

It Ain't Over Till It's Over

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It goes without saying that anyone who doesn't wish for a smooth and peaceful transition in Burma needs their head examined. But that is obviously the best case scenario. When all the window dressing and fanfare are seen for what they are the so called progress made in the peace process as well as the transfer of power to the democratically elected government to be formed by the NLD with an undeniably clear mandate is pretty thin on the ground.

Peace negotiations presided over by the Myanmar Peace Centre and supposedly the prized project of the outgoing President with international assistance have plodded on for three years with no end in sight. They are deemed exclusionary by civil society organisations for the lack of any meaningful participation of those community groups as well as the glaring absence of the armed groups that did not sign the so called Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).

Even the current ceasefire agreements have proved to be hardly binding and in practice subject to the strategic aims and whims of the military which has shown no qualms in violating them at will. Meanwhile fierce fighting rages north, east and west in the country with whole communities destroyed and displaced.

At least the new government will be taking shape in April and it is presumably fully aware of its limits to executive power enshrined in the Constitution which it will seek to amend with the explicit aim of anointing its rightful leader as president. Besides top level meetings behind closed doors power sharing with the military which is the real outcome of the election victory means that the Lady is taking great care not to rock the boat. The term 'landslide victory' has acquired a whole new meaning in the Burmese context.

Popular struggle of farmers, workers and students on the other hand carries on unabated in the extra-parliamentary arena, with state repression now dressed up as 'rule of law', just as robber baron style land confiscations, poor pay and working conditions, and a retrogressive straitjacket of an education system continue to prevail.

What is taking shape has been likened to the old diarchy rule proposed by the colonial masters and completely rejected by the people at the time. Only the element of continued foreign rule is now replaced by continued military rule so it is no longer black and white as in colonial rule but much the same in its nature. The establishment over the last two decades of the crony business class and the military businesses led by the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (established in 1990) and the Myanmar Economic Corporation (established in 1997), not just individual family businesses of generals and former generals, underpins the emergence of this new governance.

Western governments as true representatives of international capital welcome the opening up of the economy and were instrumental in channelling both the generals and the Lady down this particular 'road map', evidently a 'national reconciliation' that suits their own purpose. They have had to wait patiently and work to this end for decades unlike Asian governments and businesses since the Burmese military junta's crimes against humanity, not necessarily authoritarian rule or human rights violations if China is any guide, were just too public and horrendous to dismiss and carry on business as if nothing happened.

If politics is the art of the possible and compromise the art of government, in the coming tug of war where one party completely dominates and control not only the entire security apparatus but the bureaucratic machine of civil administration, which side will have to make most of the compromising is not difficult to see. However it remains highly debatable in this scenario if the new government will be able to move the country forward and fulfill their electoral promise of radical change that won them the popular mandate. Until the military yoke is completely overthrown by people power and the army finally and actually returns to the barracks, the vast majority of the peoples of Burma will likely be left out as usual in reaping the rewards of this marriage of convenience between the elites.

References:

[1][Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi avoids 'rocking boat' with military ahead of handover](#)

[2][The Lady and the Generals](#)

[3][Suu Kyi's surprise attendance seen as boost for Myanmar peace talks](#)

[4]<http://www.irrawaddy.com/interview/dateline-irrawaddy/104715.html>