

An Ethnic Perspective on Myanmar Democratic Transition and Sanction

Paper from All Mon-region Democracy Party (AMDP)

Democratization:

Democratization has its preconditions and these conditions vary from (as Samuel P. Huntington classified it) wave to wave of democratization. During first wave of democratization, when most of developed western countries transformed their societies into democratic ones, they did have preconditions; 1) developed economy which generates independent middle class, 2) independently motivating civil society and, 3) democratic culture where conflicts and problem are resolved under systematic institutions through compromises and negotiations. As a third world country, Myanmar doesn't have those preconditions: least developed country with crony dominated economy, so called civil society under massive constraint and counteract political culture always both side try to eradicate the other. Hence we believe Myanmar needs a transitional process to transform its society into a democratic one.

There are two different approaches of Democratization agreed among the scholars: Regime Change and Society Change. A study based on "Third Wave democratic transitions" several countries started off from Portugal in 1974 said democracy in any country failed to achieve society change together with regime change can last only 10 years in average.

Although Burma/Myanmar's 1988 general uprising made every effort for the regime change, because of then the leadership of country wide mass movement failed to bring the street politics to table dialogues, the mass movement didn't get what it aimed at. The movement even lost a chance to transform its society through "*pacted transition*" in which then the ruling regime and the opposition could get ahead of together. Again, Myanmar is now undergoing a political transition process from the rule of martial law to quasi-parliamentary governance. But this time, it is through an "*imposed transition*" where all stakeholders are obliged to go through the given framework imposed by the ruling regime. As a result, it is impossible to reach the regime change at the moment but there are opportunities (may be the *inconvenient* ones) to grasp for the society change. That is one of the reasons why we are participating in this military initiated transition process.

The aims also include survival of residual political forces of the Mon people after political status of armed groups and legal opposition groups destabilized. The civil war between then the ruling democratic government and Mon political groups broke out after 8 months of the country gained its independent back from British rule in 1948. Since then Mon people have to bear burdens of war imposed by successive ruling governments and regimes. They lost their identity, family lives, business, livelihood and their socio-economic situation lagging behind their neighbouring communities. Therefore, whatever the space may come up and whether it will be a petite or small, we strongly believe that we must grasp this upcoming *inconvenient* opportunities for the cause of our own people who have been being ignored under burden of more than half a century long civil war, agonizing political pressures and cruel economic exploitation.

The sanction dilemma:

Our understanding on the sanction imposed on Burma/Myanmar is as one of the approaches to punish suppressive regime and aimed at eventual regime change. Debates on the impact and effect of sanction become more and more intensified these days. We will not touch on the pros and cons of the sanction debates but we would like to express that both the government and ordinary people are affected by the sanction. Though it is not a matter for the government and its cronies, it is really a survival problem for the poor and the marginalised masses particularly ethnic people living in remote areas.

On the other hand, sanction is restraining the country's economic development which is leading to a constraint for the formation of independent middle class who are important driving force for democratization. It is also constraining development of independently motivated civil society and set up of democratic culture. Sanction also neglects ethnic communities who are already suppressed and neglected by successive ruling regimes.

As part of the country's democratization process in pursuing society change, we utterly need *soft powers* for State building. Technology and knowhow, human resources, management, good

governance, information and knowledge about markets, business, banking, institutions, etc.. and experiences about economic and political reform are sort of soft powers we need absolutely. Swift developments of post Second World War Japan, 1970s to 1980s Asia Tigers and 2000s India, China and Vietnam were mainly derived by those western standard soft powers and experiences. In our case, sanction is a major blockage in gaining those soft powers from the developed western world. Under the current sanction, we lost all opportunities to learn the experiences and getting those powers along with FDIs that should help us resurrecting from a war-torn society. We cannot understand that why we are under western sanction while regimes in China and Vietnam are enjoying these helps and supports from the West.

On the other hand, there may be argument that we can get those soft powers from neighbouring countries. Practically we are getting only secondary experiences from most of them, for instance, one can easily compare Total's responsive corporate culture and that of China's oil and gas companies. We cannot get those experiences and soft powers with its original virtue, norms and standard of western world from China, India and ASEAN neighbours. Those neighbouring countries may help and support economic development but will not be to the State building. Ruling regime and its cronies will benefit from this but this will not contribute to our struggle for society change.

After 2008/2009 global financial crisis, China has become an economic power and there also a new trend of globalization process alternative to western trend, China Drive Globalization. Although Western Drive Globalization comprise with IT, Market Economy and Liberal Democracy, the third segment does not include in China Drive one. It focuses only on IT and Market Economy but omitted Liberal Democracy where hidden promises for people lie. By following and team up with China, we can get economic development at most and will far away from the hidden promises of Liberal Democracy. If Burma/Myanmar have to make a way out of western sanction on its own, then it will automatically plunge itself into China Orbit where we cannot expect society change. The ruling regime will benefit from this and survive but the people will be far, far away from democratic society.

Hence, here by, we, an ethnic political party, request to all EU countries to rethink the sanction imposed on Burma/Myanmar and lift it for the country's democratic transition and for the cause of vulnerable innocent people.

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