

Global Overview and Myanmar Democratic Transition

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Myanmar transition since 2010 is praised as “Myanmar spring” by the international media due to its smooth democratization process. The 2015 post election of Myanmar is again praised by the international community for two factors: one is free and fair election which is one of the core values of democracy and another is peaceful transfer of power from semi-civilian government to elected civilian government. Myanmar democratic transition is now on her way and democratic consolidation is necessary for the completed transition. In the global agenda, the past two decades have witnessed the most remarkable development toward democracy, which has been referred to as third wave of democratization. Since then, democracy replaced the military or “quasi-civilian” regimes. It is an opportunity for Myanmar today to learn from the global trends of democratic transition.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, trends in seven different regions converged to change the political landscape of the world: the fall of right-wing authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe in the mid-1970s, the replacement of military dictatorship by elected civilian governments across Latin American from late 1970s to late 1980s, the decline of authoritarian rule in parts of East and South Asia starting in the mid-1980s, the collapse of the communist regime in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1900s, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the post-Soviet republics in 1991, the decline of one-party regimes in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa in the first half of the 1990s and a weak but recognize liberalizing trend in some Middle East countries in the 1990s. Despite these regional democratic trends, some countries continue to be beset by unstable parliamentary institutions, weak rule of law, and inchoate systems of political representation, chronic corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a lack of social justice.

According to Human Rights Watch data in 2006, more than hundred countries (121) in the world are democracy and among them, 78 are liberal democracy and the rest can be labeled as electoral democracy. Though Myanmar is yet to be a liberal democracy (long way with challenges to reach there), Myanmar can be listed in electoral democracy. In spite of the political development, asserting civilian control of the armed forces remains high on the political agenda in many emerging democracies. The book on “ Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation” written by Professor Juan J. Linz (Yale University) and Professor Alfred Stepan (the first rector and president of the Central European University) is a magisterial book that represents to understand democratic broke down, transition and consolidation. The authors highlighted the five areas that are necessary for the consolidation democracy— civil society, political society, rule of law, state bureaucracy and economic society. The book aspires to cover 15 contemporary countries stretching across three areas: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe. The book is contributive for all the democratic countries that are on their way to completed transition and to consolidation. This article would like to borrow the above-mentioned five areas as a case study on Myanmar. First let us look the civil society. The civil society can include manifold social movements such as women’s groups, religious groupings and intellectual organizations and civic associations from all social strata such as trade unions, entrepreneurial groups, journalists or lawyers. In case of Myanmar, all these groups have been freely formed since transition and are allowed to have free movement and free assembly if their activities do not damage the internal security. Myanmar has given more space for the civil society under this government and the fruitful contribution of civil society can be seen in Myanmar’s general election and peace making process.

The second condition for the consolidated democracy is the role of political society. It is to contest the legitimate right to exercise control over

public power. A full democratic transition and democratic consolidation must involve political society. Myanmar already has the institutions of democratic political society- political parties, elections, electoral rules, political leadership and legislature. However, to be efficient and effective, these institutions still need to work hard.

To achieve a consolidated democracy, the necessary degree of autonomy and independence of civil and political society must further be embedded in and supported by the rule of law. Modern democracy needs the effective capacity to command, regulate and extract. For this, Myanmar needs a functioning state and a state bureaucracy considered usable by the new democratic government. As the rule of law is weak, Myanmar requires an independent judicial system and supported by a strong legal culture in civil society. Myanmar can also learn from the Indonesian model of reforms such as Ministry of Home Affairs, transferred from military to the civilian control.

With regard to state bureaucracy, modern democracy needs the effective capacity to command, regulate and extract. For this, it needs a functioning state and a state bureaucracy considered usable by the new democratic government. The final supportive for a consolidation of democracy concerns the economic society that mediates between state and market. Market requires corporation laws, the regulation of stock market, and protection of property both public and private. Democratic consolidation requires the institutionalization of a socially and politically regulated market. This requires an economic society, which in turn requires an effective state.

Besides these five areas, civil-military relations are an important area for the consolidation of democracy. There are several theories of civil-military relations. The general understanding of civil-military relations is the civilian control over military in five decision-making areas: elite recruitment, public policy, military organization, internal security and national defense. Whatever the theories are, the best-suited paradigm for Myanmar in this current situation

is the civil-military partnership (CMP), which means neither military control over civilian nor civilian control over military in security related sectors. The possible way to construct the CMP in Myanmar is both civilian and military can cooperate in the needs of non-traditional security areas such as economic security, environmental security, health security, maritime security, etc. The Ministry of Information will host international forum on “Myanmar Democratic Transition” in Nay Pyi Taw this week. Several distinguished speakers and experts in this field from both local and international will participate and exchange their view on Myanmar democratic transition. The forum will be conducted with interesting sessions such as -political transition from military to civilian, economic transition from central command to market economy, the transition from war to peace and the role of media in transition etc. It is hopeful that the forum will contribute to Myanmar’s democratic transition and will find constructive ways for democratic consolidation.

References:

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