

Burma's 'living hell' shows no signs of ending.

As a Burmese, I want and hope for a better, freer Burma. But as an analyst, I see no sign on the ground that warrants any optimism about the country's future.

The overall picture looks extremely bleak. I disagree with the positive spin from some expert quarters about how the elections are going to create a more progressive system of governance with the political involvement of civilians.

Unable to break free from their fascist ideological and institutional roots, the military and its leadership will profit from and defend their semi-feudal rule, unresponsive to people's needs, concerns and aspirations.

Meanwhile, the officialdom will further morph into a kleptocracy—unless some “young Turks” emerge from within to decisively challenge the tyranny.

Consequently, the economy will remain in a shambles. The predatory state will continue to suck everything of value out of the country for short-term, narrow gains, without making any real investment in people or communities.

The rise in revenues from the sale of gas and other natural resources, which fatten the generals' wallets, will inversely correspond to the accelerated impoverishment of the country. The public will continue to live within the classic “natural resource curse” framework, paying an enormous ecological price for the regime's environmental mismanagement.

As the education, public health and social welfare systems have become categorically dysfunctional, in spite of their quantitative expansion, the sharp decline in the quality of Burma's human resources, military and civilian, will accelerate.

More Burmese will emigrate to greener pastures where many will survive in menial conditions. With several million migrant workers in the region, a half-million internally displaced persons and about 150,000 registered refugees on foreign soil, the country is already a living hell on

earth.

Some major cease-fires will be broken and an ensuing new cycle of violence will spill beyond the border areas, increasing both domestic and regional instability.

The humanitarian industry, human rights mafia, development consultants, journalists and inexperienced diplomats will find Burma a lucrative career opportunity.

The unmoved world will look on while the global extractive industry and Burma's neighbors carry on with their gang-rape of the country.

Because Burma will remain a low or no-priority issue for Western powers, they will continue to voice their typical liberal concerns while doing nothing substantial toward systemic change.

The Burmese people—dissidents and ordinary citizens alike—will not give up their struggle for change, in spite of everything.

Predominantly Buddhists, they keep their faith in impermanence, including that of the regime in power.

*Dr. Zarni founded the Free Burma Coalition. He is a Research Fellow on Burma at the Centre for the Study of Global Governance, the London School of Economics and Political Science.*