

It is popular today to say that Burmese civil society can be built without a struggle despite the present environment created and controlled by a military regime to ensure that people live according to their rules.

It is popular today to talk of engaging the regime which itself has refused to engage with the political party that won the last election and for whom meaningful engagement comes in twenty minute pseudo meetings with UN envoys.

It is also popular to suggest that foreign aid could open the door to a new society in Burma, even after those with bountiful aid for the disaster stricken delta after Cyclone Nargis were rejected and refused. Such views are popular among some intellectuals, a few political and NGO elites, and a few business people. It is the rhetoric of those who make up a "third force" in today's political culture.

Burma fatigue has set in for sections of the international community, and the third force has exploited the fatigue and frustrations. It offers the image of a slowly built civil society bringing gradual change to Burma. They lobby the international community to engage with the regime, to lift sanctions which they say are the cause of the poverty of the Burmese people and not the regime, and they challenge and discredit the strategies and principles of the pro-democracy movement.

When the National League for Democracy (NLD) was officially banned by the regime, the third force suggested that the entire political program of the opposition should be abandoned, and that civil society should fill the void in collaboration with the state. A prominent exiled activist who shared some of these views publicly said that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD were history.

Perhaps this third force is actually competing for the position that the NLD and Suu Kyi hold instead of focusing on civil society building on the ground.

The process of building civil society is indeed part of the struggle for a democratic society and everyone supports it. Civil society will not just suddenly appear, like ordering lunch. It grows out

of the struggle of the people, from their social and political actions, from their blood, from their sweat, from their years in prisons.

The third force seems to suggest that a civil society can be built by surrendering the principles and aspirations of the democracy movement. What kind of civil society will that build? No doubt, one similar to that breeding in the corridors of the power in Naypyidaw.

They discredit Suu Kyi, a symbol of the resistance against injustice not only in our society but around the world, a democratic symbol because she lives by her principles and would build a nation that could live in dignity with a true civil society. She should be the ideal for our sons and daughters, just as we value her father and our independence heroes.

Our young people, from different ethnic nationalities, from different social backgrounds, our young people who migrate to neighboring countries to support their families and communities, get strength and inspiration from Suu Kyi. They all know that she represents truth, justice and peace.

Some people might think that I don't respect different views. I simply believe that our young people need role models who inspire and guide, role models who have kept alive the candle of social justice, even in the darkest times.

If our young people are only offered the 2008 Constitution, the military style elections and the regime's "road map" to democracy as the only way to achieve social justice, our future will be as grim as our current situation. Such a course would only serve the regime by creating an oligarchy and a new elite class which the regime is now working to install in our society to continue patronizing our people in the future.

It's surprising and absurd that this third force, which also includes a handful of prominent exiles, spends its time and energy building an opposition against the opposition inside Burma. Most surprisingly, they have friends in Western democracies.

Apparently, the opposition movement to the pro-democracy opposition is gaining a voice and

the challenges ahead for Suu Kyi and NLD members involve not only the regime but also this third force. But NLD members will rise to the challenge, and it will only strengthen their work.

The people of Burma chose their leaders in the 1990 elections; they will choose their leaders in the future, way or another. They have reaffirmed their desired leadership several times already, most recently in the 2007 demonstrations. They will find their own way to reaffirm it again.

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