 2013). The removal of these leaders from power did not solve but rather worsened the political crisis into a full-blown polarized conflict between two hostile sides, believing that they represent the people. Thailand's coup in 2006 resulted in the awakening of dormant social forces that questioned the very legitimacy of its age-old political institutions. The revenge of the Filipino poor in May 2001 dubbed as EDSA 3 while heavily repressed by the state, displayed the tremendous power wielded by the underclass who, for the longest time, has been neglected by a government ran by a wild oligarchy (Quimpo 2009).

The sustained resilience of authoritarianism in Southeast Asia is related to the inability of its young democracies to deliver tangible and concrete governance outcomes related to socioeconomic development. The idea that democracy is inherently contradictory to Asian values, championed by strong leaders like Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore and Mahathir Mohammed of Malaysia, remains powerful. But despite being two good things, it remains difficult for democracy and good governance to go together in Southeast Asia (Emmerson 2012). Good governance in this sense means improving transparency and accountability as well as efficient and effective performance of responsibilities such as the provision of public goods and policy reforms.



Image: ipdefenseforum.com

ASEAN's Two Realms

The political regimes in Southeast Asia and the different paths that their countries undertook remain bewildering. While some opted to pursue democratization despite significant challenges, others have become too comfortable with authoritarianism and all its permutations, with some allowing some form of limited but legitimizing forms of contestation. Understanding Southeast Asia through the sole lens of democratization is highly limiting.

To a certain extent, ASEAN itself contributed to this deterioration of democracy by not pushing for this as the unifying principle for collective action. After all, the lack of democracy at home among its member-states definitely was projected at the regional level. The body's decision-making practices, norms, and habits have been tragically codified in its Charter that pays lip service to democracy and other related principles. Its refusal to meaningfully engage civil society and other pro-democratic non-state actors is glaring and unfortunate.

Clear evidence of this is its inability to act in concert and to seriously resolve the current crisis in Myanmar. By blocking regional civil society organizations out of the picture, it is also undermining the frail cohesion and unity it used to enjoy.

The silver lining seems to be that ASEAN's young democracies remain committed to democracy. While governments of the day might not pursue democratization, the region's burgeoning civil society, assertive private sector, and highly wired young population can be catalysts for a wave of democratization in the region. The remaining challenge for democrats is to demonstrate that this type of regime is capable of simultaneously providing good quality governance and democratic reforms aimed at inclusive participation and political accountability. This is an enormous task, but the hope is that Southeast Asian elites will resort to more democracy rather than less of it in addressing problems and overcoming crises. Democracy might be in deficit in ASEAN but there will always be a clamor for it. ■

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The Myth of ASEAN “Non-Intervention”

How the Regional Body Can Help Prevent a Total Catastrophe in Myanmar

By: Richard Javad Heydarian

What ASEAN needs in this critical juncture,” wrote Surin Pitsuwan, the former Secretary General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in an impassioned column in *Bangkok Post*, “is a collective sense of urgency and effective leadership. It has to be seen as a serious destabilizing factor for the entire regional landscape.” “The world is watching. ASEAN’s credibility and profile are hanging in the balance,” he warned, calling on the regional body “to act fast to save lives and prevent the carnage from deteriorating and escalating into regional tensions.” The late Thai diplomat penned these words, not in response to the latest crisis in Myanmar, following the brazen February coup against a democratically elected civilian

government; but instead on the other major crisis unfolding in the Southeast Asian country, namely the genocidal campaign against the Rohingya minority group and the ensuing “Rakhine human catastrophe” (Pitsuwan 2017). Had he been alive today, the legendary diplomat would have likely pushed for a robust intervention by the international community, including his beloved ASEAN.

Two months into its usurpation of power, the Myanmar military, also known as the Tatmadaw,¹ reportedly killed 550 civilians across the country amid nationwide protests (Beech 2021b). Among the victims were more than 40 children, reflecting the brutality of the junta and the arbitrary terror that has gripped the Southeast Asian nation

(ibid.). This is the same organization which has been accused of mass atrocities against ethnic minority groups over the past decades. Last year, the International Criminal Court called on Myanmar’s civilian authorities, then under the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, to protect as many as 600,000 Rohingya from potential “genocide” at the hands of military forces (Bowcott and Ratcliffe 2020). The unfolding tragedy in Myanmar has been a rude awakening for those who naively bought the illusion of democratization in the Southeast Asian country. After all, the junta never truly relinquished power under the unreformed 2008 constitution, which gave the men in uniform de facto veto power over all critical decisions and agencies in the government (ICTJ 2009).

¹ For further discussion on the Tatmadaw, see Hannah Beech (2021a). “Inside Myanmar’s Army: ‘They See Protesters as Criminals.’” *The New York Times*. 28 March. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/28/world/asia/myanmar-army-protests.html>.

Much has been written about the role of superpowers amid the unfolding crisis in Myanmar. Pundits and media outlets have, in particular, zeroed in on the deep influence of China, Myanmar's top economic partner, or Russia, the top source of advanced weaponries of the junta, as well as the probable impact of sanctions imposed by the Biden administration on the strategic calculus of the Southeast Asian nation's military leaders (*The National* 2021). Others, meanwhile, have focused on the sophistication of the military brass in orchestrating a seamless coup against Aung San Suu Kyi's democratically elected government with which it shared power for half a decade (Byrnes 2021). Somewhat missing in the discussions is the culpability of Myanmar's influential neighbors and, more broadly, ASEAN, which played a central role in legitimizing the junta's behind-the-scenes rule and mass atrocities over the past decade. On the most fundamental level, the events in Myanmar have exposed ASEAN's dysfunctional decision-making process and complacency. They have also laid bare the opportunism of key nations in the region, which have in recent years warmly embraced military leaders for economic gains.

Avoiding a Civil War

Even worse, ASEAN has also effectively shielded the junta from potentially crippling sanctions (Allard and Nichols 2021). All of Myanmar's nine ASEAN neighbors have sought to water down a UN General Assembly draft resolution, which calls for, among others, "an immediate suspension of the direct and indirect supply, sale or transfer of all weapons and munitions" to Myanmar. The excuse of ASEAN members is that the resolution "cannot command the widest possible support in its current form, especially from all countries directly

affected in the region," thus they needed "to make the text acceptable, especially to countries most directly affected and who are now engaged in efforts to resolve the situation." As if consensus-based dysfunction among themselves wasn't enough, ASEAN members insisted, "It is also our firm conviction that if a General Assembly resolution on the situation in Myanmar is to be helpful to countries in ASEAN, then it needs to be adopted by consensus" (*ibid.*). The result of this rearguard move, however, is that the junta will be in a position to not only maintain its military hegemony at home, but also continue to wage an increasingly brutal campaign against an emerging nationwide insurgency with no precedence in the country's history.

A major fear among observers is that Myanmar could descend into full-blown civil war, reminiscent of the recent conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan. Four months into the latest crisis, the National Unity Government (NUG), the shadow government organized by the democratic opposition, have organized a People's Defence Force (PDF) to overthrow the junta through all means necessary. In late May, Yee Mon, NUG defense minister, announced the graduation ceremony of the first batch of PDF trainees. "This military is established by the official civilian government," an NUG member said in a video released by an opposition group, showing as many as 100 newly trained fighters, with camouflage uniforms and perched behind the red and white star flags of the new force in preparation for what looks like guerilla warfare. "The People's Defence Force must be aligned with the people and protect the people. We will fight to win this battle." With more than 800 activists, protesters and ordinary citizens killed, and five

thousand others under arrest, including leading statesmen, lawyers and journalists, the opposition seems to have lost faith in any peaceful resolution of the crisis (*Bangkok Post* 2021). Instead, they have desperately embraced armed struggle against the massive Tatmadaw forces, which, so far, have shown little signs of internal fractures, albeit defections by a few brave men, who have had to risk it all in escaping the Orwellian grip of the military over their minds, finances and loved ones (DW News 2021).

From peaceful protests to civil disobedience campaigns and Molotov cocktails, anti-junta activities have begun to assume an increasingly violent character in recent months. On 18 May, a junta-appointed official, who has been accused of acting as an informant against democracy activists, was assassinated in his Yangon's Lanmadaw district office by two bombs. Two police officers, meanwhile, were assassinated with bomb blasts near the military's General Administrative Office. As long-time Myanmar watcher Bertil Lintner warned, a growing number of experts fear these events mark, "probably only the beginning of what could quickly turn into urban warfare scenarios in major cities nationwide." Across the country, from Sagaing to Shan, Mon and Chin regions, bomb blasts have targeted junta forces, including during General Min Aung Hlaing's visit to Sagaing City on 18 May. Even in relatively peaceful cities such as Magwe and Meiktila, military bases have been hit by rocket fires in joint operations between the PDF and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). As in post-war Iraq, rebels could increasingly rely on improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to target heavily armored military vehicles (Lintner 2021).

The emerging united front between PDF and EAO forces against Tatmadaw forces portends prolonged armed confrontations, which have now extended beyond historically troubled border regions to Myanmar's Bamar-majority heartland. This is, in many ways, reminiscent of the Syrian Civil War, whereby various ethnic groups of varying ideological persuasions across the northern, eastern and central regions of the country teamed up against the Bashar al-Assad regime. There are, however, three interrelated factors that may prevent a similar outcome in Myanmar. First of all, one must note the absence of direct intervention by external powers, either regional or global, which contributed to the ongoing civil wars in Libya, Syria and even Afghanistan. The second factor is the immense military asymmetry between Tatmadaw forces, which boasts hundreds of thousands of trained soldiers and modern armaments, on one hand, and the emerging yet far-from-consolidated PDF-EAO alliance, which is mostly composed of lightly armed rebels and new trainees, on the other. And the third factor is the absence of strategic depth or sanctuaries for rebel groups, as neighboring Thailand and Bangladesh will likely tighten their borders to avoid getting dragged into direct confrontation with Tatmadaw forces (McCartan 2021).

In contrast to Syria, or even Yemen, Libya and Afghanistan, so far it seems unlikely that any major regional or great power is willing to deploy advanced weaponries, militias, commandos, or even conventional troops to escalate the conflict in Myanmar in favor of one

side or the other. In short, the relatively geopolitical isolation of the brewing civil strife in Myanmar may help prevent the worst possible outcome, albeit at the expense of besieged opposition forces. This provides a unique opportunity for ASEAN, in tandem with the international community, to make necessary diplomatic interventions in order to prevent a prolonged, nationwide armed conflict in Myanmar. As the late Surin Pitsuwan pointed out, "ASEAN has enough collective diplomatic skills to steer clear of any dreadful accusations of 'interference' in a member country's domestic affairs. This is because the grouping has done it before" (Pitsuwan 2017). In particular, there are two major precedents for ASEAN intervention, which show the ability of the regional body to significantly influence the course of a conflict in Southeast Asia.

A. ASEAN in East Timor: From Reactionary to Proactive

For almost two decades, much of ASEAN stood by as the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and their proxy militia forces terrorized Christian-majority East Timor, which had just got its first chance in centuries at full independence following the 1974 'Carnation Revolution' in Portugal. Despite its pretensions to being a savior following a small-scale war in East Timor in the aftermath of the Portuguese withdrawal, Jakarta's relationship with Dili was, as Benedict Anderson noted, one between a colonizer and the colonized. The upshot of this brutalizing experience at the hands of "New Order" Indonesia was the death of as many as 200,000 people in East Timor and long-term devastation of the former Portuguese colony.²

Image: www.nytimes.com



²See Benedict Anderson (2008). "Exit Suharto: Obituary for a Mediocre Tyrant." *New Left Review*. 50 (March-April); pp. 27-59. For a deeper background analysis of the East Timor tragedy under Indonesian colonization, see Benedict Anderson (1993). "Imagining 'East Timor.'" *Arena Magazine*. 4 (May); pp. 23-27.

It wasn't so much as lack of sympathy for the plight of East Timor's population, but instead the fear of alienating Indonesia, the de facto leader of ASEAN, that prevented any decisive response by other Southeast Asian nations.

After all, the genesis of the regional body can be traced back to the shared interest of several Southeast Asian countries in containing Indonesia's revanchist ambitions, which were on full display during the *Konfrontasi* era. ASEAN, in its formative years, served as an institutional mechanism to nest its largest and most powerful member in patterns of structured cooperation and conciliation, thus channeling Jakarta's strategic ambitions in ways that reinforce the collective interest of like-minded regional states. To confront Indonesia, therefore, seemed antithetical to the very raison d'être of ASEAN.

Moreover, there was a shared interest among core ASEAN members to avoid setting a dangerous precedence, which could come to haunt them later. After all, from the Philippines to Thailand, incumbent regimes violently confronted a string of domestic insurgencies, which raised both human rights as well as regional security concerns. Not to mention, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention in the Balkans, which raised the specter of Western humanitarian intervention against oppressive post-colonial regimes. No wonder then, the likes of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad became the lightning rod for regional authoritarian regimes, repeatedly warning against any criticism of Indonesia's atrocities in East Timor in the name of upholding the sovereignty of ASEAN members. Jakarta itself

adopted a similar 'anti-imperialist' position, with Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, Arizal Effendi, warning of "the jingoism of using humanitarian pretexts to justify unilateral armed intervention into the internal affairs of a developing country, including by way of a coalition of nations outside the framework of the United Nations" (Dupont 2000: 164-165).

Following the collapse of the Suharto regime, and the ensuing democratic reforms under President B.J. Habibi, ASEAN transformed into a proactive contributor to securing peace and independence in East Timor. There were two enabling factors at play. First of all, Indonesia preferred ASEAN intervention to dilute Western intervention, particularly that of neighboring Australia. Amid the ensuing chaos following the UN-sponsored referendum on independence in East Timor (August 1999), with Indonesian proxies wreaking havoc, the Habibi administration actively sought ASEAN participation in international efforts to stabilize the situation and secure a peaceful transition. As Thailand's Deputy Foreign Minister, Sukhumphand Paribatra, put it, "We have always said that we don't want other countries, especially superpowers, to interfere in the region. The time has come to show that we can solve the region's problems ourselves with the cooperation of countries outside the region" (ibid.: 168). The result, as Pitswan put it, was a "coalition of the willing" among ASEAN countries, along with middle powers Australia and Japan, to collectively hold the ground until the arrival of the United Nations peacekeeping force and the UN Transitional Authority for East Timor

(UNTAET), which shepherded the tortuous post-independence transition (Pitswan 2017).

At this point, the regional body, under the chairmanship of Thailand, effectively adopted a 'minilateral' approach, dispensing with the need for consensus and instead called on like-minded members to directly contribute to post-independence peacekeeping operations in East Timor. In the words of then Thai prime minister Chuan Leekpai, who acted as the rotational ASEAN chairman, "Those Asean member states which are prepared and willing can join the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET)" (ibid.). The second major factor was the proactive role of 'middle powers' Australia and Japan, which kept competing superpowers out of the picture, showed willingness to work with smaller partners on a more equal footing, and made major financial contributions, with Canberra shouldering the bulk of the INTERFET cost while Tokyo shouldering US\$100 million of a US\$107 million-INTERFET Trust Fund. Thus, despite lack of experience and fiscal limitations, ASEAN became a major contributor to the INTERFET peacekeeping operations: more than a quarter (2,500) of the 9,900-strong force was composed of Southeast Asian troops, with a Thai officer as Deputy Commander. Interestingly, soon, ASEAN countries, especially Thailand and Malaysia, would scramble for contributions to land leadership positions in the UNTAET peacekeeping operations. As a compromise, a Filipino general, Jaime de los Santos,³ was chosen to lead the force, underscoring the centrality of ASEAN to East Timor's stabilization at the turn of the 20th century (ibid.).

³For more information on General Jaime de los Santos, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaime_de_los_Santos.



Image: asiatimes.com

B. Cambodia: From Proactive Reactionaries to Democratic Advocates

The East Timor case demonstrates how ASEAN can quickly move from an initial stage of stasis and conservative non-intervention, to proactive contribution to stabilization of a major crisis within a core member-state in tandem with the broader international community. As political scientist Alan Dupont put it, “Without ASEAN participation the UN’s already formidable peacemaking and peacekeeping challenge in East Timor would have been far greater and East Timor’s future prospects even more uncertain” (2000: 168). There is, however, another major case of ASEAN proactive intervention, albeit in the interest of preserving an oppressive status quo. The same crisis also saw the regional body adopting a bifurcated approach, whereby key members were allowed to engage with opposing sides of the conflict, paving the way for post-conflict stabilization and a degree of democratic opening in a formerly totalitarian political context.

At the height of the Cold War in Southeast Asia and as the Vietnam War spread throughout the region, ASEAN, then dominated by a club of illiberal capitalist regimes (namely Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Indonesia) proactively supported the government-in-exile of the Beijing-backed Khmer Rouge (KR), a genocidal regime that was ousted following the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978. This was a particularly strange case, since neither Cambodia nor Vietnam were members of ASEAN then. And the regional body, as a collective, and its key members, individually, also had no qualms with seamlessly shifting their diplomatic recognition to newly installed governments elsewhere at the time. This happened, for instance, in the case of Uganda, when the Idi Amin regime was overthrown by neighboring Tanzania (1979) as well as Afghanistan, when a communist-leaning regime was installed following the Soviet invasion in the same year (Jones 2007).

Fears over a Soviet-Vietnamese domination of Indochina, and the ensuing empowerment of communist rebellions among capitalist Southeast Asian countries, convinced ASEAN to proactively intervene in behalf of the ousted Khmer Rouge regime, backed by both China and the United States. Only a month into the Vietnamese toppling of the Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK) regime under the KR, ASEAN mobilized, in tandem with China, its diplomatic capital to delegitimize the new regime in Cambodia. In an effort to dilute the KR's presence in the government-in-exile, ASEAN members Singapore and Thailand actively cajoled exiled Prince Sihanouk and ex-Prime Minister Son Sann to form a new coalition with DK elites, including KR ideologues and top-level war criminals Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith (Nair 2021).

From the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) to the Non-Aligned Movement

(NAM) summits, ASEAN actively lobbied for the non-recognition of the Vietnamese-installed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) in favor of the remnants of the former regime. ASEAN's infamous interventions in international bodies ensured that the so-called Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), composed of KR top leaders as well as royalists and reactionaries from the ancien régime, was able to maintain diplomatic existence years after the Vietnamese invasion. If anything, ASEAN even sponsored the International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK) in an attempt to prop up its Cambodian allies. In 1981, ASEAN managed to assemble as many as 79 countries in New York, heavily isolating the new regime in Cambodia. As a result, the Third Indochina War was extended for years, contributing to immense suffering and destruction in the region (*ibid.*).

This infamous episode showed how far ASEAN is willing and capable of going in intervening in the affairs of Southeast Asian countries when backed by major powers, as well as reflective of the domestic political interests of member-states. But there was a second surprising element to this otherwise shocking story: far from relying on unanimity, key ASEAN countries pursued seemingly diametrically opposed, yet ultimately complementary, diplomatic tracks by reaching out to both sides of the conflict. As a result of this bifurcated, two-track approach, ASEAN managed to also build robust communication channels with Vietnamese-backed political forces, including the ex-KR member and future Cambodian strongman Hun Sen. In particular, Indonesia, which had severed its ties with Beijing in the 1960s, served as an "official interlocutor" with Vietnam and its proxies in Cambodia (*ibid.*).

As a result of the 'Kuantan Declaration,' a joint Malayo-Indonesian initiative, Southeast Asian states formally recognized the need to engage Vietnam and recognize its legitimate interests in Cambodia, which previously served as a proxy for hostile Maoist China activities under the KR. Southeast Asian countries also agreed that Cambodia should ultimately become a 'neutral' and 'non-aligned' country, while exploring ways to address the massive refugee crisis in the country following years of brutal rule under KR. Despite initial opposition from key Southeast Asian states such as Thailand and Singapore, which feared that this could embolden Vietnam's hegemonic ambitions in continental Southeast Asia, the *Kuantan Principles* were ultimately embedded, not only in ASEAN's 'comprehensive political solution' to the Third Indochina War, but also in the position of other major powers, namely the United States, China and Japan (Jones 2007).

Indonesia's efforts, from the Jakarta Informal Meetings to wider multilateral negotiations that culminated in the Paris Agreements of 1991, were ultimately successful in ending the Third Indochina War as well as ensuring that the post-war Cambodian regime will adopt, under the auspices of the ASEAN-backed United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), more democratic practices as well as ensure an element of accountability for past war crimes — as a prelude to eventual membership in a democratizing ASEAN at the turn of the century. Key ASEAN members of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines were among the international contributors to the UNTAC's peacekeeping mission, which was essential in shepherding the political transition in post-war Cambodia (*ibid.*).

By the mid-1990s, the ASEAN states of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand became Cambodia's leading sources of foreign investments. Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, especially under Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan's "New Look" policy, leveraged their economic influence to push for liberalization and economic integration to broader Indochina. Throughout the decade, ASEAN constantly pressured factions in Cambodia, especially Hun Sen and the royalists, to find a democratic settlement as a prerequisite for membership in the regional body. Following the so-called "1997 coup" which threatened a new round of civil strife among competing factions, ASEAN leaders repeatedly warned of dire consequences. During the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) that year, the regional body was pretty blunt with its direct intervention in Cambodia's affairs, admitting "[w]hile reaffirming the commitment to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, [ASEAN] decided that, in the light of unfortunate circumstances which have resulted from the use of force, the wisest course of action is to delay the admission of Cambodia into ASEAN until a later date," while reassuring that "The ASEAN countries stand ready to contribute their efforts to the peaceful resolution of the situation in Cambodia" (*ibid.*: 537).

ASEAN took the lead in overseeing democratic transition in Cambodia by offering technical assistance and unequivocally calling for 'free and fair elections' involving 'all political parties,' including liberal opposition groups. Its proactive intervention convinced other major powers, including the US, to broadly take their cues from ASEAN (*ibid.*). To be sure, the irony of broadly authoritarian ASEAN members



Image: disruptiveasia.asiasociety.org

shepherding democratic politics in post-war Cambodia was not lost on anyone. Notwithstanding Cambodia's long-term descent into a full-blown authoritarian regime, ASEAN clearly played an indispensable role in establishing a semblance of peace, prosperity and democratic politics in the long-troubled nation. No wonder then, in recent years, Cambodia's democratic opposition leaders, especially Sam Rainsy, have openly called on Indonesia, and the broader ASEAN region, to once again play a key role in the democratization of the Southeast Asian country amid the increasingly authoritarian rule of Hun Sen (Purba 2019).

Policy Recommendations

In retrospect, ASEAN's achievements are remarkable. Over the decades, the largely Western-aligned founding members of ASEAN managed to not only transcend territorial and maritime conflicts among each other, including the bitter Philippine-Malaysian dispute over Sabah, but to also engage with communist-aligned regimes in Indochina. The end of the Cold War saw ASEAN extending membership to Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, making the regional body the most diverse and inclusive of its kind in the post-colonial world. And at the dawn of the 21st century, ASEAN

had finalized a free trade agreement⁴ among its members and even aspired to become a driver of pan-Asian regional integration through multilateral mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which quickly became a key platform for institutionalized dialogue among the major powers of the world. Key ASEAN members such as Indonesia, meanwhile, have emerged as a 'middle power' in their own right and global advocates for democracy. But it was precisely this early and swift success, built on strategic vision and dynamism, that instilled a sense of hubris and complacency among ASEAN members (Heydarian 2017).

It's high time to revisit the regional body's overreliance on a unanimity-based decision-making process in favor of the so-called "ASEAN Minus X" formula (Emmers 2017), a majority-based alternative that facilitated the quick and successful finalization of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in the past. It would also help if ASEAN truly operates on the principle of 'consensus.' For instance, the European Union's "qualified majority voting" system,⁵ which rightly incorporates respective contributions and relative interests of individual members into the decision-making process, is worth considering (*ibid.*). What we need now is a new reset, as ASEAN grapples with a totally new geopolitical environment amid the rise of China and the resurgence of authoritarian rule in Asia. And taking decisive action on Myanmar is a good way to start a new phase of ASEAN revival. Fortunately, the region can count on the leadership of a resurgent Indonesia. Following its own democratic transition

⁴For more information on ASEAN's free trade agreement, visit https://asean.org/?static_post=agreement-on-the-common-effective-preferential-tariff-cept-scheme-for-the-asean-free-trade-area-afta.

⁵A brief description of the UE's qualified majority voting system can be found in this link: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/voting-system/qualified-majority/>.

during the 'Reformasi' era, Indonesian leaders played a key role in consolidating ASEAN gains as well as projecting its pacifist and inclusive values in the broader region.

Former president Megawati Sukarnoputri, for instance, was instrumental in the finalization of the ASEAN Political-Security Community, while her successor Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono embedded democratic principles into the country's strategic doctrine, best evidenced in the Bali Democracy Forum. As for President Joko Widodo, he has played a key role in highlighting the importance of a democratic and humane solution in Myanmar, while advocating 'ASEAN centrality' through the adoption of, among others, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (Drajat 2021).

A sustainable, just, and comprehensive solution to the unfolding Myanmar crisis will require not only Indonesian leadership, but also close coordination between ASEAN and the international community, including major powers China and Russia as well as the US and its relevant partners such as Japan, India, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the European Union (EU). Moving forward, ASEAN and its partners should proactively move on five key fronts in order to prevent a prolonged humanitarian and political crisis in Myanmar, which could spill over into neighboring states and beyond:

1. Upholding the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle: All options should be on the table, even if peaceful resolution of the crisis is the primary concern. Under the R2P principle, which has been enshrined in relevant

international instruments, the threat of a United Nations-sanctioned humanitarian intervention to prevent further mass atrocities by the junta should not be excluded, both on practical and moral grounds.⁶ It's unlikely that either China or Russia will agree to an R2P intervention in Myanmar, especially after the debacle in Libya, but that option should be included in conversations about and with Myanmar's junta, especially as the mid-intensity civil war in the country gains pace. It must be noted that all UN members have a responsibility to protect their citizens from heinous crimes, including ethnic cleansing, genocide, and war crimes. Myanmar's junta is no exception to this universal principle.

2. Coordinated and targeted arms embargo: The international community, including ASEAN, should advocate for legally grounded and calibrated restrictions on arms exports to Myanmar, including state-of-the-art heavy weaponries, as well as advanced surveillance and electronic warfare technology. While China has been a major partner and diplomatic sponsor of the Myanmar regime, it's actually Russia that has emerged as a major source of advanced weaponries for the junta in recent years (Macan-Markar 2021). Thus, the international community should shed light on Russia's nefarious role in propping up the Myanmar junta and, accordingly, apply necessary collective pressure to limit the superpower's military aid to the brutal regime. Thus, while Russia and China will almost certainly hold their ground against any Libya-like

humanitarian intervention, they may prove more amenable to concessions on arms exports restrictions.

3. Escalating targeted sanctions: Historically, sanctions have a mixed record, often hurting ordinary citizens more than their targeted regimes. In the case of Myanmar, however, the junta is a 'state within a state,' with an increasingly insulated economy. This provides a unique opportunity for decisive yet targeted sanctions against the junta's economic interests, including major conglomerates such as the Myanmar Economic Holding (MEC) and Myanmar Economic Holding Limited (MEHL), which have been the economic backbone of the military elite. The international community can also consider secondary sanctions, which would target companies and individuals that circumvent UN-sponsored and other relevant sanctions regimes in aid of individuals and entities involved in the Myanmar coup and supportive of the junta. It's unlikely that sanctions will ever bring the junta to its knees, given historical precedence and the endurance of similar regimes such as North Korea, but they may be just strong enough to create divisions within the junta and force them to the negotiating table (DW News 2021).
4. Leveraging diplomatic pageantry: While the junta enjoys military superiority at home, it desperately seeks diplomatic legitimacy without. Here, ASEAN can draw lessons from its past intervention in the case of Cambodia, where it actively undermined a new regime by helping a government-in-exile to

⁶See <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/about-responsibility-to-protect.shtml>.

maintain global diplomatic recognition. The same principle can be applied to Myanmar, except in this case, the regional body could support diplomatic accreditation of the remnants of the NLD-led civilian government, and now democratic opposition, to sustain recognition and communication channels at the level of the UN and other relevant international bodies. Short of this, ASEAN can actively threaten the junta with such prospect or, alternatively, even follow in the footsteps of the African Union, which recently suspended Mali's membership following a military coup in the African country (Al Jazeera English 2021). At the very least, ASEAN can punish the junta with various forms of diplomatic snobbery, including the usage of downgraded or modified honorifics and titles for the junta's representatives in regional meetings, as well as delaying nation-level diplomatic recognition to the new regime (Nair 2021). In short, ASEAN should constantly remind the junta of its legitimacy crisis, and that it's not all well, even if, as a principle, the regional body recognizes states rather than governments per se.

5. ASEAN Special Envoy and Proactive Crisis-management: In April, ASEAN and the junta have agreed to a Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair to oversee the implementation of the so-called “five-point-consensus,” which calls for, *inter alia*, de-escalation of violence, constructive dialogue among stakeholders, and provision of humanitarian assistance to affected communities. Instead of



Image: thediplomat.com

following normal bureaucratic procedures, namely running through multiple levels of diplomatic representation among member-states, the current ASEAN chair, Brunei, should proactively push for the appointment as well as empowerment of a Special Envoy to oversee the implementation of the blueprint for crisis resolution in Myanmar. It should also coordinate a long-term response with the next ASEAN chairs, namely Cambodia and Indonesia, to ensure continuity and sustained response to the crisis. The Special Envoy should have the mandate and necessary capabilities to monitor and mediate the crisis on the ground by reaching out to various stakeholders, including the opposition. Of great urgency is the role of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on

Disaster Management (AHA) to expeditiously provide necessary aid to the worst affected communities in Myanmar in order to avoid a full-blown humanitarian crisis amid the economic meltdown of Myanmar.⁷

ASEAN and the broader international community should focus on the root causes of the crisis. Thus, any just and sustainable roadmap will have to involve decisive measures, including the restoration of democratic elections in the near future, release of political prisoners and opposition leaders, and nudging the junta towards complying with its obligations under R2P and other relevant principles in the UN. Stopgap measures and half-hearted engagements will only reinforce the grip of, and legitimize the Myanmar junta, paving the way for long-term civil strife with unspeakable human cost and threat to regional security and peace. ■

⁷ See Evan Laksamana (2021). “Forget ASEAN Bureaucracy, Brunei Must Decide on Myanmar Special Envoy with Urgency.” *South China Morning Post*. 5 May. Retrieved from: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3132179/forget-asean-bureaucracy-brunei-must-decide-myanmar-special-envoy>.

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Building A Strong Civil Society

Lessons from Indonesia's Reformasi

By: Bunga Manggiasih

Civil society must be constantly nurtured and strengthened to ensure a strong democracy. Otherwise, civil society becomes vulnerable, too weak to oppose oligarchs and populist political groups, and unable to turn back democracy's regression. Indonesia is learning this the hard way.

It was not another humid day after school, I thought, when I arrived home. It was Thursday, 21 May 1998. I was 14 years old and an 8th-grade student.

The last couple of weeks had been gloomy after hearing the news that four university students in Jakarta were shot and killed by the military during a rally demanding President Soeharto to step down. The protest was one of many marches across Indonesia after the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR-RI) elected Soeharto for the sixth time on 10 March 1998, rubber-stamping the 32nd year of his presidency amidst the severe financial crisis across Asia. After months of rallies, riots (allegedly instigated by the Indonesian military) broke out in Jakarta and killed at least 1,000 people — an unprecedented tragedy in my lifetime.

Fortunately, there was no such rioting in Yogyakarta, my hometown, more than 500 kilometers away from the Indonesian capital. However, on 8 May 1998, the police and the military tried to suppress a student demonstration, which left one protester dead and several hundreds wounded. But an even bigger rally called *Rapat Akbar* or the Great Gathering was organized on 20 May, wherein about one million people congregated at the city's North Square to listen to Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, the Governor of Yogyakarta, announce his support for the *Reformasi* (Reform) movement. Change was in the air, and it was very much discussed at the dining table of people's homes.

However, the next day was school as usual for K-12 students. In my case, I started school that morning

at 7:00am, mindlessly went through an array of classes, including one Civics Class where my teacher could not answer my questions on why the government has only allowed three political parties since 1973 and when the monetary crisis would end. Mom picked me up at 2:00pm and told me about Suharto's resignation on our way home.

We turned on the TV and it was all over the news: Soeharto's short resignation speech, smiles upon the faces of thousands of students occupying the MPR-RI building, political pundits and pro-democracy activists busy discussing what's next for Indonesia. It felt surreal because we thought Soeharto was so repressive he would be president for life. We were ushered into a new era, the Reform Era.



Image: www.straitstimes.com

Euphoria filled the air in the following years. Indonesia seemed to have left authoritarianism behind and leapt into a vibrant democracy. The military withdrew from politics (no more of Suharto's "dual function" army), the party system was liberalized, elections became free and competitive, independent media flourished, the East Timorese were allowed to vote in a referendum and decided to leave Indonesia and become independent, the Corruption Eradication Commission was established and set a perfect conviction rate for more than 15 years. Dad stopped locking his special shelves of leftist books, which were prohibited during Soeharto's reign. We all breathed in the newfound freedom.

From Vibrancy to Failure

Civil society played a pivotal role in the years leading to *Reformasi*. Let us look back and have a quick historical review of civil society dynamics in Indonesia.

Suharto's army-backed government came to power in 1966 by purging communists and alleged communists, who were accused of attempting a coup against former president Soekarno. In the following decades, political activities were heavily restrained through manipulation, co-optation and repression.

Competing political parties were forced to merge into one of two parties: the United Development Party (PPP) for Islamic parties and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) for nationalist and non-Islamic parties. The government prohibited parties from operating at the grassroots, limiting them to district level. In every general election, these parties acted as the pseudo-opposition competing against the Functional Group (Golkar), which consisted of the armed forces, the corps of civil servants, as well as the state-sanctioned labor union and professional associations (only one association per profession), which all supported the developmentalist policies of the Soeharto regime.

In six elections, Golkar won 62% to 74% of the votes, effectively making Indonesia a one-party state. A new spelling system was introduced in 1972, both to mark a departure from the previous president, Soekarno, and to prevent upcoming generations from comfortably reading literature written in the former spelling. Prominent leaders of the 1966 student movement were co-opted into the regime. Soeharto also expanded the territorial system of the army to the village level and appointed military officers as regional heads to maintain strict control over the nation.

In the early 1980s, realizing the difficulties in fighting against state co-optation and mobilization, people started to build indirect confrontation strategies. Activists, academics and artists joined forces to routinely write criticisms, conduct theatrical performances and hold informal meetings. Student activists formed organizations to help people fight local abuses and organized study groups to discuss their critique of the state. Social criticism also found its way to theaters in both grassroots rural areas and urban middle class settings, skirting government censorships through humor and satire. NGOs were formed, most partnering with the government to develop small-scale programs concerning health, agriculture and the plight of urban informal sectors. Several other NGOs were established to develop the awareness and capacity of target groups such as labor, rural citizens and the unemployed. Civil society (or the various non-governmental institutions seeking to balance out the state's dominance) were formed (Hadiwinata 1999).

Pro-democracy movements thrived in the 1990s, stemming from the growing dissatisfaction with Soeharto's leadership that became

even more despotic. Students formed a broad network through underground off-campus activities, collaborating with various pro-democracy NGOs such as the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) and the International NGO Forum for Indonesian Development (INFID) to put pressure on Soeharto.

Bob Sugeng Hadiwinata (2003) recorded that there were differences among these groups regarding the extent of confrontation toward the government, but members of the movement shared common purposes. These purposes were demands for the protection of human rights, better enforcement of the rule of law, reduction of the state's power and the military's role in politics, as well as free and fair elections. Students and NGO activists turned to be more involved in practical and direct resistance, rallying thousands of people on the streets. The state, through its military, tried to stifle this pro-democracy movement through intimidation, arrests and detention. At least 23 activists were abducted by the military in 1997-1998 — nine were released, one was found dead and thirteen others are still missing. Nevertheless, the pressure for democratization grew stronger and resulted in Soeharto's resignation.

However, the main forces behind the movements were only united by short-term interests and demands, not by a clearly identified ideology. It was the consequence of a deeply entrenched post-1966 Red Scare propaganda and the imposition of a state ideology, Pancasila, as the only ideology allowed under Soeharto.

Meanwhile, prominent figures in the pro-democracy movement either joined the government or became politicians through new political parties after 1998. Left by

their leaders and without sufficient regeneration, several civil society organizations struggled to fill the vacuum and survive. The lack of a common enemy in the years following *Reformasi* also disoriented civil society, as groups scrambled to reposition themselves in the new political landscape. At the same time, new civil society organizations mushroomed across the nation. The National Statistics Agency (BPS) recorded around 70,000 such organizations in 2000, from only approximately 10,000 in 1996. Although some were genuinely established to empower the people, others were established for the founders' political and financial gain (Humaidi 2009).

All of this contributed to civil society's failure to serve as a countervailing power in Indonesia.

Illiberal Turn

Soeharto left Indonesia with plenty of structural challenges, including entrenched political and material inequality, weak rule of law, and endemic corruption. Therefore, democratic deepening has been difficult in Indonesia, leaving the nation vulnerable to renewed illiberal threats. The threat to democracy comes from above (taking the form of anti-democratic actors within the political elite and in formal state institutions) and from below (manifested in illiberal social movements and grassroots support for chauvinist or authoritarian agendas). Civil society is increasingly polarized, to the extent that the largest community organizations in the nation have actively endorsed the state's authoritarian tactics against their ideological rivals (Power and Warburton 2020).

Image: www.abc.net.au



Marcus Mietzner (2021) argued that the escalating polarization has split civil society along primordial and ideological lines, eroding its ability to offer a united pro-democracy front. The government utilizes this polarization to justify increasingly illiberal measures. These two factors have reduced Indonesian civil society's activist resources, accelerating the country's democratic backsliding in the process.

Two waves of massive marches on the streets in 2019 and 2020 proved how the elites do not really care about the opinions of the people any longer. These marches used the banner of *Reformasi Dikorupsi*, which means "The reform has been corrupted." University students joined hands with labor, anti-corruption, human rights and environmental activists.

The 2019 demonstrations were triggered by the move of the Lower House or the People's Representative Council (DPR-RI) to revise several laws in the very last week of its session. Lawmakers wanted to change the anti-corruption law so that the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) would be required to first get the approval of a DPR-RI-appointed supervisory board before any surveillance, arrest or confiscation of property can be made. Keep in mind that high-profile DPR-RI members had been arrested and tried for corruption, and more might be caught if KPK remains strong. Therefore, this revision is meant as a safety net for members of parliament to avoid arrest. At the same time, the revision of the criminal code would, among other things, outlaw acts of defamation against the president and the government, criminalize premarital sex and abortion, and prohibit unauthorized promotion of contraceptives. The government and the DPR-RI agreed to suspend



Image: www.japantimes.co.jp

the revision of the criminal code, but they swiftly continued the revision of the anti-corruption law, ringing the death bell of KPK.

2020 saw more nationwide rallies against the Omnibus Law — an unprecedented gargantuan thousand-page bill that amends dozens of laws under the pretense of promoting investments. The government called it the "Jobs Creation Bill," to try to convince people that such revisions are needed to create more jobs. In reality, the law dismantles safeguards for workers' welfare and environmental protection on a scale never seen before. The police arrested almost 6,000 protesters, labeling them as anarchist demonstrators and violators of COVID-19 restrictions. Despite being rejected by the people, the DPR-RI passed the bill on 5 October 2020. I cried that night, feeling most disappointed during the pandemic.

However, there is more than just a gloomy picture. Public support for

democracy remains high, even among election losers. Although losing elections can induce strong feelings of dissatisfaction and greater distrust in the integrity of elections, Muhtadi (2020) found that support for democracy remains high among those who voted for losing presidential candidates. In short, Indonesians still see democracy as the only game in town. In the meantime, even though the 2019-2020 protests failed to change policies, they reveal that hundreds of thousands of youth are willing to stand up for democracy.

Lessons for Myanmar

So, what can Myanmar learn from Indonesia? Arguments have been made about how Myanmar's military, with its recent coup, chose to follow Soeharto's authoritarian playbook instead of the Indonesian army's post-1998 reforms (Borsuk 2021). If anything, the violence of the Tatmadaw seems almost like a match for the 1966 anti-communist purge in Indonesia.

Nevertheless, the coup sparked unprecedented mass protests, civil disobedience and labor strikes. Ethnic divisions even began to soften. In parallel, ethnic minorities' militias joined hands to condemn the junta and support the shadow government. This is Myanmar's momentum to keep building a strong civil society.

After all, as Larry Diamond (2004) said, civil society is very important in building and maintaining democracy. Civil society is needed to limit and control the power of the state, to expose the corrupt conduct of public officials, to lobby for good governance reforms, and to promote political participation. Civil society can also help develop important democratic values such as tolerance, moderation, compromise, and respect for opposing points of view. However, civil society itself should remain independent, voluntary, law-abiding, tolerant and pluralistic so they have the legitimacy to remain in the democratic realm.

In the long run, parallel with other efforts to free Myanmar from the junta's grasp, civil society should design and implement a program for the constant regeneration of committed activists. This will ensure there will be enough people

to drive the movement after former leaders leave civil society, either to join the government, go into hiding or flee abroad to rally support. Civil society needs to nurture its collective knowledge and memory, utilizing available information technology tools. Under severe repression, pro-democracy activists may have to operate underground. Nevertheless, the strengthening of civil society must continue even after the military junta leaves the stage to let democracy in.

Civil society is not a monolith and it is, of course, normal to have different views and methods within the movement. However, a common ideological foundation will strengthen the collective movement. What kind of future Myanmar does civil society envision? Is it a democracy in bed with capitalism, a social democratic one, or democracy with other kinds of ideology? It would be good if civil society could reach a consensus about this, consistently push for it and implement it internally.

I hope it won't take Myanmar 32 years of oppression to achieve their kind of *Reformasi*, and when that happens, civil society will hopefully be strong enough so they won't fall into the same trajectory with their counterparts in Indonesia.

Image: www.channelnewsasia.com



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Lessons for Myanmar from the (Ongoing) Democratic Transition in Brazil

By: Cecilia Lero

Introduction

Until around 2012, Brazil appeared to be one of the more successful cases of a transition to democracy in the developing world. It stood out for exhibiting over twenty years of uninterrupted and generally peaceful elections, an increasingly independent judiciary, improvements in bureaucratic capacity, and major strides in reducing extreme poverty. Although deep-seeded problems continued to exist, including corruption, police violence, and extreme economic and racial inequality, most national and international observers agreed that Brazil was a consolidated democracy that, while far from ideal, was moving in the right direction.

This optimism came to a crashing halt when a series of nationwide protests erupted in 2013. Originally triggered by protests against public transportation fare increases, the

popular outrage soon expanded to include more general criticisms of the government under President Dilma Rousseff and her Workers' Party (PT) as well as to include a substantial contingent of protestors who identified with right-wing ideologies. The wave of protests marked the beginning of a series of events including a major corruption scandal, the impeachment and removal of Rousseff, and the disqualification from candidacy and imprisonment of former President Lula da Silva, culminating in the election of far-right authoritarian populist, Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. Bolsonaro's presidency has been characterized by attacks on democratic institutions, the independence of other branches and agencies of government, and poor, and nonwhite people. The events of recent years have highlighted the structural shortcomings embedded in Brazil's transition to democracy that may provide important points of consideration for democratic forces in Myanmar.

The Brazilian Context: Managed Transition

Like Myanmar, the democratic transition in Brazil was a managed one. That is, as opposed to the military dictatorship being deposed in popular revolutions like in Tunisia or the Philippines, elements within the military decided to generally open the democratic space. This tension among the ruling forces has been described as "hardliners" versus "soft-liners." Hardliners desire the continuation of total autocratic rule. This may be for a myriad of reasons, including the benefits they receive from being part of the ruling group, the ideological belief that the population is too "messy" or "immature" for democracy to succeed, or the fear that once a democratic regime is in place, they and their families will be prosecuted. Soft-liners may also have a strong preference for continued authoritarianism, but they also believe that elections and



Image: www.americamagazine.org

other forms of democratic opening, such as the relaxation of restrictions on speech or assembly and the writ of habeas corpus, are necessary for the autocratic regime to have legitimacy both domestically and internationally. These soft-liners may be satisfied with what they were able to extract from the state and now prefer to retreat to private life; they may want to see some opening but not full democratization; and some may feel that the authoritarian regime is already a sinking ship and want to position themselves for office in the new democratic regime (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986).

In Brazil, a large part of the arguments made by soft-liners was that the military “unfortunately” had to impose dictatorial rule in order to pursue national development projects, as well as to defeat a supposed communist threat. Intense factionalization within the military led to a prolonged process of opening that began in 1974. State governors were not directly elected until 1981 and the first civilian president was

elected in 1985. The 1985 elections were also the target of an extremely large public campaign for direct elections. Although the campaign was unsuccessful and the president was still decided by an electoral college, the *Direitas Já* campaign was an important focal point for organizing the population and getting citizens accustomed to participating in public acts. This would not have been possible under the stricter days of the military regime and provided an important training ground for democratic activists moving forward.

The opposition candidate was able to win in 1985, even in an electoral college system that was designed to favor the military, largely because the opposition candidate's moderate stance within an already moderate wing of the opposition was able to take advantage of divisions within the military. Tancredo Neves was able to make deals with members of the ruling party and did not pose a threat to the ruling class, unlike the emerging leftwing Worker's Party that criticized Neves along with the

military regime. Part of such deals was adopting a conservative former member of the military party as his vice-presidential candidate. It did not look optimistic for proponents of progressive politics when Neves died of a sudden illness before he was able to take office and his running mate assumed the presidency. However, the first victory of a civilian opposition candidate sealed the unviability of going back to military rule. The 1989 presidential elections were direct and have continued to be direct and uninterrupted since then.

It is important to note that prior to the 1970s, Brazilian civil society was extremely weak and fractionalized. The decision to begin opening democratically was more the result of splits within the military than pressure from civil society or the international community. Yet, civil society was able to take advantage of the burgeoning space to begin organizing and gaining influence, particularly in labor unions, whose leadership had been largely

dominated by military regime allies. The civil society that emerged was not beholden to the main opposition party during the military regime (from 1965 to 1979, only one opposition party was permitted to participate in elections). Rather, it stressed its autonomy from existing political formations. Some of these groups would later go on to establish the Worker's Party, which would hold the presidency from 2003-2016, and some would remain independent but push for important mechanisms at the national and local levels.

There is myriad of factors that contributed to Rousseff's impeachment in 2016 and the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 that are beyond the scope of this article, including but not limited to major corruption scandals, an economic crisis, and a rift in the implicit deal between the ruling PT and the finance capital sector, the expansion of conservative Neo-Pentecostal Evangelical Christian churches, and a lull in social movement grassroots organizing. Nevertheless, current levels of democratic repression and systematic state torture cannot be compared to the height of the dictatorship. Democratic gains made in the past thirty years, both in institutions and in the popular psyche, have made it so that autocratic forces cannot readily reimpose martial law as millions of people are actively engaged in doing what they can to defend and expand democracy.

The Role of Strong and Independent Civil Society and Social Movements

The initial process of gradual democratic opening was largely the result of splits within the ruling military regime itself. However, progressive actors took advantage of the democratic space as it emerged to organize and begin contesting



Image: www.france24.com

power in important social institutions, notably labor unions and professional organizations, rural worker organizations, and grassroot Catholic organizations. Social movement actors did not consider themselves bound to the major opposition party. The only opposition party that the military regime permitted to participate in elections from 1965 to 1979, the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), was a catch-all formation comprised of various personalities and ideologies that opposed military rule. As such, it included traditional conservative politicians that did not share the same economic and social inclusion goals as the popular movements. Additionally, elections under the military dictatorship were not free and the military's party maintained huge majorities at all levels of government. Until restrictions on the number of parties were lifted and direct elections were held, social movements prioritized building their bases, and contesting power using non-electoral strategies like land occupations, strikes, and winning union elections.

When restrictions were finally lifted, many of these social movement actors would go on to found or support the Workers' Party. The PT presidential candidate, Lula da Silva, came in second place in the 1989 presidential elections, the first to be held by direct vote. He won the presidency in 2002, commencing 15 years of PT presidencies. Other groups would remain independent or form or join other political formations. Throughout the 1990s, civil society and social movements would play pivotal roles designing policy mechanisms at various levels of government, particularly at the city and municipal levels, amending articles of the constitution, and engaging in civic education.

The years of the PT government, however, were accompanied by a lull in social movement activity. Many grassroots organizers were called to work in government, leaving a lacuna on the ground. Many movements also lost their vigor, adopting a "wait and see" attitude now that their most natural

ally was in power. The PT, for its part, was navigating powerful structures of old politics. Despite holding the most powerful office in a hyper-presidentialist system, the PT never had a majority in Congress and many members of the judiciary remained ideologically opposed to its vision. The PT was often fearful of overreaching and having its programs fully blocked by old conservative powers and remnants of the dictatorship. Da Silva is reported to have said that he would not start any fights that he could not win, hence the compromises with the forces of old politics and extractive capital. These compromises also led to criticisms from social movements and other political formations on the left.

This combination of less attention to grassroots organizing and strengthening civil society's political power, together with disappointments and splits among progressives as a reaction to the PT's concessions to conservative forces, resulted in a left that found itself in a weakened position by the mid-2010s. Although PT governments arguably delivered significant improvements in terms of reducing extreme poverty, macroeconomic growth, transparency mechanisms in government, and encouraging a more independent judiciary, these accomplishments were not enough to solidify the narrative of the PT as a party that ushered in a national transformation in the right direction. To the contrary, a major corruption scandal beginning in 2013 whose investigation was dramatized and drawn-out over several years made the PT, and indeed all major parties, seem like they were all just parts of the same incorrigible, corrupt system. This opened the door for an extreme candidate like Bolsonaro who harshly attacked established politicians (despite being one

himself) and praised the military dictatorship's use of violence and destruction of democratic norms and institutions. Social movements that had been closely allied with the PT were also painted as corrupt entities, contributing to citizens' resistance to join political and civic organizations that could hold the government in check.

The complicated relationship between civil society and political parties in Brazil presents important points of consideration for Myanmar's current situation. The role of an independent civil society that engages people in important matters of politics and governance and pressure political parties, as opposed to merely observing the competition between political parties and expecting one of them to get it right, cannot be over-emphasized. While coalitions between pro-democracy political parties and social movements and civil society organizations are important, it is important that civil society and social movements maintain independence and do not relax efforts at base-building and gaining political power and influence independent of the political parties with which they may be allied with. An independent and strong civil society is more likely to be able to pressure an allied political party to pursue its policy interests, but also provides a necessary counterweight to the pressures that a pro-democracy party and government also face from authoritarian elements and institutions within the state.

A strong and independent civil society is also able to continue organizing citizens to democratically engage the state and hold it accountable even when the leader of an allied party is discredited or jailed. The PT gained prominence not only because of its early investment in base-building

and ideological education, but also because of da Silva's personal charm, political skill, and cultivated image as a leader. While his persona aided recruitment through providing a focal point, it also provided a focal point for the rightwing in general and anti-democratic forces in particular to attack and malign. When da Silva was jailed just months prior to the 2018 election and barred from running for office again, the PT's image was so tied to da Silva as an individual that it struggled to campaign for his replacement or to effectively counter the violent and anti-democratic rhetoric of the Bolsonaro camp. There had been inadequate investment in raising the profile or developing the skills of other party or civil society leaders. The PT was so reliant on da Silva as a personality, that once Bolsonaro won office, the PT's main campaign and slogan was "*Lula Livre!*" ("Free Lula!") as opposed to a more substantive campaign about protecting democracy and social inclusion efforts from Bolsonaro and the movement towards authoritarianism and exclusion.

The overwhelming emphasis on da Silva as an individual has also functioned to enable polarization, which in turn plays into the rhetorical strategy of authoritarian populists like Bolsonaro. Anyone who criticizes Bolsonaro is met with a litany of da Silva's sins, both real and imagined. Unwittingly defending da Silva becomes a distraction to meaningfully examining Bolsonaro's rule. The rhetoric of false equivalencies and desire to avoid being stuck between ardent da Silva loyalists and ardent Bolsonaro loyalists encourage many to withdraw from discussing or participating in politics at all. An inactive population that does not pay attention and thus does not hold its government accountable is a boost for authoritarianism.



Image: www.taiwannews.com.tw

Finally, it should be noted that despite disappointment among the left with the PT (which has led to the founding of another left party, the PSOL, that openly criticizes the PT and competes with it in elections), when it comes to major democracy-threatening events like the impeachment of Rousseff, the candidacy and now presidency of Bolsonaro, and the release of da Silva from prison, most groups on the left have taken a broadly unified stance. This demonstrates that even when ideological disagreements are substantial and justified, if democracy itself is under threat it is a time for unity.

Establishing a Narrative About the Dictatorship

The Brazilian military regime used widespread violence, torture, disappearances, and corruption to maintain itself in power. While the development projects that the regime pursued arguably had

positive effects on GDP especially in its early years, they also resulted in rapid urbanization without adequate services or infrastructure (and later social unrest), environmental degradation, and attacks on indigenous and black populations. Yet, to this day there does not exist a widespread understanding or consistent narrative about the costs of military rule. The first official truth commission report about the military regime's use of torture was released in 2014, to a lukewarm national reception. This lack of a complete and common understanding of history has enabled military apologists, fascist organizations, and fake news producers to present the dictatorship period as one of peace and progress, where everyone was safe, politics was free from corruption, and only bad people were treated with (justified) violence.

The idea of a common narrative is understandably tricky for members of the military who would prefer the regime to be remembered as a necessary step in national development. It is worth considering the establishment of commissions with representatives from the military, political opposition, nonpartisan civil society, and the academe to settle how some important topics will be remembered and taught in public schools. As an oversized military should no longer be necessary under democratic rule (as groups in society should be able to compete in elections as opposed to violence), a holistic disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process should be ideal for some sections of the military. If this is not possible, however, any form of training about democratic ideals, the right to criticize government, and how the military can contribute to building a strong democratic state should be considered. We observe in Brazil that even thirty years after the end of military rule, the military as an institution continues to have its own insular culture that values submission to authority and traditional conservative values over social inclusion and human rights. Presenting the military dictatorship as the “golden age” of corruption-free politics and economic progress and failing to address the military's institutional culture has directly benefitted the careers of politicians like Jair Bolsonaro, including Bolsonaro's presidential campaign. It also continues to add support for ongoing state violence, which is overwhelmingly violence against poor, black urban residents, and support for *milicia* groups, a form of organized crime comprised of ex- and current military and police officers.

Looking for Institutional Loopholes

Transitions to democracy, and especially managed transitions, will always carry over remnants of authoritarian institutions. These remnants often create structural impediments that stack the deck against consolidated and well-functioning democratic regimes. For example, the electoral system for federal, state, and municipal level legislators is an open-list proportional representation system that encourages competition between members of the same party, thus inhibiting the development of programmatic parties with mass bases and encouraging personalistic politics. High pensions for retired military personnel and their children comprise a sizeable portion of the Brazilian national budget that could arguably put towards more meaningful national development. For example, due to some antiquated features of the military pension system, adult daughters of retired military personnel receive an estimated R\$5 billion (US\$967 million) per year, an amount equal to the overall national spending on education in 2018 (Mori 2019; Pina 2017). Leonardo Avritzer identifies several nondemocratic features of Brazilian institutions that contribute to cycles of democratic crisis, including the Law on Impeachment which creates a wide-ranging framework to remove elected officials from office; and a lack of limitations on the Armed Forces' ability to intervene in politics in the name of security policy (2019). Racism against black and indigenous people, which includes targeting them for violence and their land for extraction, continues to be embedded in state institutions.

The antidemocratic aspects of the Myanmar Constitution, as well as established laws and institutions, should be identified and addressed before they stunt democracy over



Image: www.thetimes.co.uk

the long-term. It is important to consider not only how these laws are written and what they mean in theory, but to also especially consider how they are used and what their ramifications are in the real world. Authoritarian setbacks often stem from piecemeal distortions of democratic institutions and norms, with some warped interpretation of democracy and national defense as the justification.

Conclusion

As we consider the current wave of democratic backsliding in Brazil and many other countries, we are reminded that the path towards progress is not always a straight

line. In the 1980s and 90s, it became popular to believe that democracy is the apex of the natural evolution of the human condition and that advanced societies would automatically drift towards democracy. Looking back, however, we see democracy is an ongoing battle, that there will always be groups in society looking to monopolize power and exclude others, and that, if there is any inevitability, it is that systemic oversights and weaknesses from the past will come back to haunt us in the future. There is no formula for the ideal democratic transition or governing regime, but there are lessons for pitfalls to avoid as we battle on.

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Image: www.opendemocracy.net



The Philippine People Power Revolution and Its Lessons for Democracy

By: Veronica Alporha

The Complex Legacies of the EDSA People Power Revolution

On 24 June 2021, the Philippines was shaken with the news of the death of former President Benigno Simeon “Noynoy” Aquino III, only half a decade after stepping down from the presidency. In the midst of a populist and fascist administration, Aquino’s death served as an electrifying wave of nostalgia to the years of a liberal, reformist, but flawed democracy characteristic of his term. Noynoy was the only son of the martyred leader of the opposition against Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, Jr., and former President Corazon “Cory” Cojuangco-Aquino. The latter was catapulted to the presidency after the historic EDSA People Power Revolution in 1986.

The second Aquino presidency that lasted from 2010 to 2016 was as unexpected as the first. Noynoy Aquino was a first-term senator



Image: www.officialgazette.gov.ph

who was moderately popular and was not among the Philippine presidentiables until a year before the May 2010 presidential elections. However, when his mother and former president Cory Aquino succumbed to colon cancer on 1 August 2009, the people displayed massive support for the deceased, comparable only to the one given to Ninoy Aquino when he was assassinated in August 1983. When Ninoy was shot dead in broad daylight at the tarmac of the Manila International Airport that now bears his name,¹ People Power started gaining traction. The middle forces were shocked to political involvement. Multisectoral coalitions were formed and groups across the political spectrum started to constitute broad alliances against Marcos. The dictator's legitimacy suffered in the midst of the political storm fueled by the murder of Ninoy Aquino and the unprecedented economic crisis driven by extensive foreign debt accrued by the Marcos administration. Marcos needed to prove that he was still a legitimate president. In a bold and reckless move, he then called for a "snap election" in an international television interview in November 1985 (Reaves 1985).

The growing anti-Marcos movement helmed by the traditional opposition persuaded Cory Aquino to run against Marcos. On 7 February 1986, the election took place. The Commission on Elections' tally showed Marcos as the winner, but the volunteer group National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) showed

Aquino leading the race. At this point, high-ranking officials and soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), led by Marcos' own henchmen Juan Ponce Enrile and Fidel V. Ramos, started defecting and attempted to take over the government in a military coup. At this moment, Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin went on a radio broadcast and called on Filipino civilians to join the soldiers in EDSA.² Thousands of people from different walks of life flocked to the streets and demanded the ouster of the dictator, armed only with flowers, rosaries, placards, impassioned speeches, songs and the indefatigable resolve to be free. More soldiers defected and joined the civilians. By 24 February, Corazon Aquino was sworn in as president. By midnight, Marcos and his allies fled Manila onboard a US Air Force rescue helicopter before they were flown to Hawaii (Stuart-Santiago 2013).

The EDSA People Power Revolution was recognized around the world for its non-violence. It was unprecedented in Philippine history. In the years of the dictatorship, the revolutionary left, which was the most organized and sustained opposition force against Marcos, was convinced that the only way to topple the dictatorship was through an armed revolution. When Marcos called for a snap election, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) called for a boycott. They saw the election as a ploy for Marcos to justify his presidency through electoral fraud.³ But while the election was indeed

described by the International Observation Delegation as something that was not done in a free and fair manner, the CPP was not able to foresee that the people would adamantly insist on Marcos' illegitimacy through civil disobedience and non-violent protests with such force that humiliated Marcos to the point of departure.

One of the first acts of Cory Aquino as president was to free all of Marcos' political prisoners. The Aquino government also formed a commission to draft a new constitution that would replace the 1973 Constitution created by the dictator through a largely partisan convention. Against the backdrop of a democratic political climate, civil society flourished. Nevertheless, the new democracy was far from perfect. Sections of the armed forces that were not content with the new civilian government and still relished the years of military supremacy under Martial Law attempted several military coups. The peace talks with the communists fell apart within the year as the administration drifted steadily to the right. Land reform remained far-fetched in a Congress manned by the elite, and in a government headed by a daughter of the landed class. The Aquino government yielded to the demands of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and voted to pay the massive foreign debt incurred by the dictator. In other words, despite the spectacular revolution that inspired other countries, many social ills that had plagued the people still remain.

¹ Manila International Airport was renamed Ninoy Aquino International Airport in 1987 — *the editor*.

² EDSA is the popular acronym of Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, a 23.8-kilometer highway that serves as the main thoroughfare of Metro Manila. Located along EDSA is the general headquarters of the AFP, as well as the main headquarters of the Philippine Constabulary, now known as the Philippine National Police (PNP) — *the editor*.

³ For more details about the CPP's boycott of the 1986 snap election, see Joel Rocamora (1994). *Breaking Through: The Struggle Within the Communist Party of the Philippines*. Pasig City: Anvil Publishing.

Thirty-five years hence, activists and scholars have started asking about the legacies of EDSA, and the lessons that the world can draw both from its successes and failures. Aside from appraising People Power as an event, it is more worthwhile to look at its aftermath and at the EDSA Republic that it created.

EDSA Dos, EDSA Tres and People Power Fatigue

Fifteen years after EDSA People Power of 1986, the Filipino people repeated history. After numerous corruption scandals, movie star-turned-politician and Philippine President Joseph Ejercito “Erap” Estrada was forced to resign after people marched down the same historic highway calling for his ouster. His vice president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, was immediately sworn in on 20 January 2001 culminating the protest activities that started three days prior. Hence began the Arroyo presidency that would last for nine years. A few months after EDSA Dos, hundreds of thousands of people who supported the ousted president marched and flocked to EDSA. They protested the installation of Arroyo and aimed to reinstate Estrada. The sheer number of the people caused the media to refer to the events as EDSA Tres. The movement was constituted by the poor who served as the main constituency of Estrada. They were, however, helmed by pro-Estrada politicians, and when it became clear that the new Arroyo government would not buckle, the politicians were quick to bolt out of the movement.

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo served the remaining three years of Estrada's term and ran again for the presidency in the much-contested 2004 presidential elections where she won against another movie star, Fernando Poe, Jr. The said election was wrought with controversy and

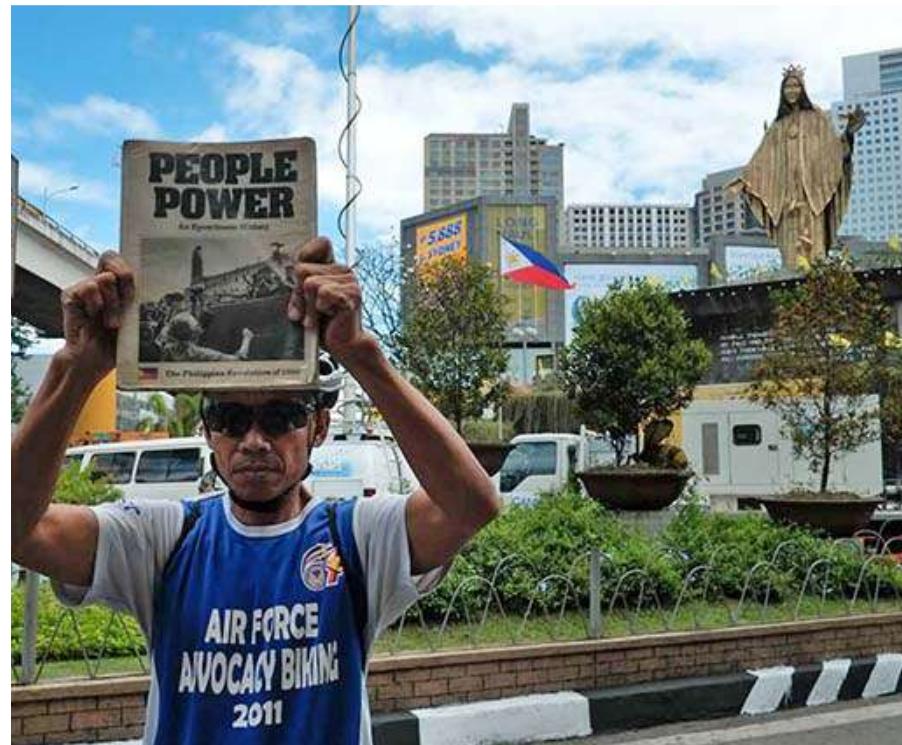


Image: www.rappler.com

such would prove ominous for the rest of Arroyo's term. Her administration was largely unpopular. She registered extremely low satisfaction ratings from 2004 until the end of her term in 2010. Despite the sustained but modest increase in GDP, hunger and poverty continuously increased, demonstrating that the Arroyo administration's economic performance was only good on paper. Numerous corruption scandals and exposés riddled her term. Protest actions from the ranks of students, labor groups, and various progressive strands flourished. The government responded heavy-handedly. Journalists, student activists, labor and peasant leaders were arrested, summarily executed, or were made to disappear (Rood 2010). The Philippines became one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, second only to Iraq. Indeed, journalist Conrado de Quiros once referred to Arroyo as the ideological daughter of Marcos owing to the level of repression that her regime inflicted against its critics, corruption committed by

her friends and cronies, and the involvement of the military in governance.

Despite the intermittent protests and mobilization among anti-Arroyo groups, EDSA was never filled again with millions of Filipinos in a unified call to oust a sitting president. There seemed to be a “people power fatigue” among Filipinos (Mydans 2006). Indeed, with no fundamental change in the way that the government is run, coupled by the lack of social services, increasing unemployment, persistent inequality, and obscene wealth enjoyed by the political and economic elite, the appeal of People Power waned and turned into disillusionment. With elections becoming nothing more but a ritualistic exercise often rigged by different kinds of fraud and characterized by popularity contests, democracy was reduced to an abstract concept that hardly affects the material condition of the people who have to work for low wages or go overseas for better economic opportunities.



Image: japantimes.co.jp

Cory Magic and One More Chance for People Power

Arroyo was approaching the end of her term in a bad position. Her attempts at charter change were easily blocked by the relatively strong opposition in the legislature, and early electoral surveys were demonstrative of her government's unpopularity. But the greatest blow to her prospects of keeping herself in a position of influence after 2010 was the death of Cory Aquino on 1 August 2009. Cory's historic rise to the presidency and her legacies were remembered with collective nostalgia. Her refusal to cling to power beyond her term in 1992 was juxtaposed against Arroyo's various maneuvers to extend her hold on the presidency. With the presidential election in the horizon, attention was turned to the Aquinos' only son and incumbent senator Benigno Simeon Aquino III of the Liberal Party (LP). The original standard bearer of the LP, former Trade Secretary and Senator Mar Roxas, seeing the power that the Aquino legacy held, stepped aside for the emerging and

reluctant presidential candidate. After Noynoy Aquino finally proclaimed his intention to run for president, his survey showing shot through the top overtaking all others. Analysts and pundits saw the 2010 presidential election as another People Power disguised as an election (Claudio 2013).

The second Aquino presidency touted intense and serious campaigns against corruption. They wanted to underscore that Noynoy Aquino was the opposite of Arroyo. They filed corruption cases against seating senators, congressmen, middlemen, and the former president herself. The Liberal Party-dominated legislative branch impeached, for the first time in history, Arroyo-appointed Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona in 2012. Aside from its anti-corruption crusade, the government also exhibited an inclination to reformism. Key legislations were passed like the Reproductive Health Law, the Sin Tax Law, and the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro — the closest that the Philippines had

ever gotten in ending the decades-old Muslim insurgency in Mindanao. The Conditional Cash Transfer program was expanded, and despite loud and relentless criticisms, Aquino initiated the change of the country's basic education curriculum by adding two more years to secondary education. The Philippines also brought the People's Republic of China to court over territorial disputes in the West Philippine Sea and won.⁴

However, despite the promising showing of the Noynoy Aquino administration in terms of remedying impunity in government and economic performance, the majority of the people remained left out. While the Philippines was being recognized as the new Asian Tiger, the transport crises felt by many Filipinos who move around the city everyday became extreme. Economic growth mostly benefitted the country's wealthiest but did very little to create social safety nets for the poor and the growing middle class. While the pie had indeed gotten bigger, and the poor and the middle class had more money in their pockets, many remained in the crevices of insecurity and precarity. For example, a middle-class family may earn enough to afford more than their basic needs, but a single hospitalization may send them below the poverty line. While the economy grew with the introduction of highly mobile capital, increased foreign direct investments, eco-zones, and other wealth-creating economic activities, the people hardly felt any respite from the anxieties brought about by their precarious jobs and income.⁵

⁴ For an extensive report on the economic legacies of Noynoy Aquino see, JC Punongbayan (2021) “[ANALYSIS] PNoy's Legacy: We Were No Longer the 'Sick Man of Asia'.” Rappler. 30 June. Retrieved from: <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/analysis-pnoy-legacy-we-were-no-longer-sick-man-of-asia>.

⁵ This argument is inspired by a lecture from Herbert Docena for Ateneo de Manila's Department of Sociology and Anthropology Seminar Series on the Web, “Deglobalization, Dissent, and Democracy” held on 10 August 2020. The lecture may be accessible here https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=409143710063471&ref=watch_permalink.



Image: www.nytimes.com

Thus, the outstanding economic growth facilitated by the liberal reformist Aquino government in the first half of the 2010s did nothing to alleviate the growing social anxiety among ordinary Filipinos. This collective anxiety needed a salve — a figure with simple explanations for the deep-seated problems of Philippine society and offering really simple solutions. Thus, an overwhelming number of Filipinos who, only three decades prior ousted a corrupt and murderous dictator, rallied behind a self-confessed murderer from Mindanao.

The Failed EDSA Republic and Democratic Backsliding in the Age of Dutertismo

Pundits and academics have elaborated on the role played by social media and disinformation in Rodrigo Duterte's phenomenal rise to the presidency.⁶ However, the ease in which the political machinery of Duterte and his supporters swayed public opinion toward an erstwhile obscure local

politician from the south ought to be explained. Indeed, the massive popular support garnered by Duterte's presidential bid could not be rationalized by people's gullibility alone. The social anxieties that resulted from an economy that created precarious employment combined with the disillusionment that came with the continued abandonment of the people's welfare and interest could have arguably caused the people's sudden and passionate penchant for Dutertismo. When people's limited prosperity stands on unstable ground, then it is understandable that they would flock around a leader who touts a hard and fast action against enemies who, in their view, exacerbate their insecurities and their utter lack of social mobility. For Duterte, the identified enemies are the drug addicts who endanger communities and perpetrate crimes, and the "yellows" who represent the elitist and oligarchic politics proliferated by the likes of the Liberal Party (Curato 2017).

Duterte and his entire propaganda machinery put words in some long-sitting, silenced, yet constant grievance among many Filipinos who felt trapped in the vicious cycle of establishment politicians playing musical chair in Malacañang.⁷ Rodrigo Duterte's rise to the presidency was because and not in spite of his rhetoric that went against the most fundamental of liberal democratic values like the right to due process of law, gender equality, and the very right to life. Clearly, the victory of Dutertismo was an embodiment of a profound democratic backsliding that occurred in almost similar fashion in many parts of the globe. Duterte, in more ways than one, is the epitome of the failure of the EDSA Republic. This is further proven in the way that the heirs of the dead dictator were able to gloriously return to national politics, with Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., almost clutching the vice presidency in the same presidential election.

⁶ See for example Jonathan Ong and Jason Vincent Cabañes (2018). *Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines*. The Newton Tech4Dev Network.

⁷ Malacañang is the official residence of the President of the Philippines — *the editor*.

At present, the Philippines is experiencing the worst economic recession and one of the world's worst pandemic response. Duterte kept good to his words that drug addicts would be hunted down and extrajudicially killed. Wanting to dodge accountability from the international community, his government withdrew the Philippines from the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2019. In June 2021, ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda sought for authorization to conduct a full-on investigation into crimes against humanity perpetrated by Duterte's administration in connection to the Philippine war on drugs that killed tens of thousands of suspected Filipino drug users.

Duterte's stunning rise to power prompted traditional and elite politicians to jump ship and switch to his party, demonstrating the inept political party system in the Philippines. A supermajority was formed in the legislature. In the 2019 midterm elections, the opposition did not even win a single senatorial seat. This is a feat that not even the dictator Ferdinand Marcos was able to accomplish. In the same vein, Duterte and his cohorts successfully deposed Aquino-appointed Supreme Court Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno. Before this, the influence of the administration on the judiciary was made palpable with the high court's decision to give Marcos a hero's burial, almost three decades after he died in exile. The administration's pivot to China also undid the hard-won battle on the territorial dispute in the West Philippine Sea, thereby compromising the country's sovereignty.

In the past year, critics of the administration lament impunity in government as manifested by quarantine violations committed by top police officers and high-ranking



Image: www.pinterest.ph

politicians despite the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the brazen abuse of power committed by the police against civilians. In the midst of the pandemic that caused widespread death and hunger, the government passed the Anti-Terror Law that targeted activists and dissenters by removing almost every legal protection to the right to free expression and assembly.

All these developments are clear manifestations of how Philippine democracy, once a model for our neighbors and other countries in the Global South, has quickly disintegrated. In the age of Rodrigo Duterte, the legacy of EDSA People Power was not only undone; it was mocked.

The Real Lessons of EDSA

Thus, the most important lesson of EDSA lies, not in the resplendent moment of a united people marching together to regain their freedom in a peaceful and non-

violent manner, but in the aftermath that forces us to revisit unanswered questions on the meaning of democracy and on the ways to preserve it.

In 2008, political scientist and activist Nathan Quimpo described the Philippines as a contested democracy. Indeed, other characterizations of Philippine democracy like cacique democracy or elite democracy, while not necessarily wrong, may sound fatalistic and defeatist. Contested democracy, in contrast, recognizes that despite unrelenting attacks on the Filipino people's political and economic freedoms, the progressive forces of resistance who insist on fighting for the interest of the oppressed, the powerless, and the marginalized have always persevered — even in times of utter desperation, even in moments of serious temptation to choose the easy way, and even on days when it becomes clear that the losses far outnumber the victories.

To choose the easy way may often mean compromising on certain ideas that are not negotiable in exchange for some leeway to influence governance or advance the progressive movement's agenda. It may also mean coalescing with groups and people whose ideologies and interests are counterintuitive to fundamental progressive values of freedom, equality, and social justice. However, the easy way may also take the form of the blanket refusal to question long-held tenets and hide in the comfort that extremism and dogmatism afford.

What is clear from the Philippine experience is that democracy is not won on a single election or in one euphoric moment of revolution. It is won through constant and continuous contestation anchored on a clear, adamant, and uncompromising resolve to protect and uphold the interest of the people that genuine democracy ought to serve. ■

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Image: www.occupy.com

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What I Learned from Transitional Justice Work in Myanmar

By: Ruben Carranza

“My dear doctor, can you make out that we are in this country for any purpose except to steal? The official holds the Burman down while the businessman goes through his pockets.”

— From *Burmese Days* by George Orwell

In 2015, on the eve of a parliamentary election in which the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi (for brevity referred to as AASK in this essay) eventually won a supermajority of seats, I was in Myanmar with my Yangon-based co-workers, waiting for the NLD to respond to our request for a meeting. We introduced ourselves and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)¹ as an international non-government organization that assists governments, activists and victims of human rights violations in designing and implementing transitional justice processes in post-dictatorship and post-conflict countries. Knowing that many who may have heard about it often associate “transitional justice” with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we

preemptively explained that there are many other examples of truth commissions and other transitional justice processes relevant to Myanmar’s experience that NLD-led legislators could study and learn from. We then offered ICTJ’s assistance and expertise to the NLD.

While the older, more senior leader who led the two younger NLD members in the meeting only looked at us quietly after our interpreter conveyed what I had just said, the two younger NLD members were eager to hear more. In so many words, they then asked a question that, to me, any group wanting to promote transitional justice in Myanmar would have had to be ready to answer at that time: “If the NLD wins the election, why should the party pursue accountability instead of reconciliation?”

As this was being written, that question already seems moot. The NLD-led government has been ousted in a coup. Not only has the military retaken power; they have also attacked and killed anti-coup protesters as well as launched offensives in ethnic areas where armed groups opposed to the military have strong support. It might seem pointless to discuss transitional justice in such a dire situation; but in these moments of despair, in the midst of impunity and injustice, reflecting on what transitional justice processes might be possible, and the timing and sequencing of those processes can be helpful. It can help opposition leaders, human rights activists and their advocates outside the country to chart alternative political agendas that include commitments to justice and accountability. It can sustain courage and offer hope to individuals and communities bearing the brunt of opposing fascism in the country.

¹ More information is available at their website: <https://www.ictj.org>.



Image: www.internationalaffairs.org.au

Too Early or Too Late?

One can argue that it is too early to talk about transitional justice in Myanmar. The return to military rule clearly signals the military's unwillingness to allow the continuation of what was already an uneven transition to civilian rule. That the military intend to stay unaccountable and in power is clear from its unleashing of violence against protesters and in ethnic areas. Without space for peaceful protest or even a dialogue with the NLD, many of whose leaders including ASSK have been detained again, there is no prospect for a transition.

On the other hand, while it can never be too late for justice to be pursued after a transition from dictatorship, war or entrenched legacies of injustice, it now seems too late to discuss a transition in Myanmar that involves the participation of the military's leadership. The military's repeated betrayal of the Myanmar people's expectations of a more fair and less violent society makes it an unreliable partner in any transition that might come from an election, peace negotiations or a negotiated sharing of power. For those in the

Global North that keep equating military-organized elections with democratic progress, the 2021 coup may be the evidence they need to fully accept that neither elections nor the NLD winning them are the keys to transition and to transitional justice.

In 2010, the NLD boycotted that year's parliamentary election, arguing that the setting-aside of one-fourth of parliamentary seats to the military under the 2008 constitution along with the disqualification of ASSK from running (*The Guardian* 2010) made the election undemocratic. But five years later, the NLD not only participated in the parliamentary election but won a plurality of seats, enough to elect Myanmar's president and vice-president. Moreover, even if ASSK was still disqualified from running for that election, the NLD exercised its power and made her the *de facto* head of government by creating the position of 'State Counselor.' This suggests that even while the military controlled the state, the NLD possessed some power in government and had an opportunity to propose legislation that could have brought modest forms of justice for limited groups of people.

That is precisely why we suggested that NLD legislators sponsor a reparations law for former political detainees that would offer them healthcare, livelihood, and the restoration of their civil and political rights, including their licenses to practice a profession as well as the right to vote and be candidates in elections. We said that a reparations program could address the immediate needs of groups and communities harmed and devastated by human rights and humanitarian law violations in the country. We emphasized that the law could be designed to focus on victims of human rights violations rather than on their perpetrators, thus avoiding the matter of individual accountability.

In that same 2015 meeting with NLD officials, I said that the party itself deserves reparations. I mentioned the example of reparations given to the legal leftwing *Union Patriota* (UP) party in Colombia. *Union Patriota* participated in elections while peace talks were going on between the state and leftwing rebels. Soon after winning a number of elective positions, over 4,000 UP members were killed in what has come to be



Image: www.civicus.org

described by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights as 'political genocide' (Justice for Colombia 2018). In 2012, Colombia's state reparations agency offered reparations to the party and the families of UP members and officials who were injured or killed in this period, including access to housing, healthcare and rehabilitation as well as guarantees of secure participation in elections. I recall what the senior NLD official said in response: the party does not need symbolic reparations.

There are different and many arguably good reasons why the NLD would not want to recognize itself as a "victim" entitled to reparations. It could be regarded as self-serving. It may be perceived as a precursor for the NLD to go after the military for abuses against reparations-seeking party members — a perception the NLD has tried to avoid. But what reason could there be to not even try to help those who are *not* NLD members (or even those who are) who continue to suffer the consequences of

prolonged detention, torture or the deaths of their ex-political prisoner family members? There are two notions that may explain this reluctance. The first is the erroneous notion that the main goal of transitional justice is revenge, carried out through criminal prosecution. The second is the notion that reconciliation and forgiveness are so important in transitional justice that they are seen as starting points rather than its possible outcomes. In 1990, after the NLD's landslide victory in the first multi-party elections after decades of military rule, the notion of transitional justice as punishment was articulated by a ranking NLD official: "NLD Spokesman U Kyi Maung, flushed with the NLD's landslide election victory, observed to [a foreign journalist] (that) in actual fact, how many Germans stood trial at Nuremberg? The (junta) saw the writing on the wall. They knew what awaited them when power had been transferred. They were now unlikely to let this happen" (Tonkin 2007: 42).

On the other hand, the notion of transitional justice as principally about forgiveness as a way to reconciliation was declared by ASSK herself: "Whatever mistake [military dictatorship officials] have made in the past, we need to give them the chance to change, instead of seeking revenge" (Mann 2015). With the 2021 coup, the luxury of giving the military a "chance to change" and to reassure them that transitional justice is not about "seeking revenge" may have passed. But while it may be too early to go beyond reflecting on transitional justice and to implement specific transitional justice processes, it is never too late to start thinking about the design, timing and sequencing of those processes in anticipation of the opportunities to implement them.

Privileging Prosecution Can Be as Unproductive as Prioritizing Reconciliation

To help different stakeholders understand that transitional justice is broader than prosecuting human rights abusers and can be calibrated so that it can be politically feasible, practical and helpful, we held several workshops with the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners in Burma (AAPP-Burma), the Former Political Prisoners Society (FPPS) and with human rights activists from the country's different ethnic areas. In these activities, there was a clear concern that any move to seek justice from the government no matter how limited or modest — such as reparations in the form of healthcare — could still provoke a repressive military response. At the same time, there was a view among some AAPP and FPPS members that it would be worth the risk to prioritize the most vulnerable former and current political detainees, particularly those who are old, sick or whose families are desperately in need of economic

support. Part of the workshop's outcome was to calibrate the way reparations could be sought, designed *and* implemented to minimize those risks. But this back-and-forth over whether there ought to be an attempt to enact a reparations law was dependent on whether NLD legislators, many of them former political detainees themselves, were willing to take action. They were not. In the end, while the NLD was in power, the main action it took was something that military rulers had already been doing in the past: granting piece-meal amnesties to small groups of prisoners (Tun 2016).

There are victims' needs that cannot wait for a full transition. This is the reason why the UN General Assembly in 2005 declared that "a person shall be considered a victim regardless of whether the perpetrator of the violation is identified, apprehended, prosecuted, or convicted."² One lesson from this experience is that stakeholders such as victims' organizations, student groups and even younger NLD members must step up and take initiatives directly.

The Arab Spring and the transitions that followed it showed that when young people realize that their political and economic futures are at stake, they will reject the reactionary attitudes of old political elites and create conditions for a transition and the possibility of transitional justice (Carranza and Zouari 2020).

In Myanmar, it has not helped that many Global North governments, "international justice" groups and the corporate news media were singularly focused on the displacement and killing of the Rohingya people in a way that made criminal prosecution [and trials in the Global North] seem as if it was the only form of justice that could be done. Furthermore, and as Carmen Cheung has pointed out, in narrowing prosecutions to only those crimes committed against the Rohingya, "the international justice community effectively ignored the serious crimes committed against other ethnic groups (and) exacerbated ethnic and social divisions in a dismal — if unwitting — echo of colonial-era divide-and-rule tactics" (2021).

The 2021 coup and the military's subsequent unleashing of violence against both peaceful protesters and ethnic communities now show that neither the judgment of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or the prospect of an International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation will deter the military from committing even more human rights violations. As I have written elsewhere, "while punishing perpetrators of human rights violations is important, it is not the only or often even the most necessary form of justice for the victims who suffered loss, pain, or economic and social harm during a war or under dictatorship" (2020).

At the same time, prioritizing reconciliation, to the point of ASSK essentially defending the military's conduct against the Rohingya at the ICJ has also clearly been unhelpful (UN News 2019). It certainly did not stop the military from overthrowing the NLD-led government.

Image: www.japantimes.co.jp



²A copy of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 60/147 of 16 December 2005 can accessed through this site: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/remedyandreparation.aspx>.

An Inclusive Transitional Justice Agenda and Alternative to Dictatorship

One initiative that has stood out is the creation of a National Unity Government (NUG) by almost all groups that have resisted the military.³ Bringing together the NLD leadership and the leaders of many ethnic armed groups, parties and independent political formations is, in itself, a historic accomplishment. But creating the NUG is also a symbolically significant way of confronting the military's predominant concern and often-invoked excuse for taking and re-taking power — the preservation of the post-colonial state that was created through the union of Myanmar's different ethnic groups (Jones 2014). The NUG can and should show that preserving Myanmar's unity and territorial integrity does not call for violating human rights, committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. But it must also show that a democratic and just government in Myanmar understands the economic and social grievances that led to the 1988 revolution and to even older ethnic conflicts. It should commit to providing the youth and poor citizens access to education and employment opportunities. It should be committed in ending land confiscations, forced displacement and large-scale corruption through military-owned businesses. In other words, the NUG must already show exactly how it is an alternative to the military government, and its transitional justice agenda must be inclusive and go beyond what the NLD has already been reluctant to do.

It is important for the NUG to show that it is the inclusive alternative to dictatorship because even as this is being written, “there are legitimate



Image: www.japantimes.co.jp

questions about (the) representative nature” of the NUG being raised, including its views on justice for the Rohingya (Khant and Camroux 2021). The NUG should show that its transitional justice agenda can do better than the NLD's overcautious, reconciliation-driven approach, and that it will reconsider the viability of ceasefires that do not provide opportunities for peace with justice. One way the NUG can do these is by supporting civil society initiatives and allowing younger activists, including those that belong to non-NLD groups and ethnic organizations, to explore what transitional justice means to them. This may not be something easily accepted by the NLD. As my ICTJ colleague Anna Myriam Roccatello points out: “The analysis of Suu Kyi as a leader did not accurately assess her ability to

represent civil society that is not directly aligned with the NLD agenda. And that is even more true for civil society representatives of ethnic minority groups, who have aspirations of decentralization, if not federalism. I think we all lacked a deep understanding of her way of operating as a leader” (McCann and Roccatello 2017).

In fact, there have been specific transitional justice processes done in Myanmar, all led by civil society. The All-Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), a former armed group, conducted a truth-seeking process involving abuses committed twenty years earlier within its own ranks. My former ICTJ colleague Patrick Pierce, who provided advise for that process, suggests that it was a way of showing an NLD-led government

³ For more information on Myanmar's National Unity Government, its website is available at <https://www.nugmyanmar.org/en/>.

what truth-seeking could be. He has also pointed to the holding of “public commemorations of past violence,” such as those memorializing prison strikes by political detainees, and how these had “at least tacit official approval” (Pierce and Reiger 2014). What would have been gained had there been a government that understood the value of more explicit support for these initiatives? We will not know now because the NLD never made that effort. That should be a lesson for any future post-dictatorship government or even for the NUG. Roccatello notes that recent steps coming from NUG-linked opposition parliamentarians “represent a new approach to social and political cohesion in Myanmar based on upholding fundamental human rights and freedoms, equality, justice, and self-determination. But it is unclear if or how (this approach) would redress past injustices” (Roccatello 2021).

In some cases, Global North governments, UN agencies and international human rights groups often prioritize more recent episodes of repression and violence in calling for justice and accountability. In a 2015 ICTJ podcast, I noted “the difficulty of talking openly and optimistically about justice, reform, and accountability in Myanmar (given the persistence) of the country’s most pressing justice issues: the lack of reparations for freed political prisoners, land confiscation, human rights violations against ethnic minorities, and the military’s continuing hold on power” (ICTJ 2015). Longer-term but persistent injustices including those that lead to protests or even armed conflict are as important to pay attention to as current crackdowns on dissent.

Even now, the NUG should explore how signaling support for transitional justice can reinforce its

legitimacy. One step can be offering symbolic apologies for their own failure to curb violence against those belonging to other religious or ethnic communities. The NUG can also commit that once in power, it will free *all* political detainees, including those charged for belonging to or supporting ethnic armed groups who are otherwise not the most responsible for war crimes or crimes against humanity. The fundamental importance of addressing the grievances of ethnic communities in a post-dictatorship transitional justice agenda cannot be overemphasized. According to Lee Jones, the “centre-periphery conflict has been endemic in Burma since it gained independence in 1948.” He adds that Bamar-majority nationalists led by ASSK’s father “sought rapid decolonization (while) the minorities feared losing their autonomy within a unitary, Bamar-dominated state.” Many of the violations in the ethnic areas are of a collective economic and social character and are often driven by the relationship between foreign capital and military-owned businesses. Jones implicates both the military *and* local elites, in this relationship:

“First, the regime initiated joint ventures with local elites to exploit the borderlands’ natural resources, notably in logging, mining, and agriculture, helping the regime to expand its military, administrative and economic reach into areas of the country where it previously had little or none. The army and ceasefire groups’ militias guarded these operations, whilst local elites brokered transboundary investments via black market contacts. Foreign trade and overseas investment were again critical in enabling this strategy. Two-thirds of foreign investment went to just three resource-rich minority states” (Jones 2014: 793).

The question then is whether the NUG can be an alternative, not only to military dictatorship but, with respect to questions of transitional justice, an alternative to how the NLD understood, let alone dealt with these grievances. The NUG is likely to propose a new constitution, one that might finally remove the built-in veto power as well as impunity of the military. It should go beyond that. Through the constitution and other institutional reform measures, it must go beyond recycling the reliance on elections as a measure of popular democratic participation. Guarantees of human rights must likewise go beyond individual civil and political rights and political representation in parliament. Constitutional guarantees should include economic, social and cultural rights, and acknowledge and commit to repairing the legacy of inequality that British colonization institutionalized in the post-colonial state. This will build a broader foundation for transitional justice and can help sustain guarantees of non-recurrence over time.

Tshepo Madlingozi, has commented on debates over whether to keep or change South Africa’s post-apartheid constitution and whether it allows the state to take over land that was never redistributed *after* apartheid and after transitional justice processes like the Truth Commission had been carried out. He argues quite strongly that it isn’t enough to ‘reform’ a constitution by “looking forward.” In a country divided by identity and race, he says, the constitution must also look backward and acknowledge the fundamental injustices that it seeks to change:

“A decolonizing constitution is bifocal in the sense of being both backward-looking and forward looking. It looks back and clearly names the past it denounces and endeavours to break from. It is



Image: www.ituc-csi.org

forward-looking by laying a framework for a post-segregationist and all-inclusive future in which all citizens would attain a sense of affective and material belongingness. First, the earliest clue that the drafters of the South African constitution do not pretend to pursue a decolonising agenda can be seen in the fact the word "Apartheid," let alone "colonialism," does not appear in the entire text of the constitution. It is thus not clear what past this constitution seeks to constitute a rupture from" (2018).

Let the New Generation Decide Issues of Justice and Reconciliation

Reconciliation between and among the different ethnic, religious, and other identity groups in Myanmar should not be conflated with 'reconciliation' between the military leadership and the victims of human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The former Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar Tomas Quintana

emphasized that "moving forward or forgiveness cannot ignore or whitewash the past." The government, he said, "should therefore demonstrate its willingness and commitment to address the issue of truth, justice and accountability" (UNHRC 2012: 17).

But as that meeting I had with the senior NLD leader and his younger colleagues suggests, it might take a new generation of Myanmar leaders to take justice and accountability seriously. The coup and its aftermath seem to have made this more likely. As a young Gen Z activist from Myanmar wrote: "Among (his) generation's leadership, there has been an unprecedented level of political awareness (of) why the different ethnic nationalities have been struggling for decades for a more democratic society in a federal political framework (and) the collective acceptance among the various political forces that Myanmar's military is the chief barrier to peace and stability in the country" (Sapi 2021).

Whether it will be the younger activists or the still revered senior leaders who will eventually decide how to deal with the root causes of conflict and fascism in Myanmar, those who will set the transitional justice agenda should not repeat the obvious mistakes of the past, including those made by their most revered leaders like AASK. A reminder from Aung San, Suu Kyi's father may be an apt way to end this essay, from a speech he gave in 1945, to the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) that he headed: "We cannot bank our hopes on possibilities. We must put our trust in ourselves, in our capabilities and efforts and strength and preparations not only for our success but even to avoid our own defeat." ■

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