

## CHAPTER 3

### MYANMAR DEMOCRATIZATION

Myanmar, internationally known as the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is a sovereign state located in Southeast Asia. Myanmar has some borders with several states such as Thailand, Bangladesh, Laos, China, and India. In the previous era, this country has Yangon as its Capital city. However, in 2006, the government announced the changing of Myanmar capital city into Nay Pyi Taw. Myanmar has been struggling for its democratization since the implementation of the new constitution in 1974 and the establishment of democratic political party in 1989. Today, this country is one of the members of Association Southeast Asian Nation, a Regional Intergovernmental Organization in Southeast Asia, Myanmar has been joining ASEAN since 1997.

Table 3.1

Myanmar Map<sup>43</sup>



<sup>43</sup> <http://www.asiafastfacts.com/images/fastfacts-myanmar-burma.jpg>

In this chapter the writer will highlight the Myanmar's timeline of democratization which will be explained by dividing the timeline into two sub chapters; Myanmar after its independence and Myanmar after joining ASEAN.

#### **A. Myanmar's Political Condition After Independent**

Myanmar is a country led by military regime since 1962. When the Army Chief of Staff, General Gen Ne Win, did military coup to take the country which was led by U Nu. There was no doubt that the military leader in Southeast Asia at that time growth as influential power with their strong ideology in their own country. It happened in several states in Southeast Asia in general, such as Indonesia in which its military influence was really powerful in politics.

After doing a coup, Ne Win established a policy which was known as "Burmese Way to Socialism". This policy aimed to nationalize economy, establishing the single political party and banning the private media in Myanmar.<sup>44</sup> This ideology has been known as the army effort in formulating an ideology in order to unite and lead the people that the structure of the political party in Myanmar in dividing condition.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> BBC News Asia. (n.d.). *Myanmar Profile A Chronology of Key Events*. Retrieved August, 2014, from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12992883>

<sup>45</sup> Von Der Mehden, F. R. (2007). The Burmese Way to Socialism. *Asian Survey*, 3(3), 129-135. Retrieved August, 2014, from <http://bazanlin.files.wordpress.com/2007/07/the-burmese-way-to-socialism.pdf>

## 1. The Establishment of New Constitution and Demonstration Protest in Myanmar

In 1974, Myanmar was going to implement the new constitution which transferred the army power in leading the country into people assembly like the other democracy states. People assembly here as the representative of Myanmar's society, even military still powerful in the legislative arena. At that time, the transferring of power into people assembly was headed by Ne Win.<sup>46</sup>

In the new constitution, some principles indicate Myanmar as a socialist state, in term of goal of state and economic. On the other hand, the new constitution also states that the basis of the State structure are social democracy and the rights for the people to elect and to be elected in the election as the people representative.<sup>47</sup> The new constitution of 1974 was the first step for Myanmar in moving forward to democracy which affected the democracy movement in Myanmar. It was the democracy movement which was led by the minority group who was against the Junta Military Regime by mounted insurgency. It has been known as the Opposition National Democratic Front.<sup>48</sup>

In 1981, the presidency of Myanmar was changed from Ne Win into San Yu, a retired general. Although Ne Win was not longer the president of Myanmar, his power was still strong in Myanmar politics. He became a chairman of ruling

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<sup>46</sup> Op cit, BBC News Asia.

<sup>47</sup> The Constitution of The Union of Burma (1974). Chapter II: Basic Principles. Retrieved August, 2014, from <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs07/1974Constitution.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Op cit, BBC News Asia.

Socialist Program Party.<sup>49</sup> It indicated how powerful military regime in controlling politic issues in Myanmar government.

Six years after San Yu controlled the government of Myanmar, The government could not maintain the economic stability which affected the devaluation of Myanmar currency. As the impact, the people turned down to the road as their dissatisfaction to the government and the riot could not be intercepted.<sup>50</sup>

## **2. The Establishment of Democratic Political Party and Myanmar Election in 1990**

One of people groups besides ONDF which was against the Junta Military regime in the government was National League for Democracy. NLD was different with ONDF. This movement tends to struggle the government of Myanmar through political ideology which attempted to spread the idea of democracy as the fundamental way to resolve the domestic problem such as human rights violation toward people and put the people into power. Even Myanmar has people of representative institution as the assumption that the peoples have taken power in the country, the legislative is still controled by Military regime because of one political party system which was implemented since Ne win's regime. This condition was actually what NLD wanted to change. The legislative supported the Junta Military because most of parliament members were the retired military army.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

National League for Democracy was formed by Aung San Suu Kyi in 1989. Suu Kyi is the daughter of Aung San. He is the Burmese hero who struggled for Burmese independent in 1947. Suu Kyi and her colleagues of their party fought the government and decided to participate in Myanmar election in 1990. As the impact of the government under SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council), Suu Kyi and her colleague restricted in doing campaign for the election. Besides Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest, this showed how undemocratic the government at that time. Surprisingly, the result of election showed that NLD won the election for 80% voted for parliamentary seat.<sup>51</sup> This result made the military regime dissatisfied with the election and refused the result of vote and kept Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. Although she was under house arrest, she won the Noble Peace Prize as she was considered to be an aspiration for her campaign leading for democratic change in 1991.<sup>52</sup> The winning of NLD in the election in 1990 had shown Myanmar people desires of democracy.

Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest for six years. Suu Kyi and her colleagues were released from house arrest in 1995. They tried to hold a NLD congress. This congress became the first congress for NLD since it was established in 1989. Finally, in 1996, they succeeded to hold the first NLD congress.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Pletcher, K. (2014, February 3). *Aung San Suu Kyi*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved August, 2014, from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/43227/Aung-Suu-Kyi#ref64491>

<sup>52</sup> *Republic of the union of myanmar (burma)* (2014). . Provo: ProQuest and Brigham Young University ProQuest and Brigham Young University CultureGrams. Retrieved August, 2014, from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1499887705?accountid=38628>

<sup>53</sup> Op cit, BBC News Asia.

## B. Myanmar's Political Condition After Joining ASEAN

Myanmar has joined ASEAN in 1997. ASEAN as the Intergovernmental Organization in South East Asia has the interest to reform Myanmar because Myanmar has many human rights violation within it. Besides Myanmar is in process to hold democracy, it can be seen NLD won the 1990 election as the signal of people's desire of democracy. What has happened in Myanmar were potential to ruin the political stability and security in South East Asia if the democratization is stopped and the government neglects the people's desire of democracy.

— In the beginning of Myanmar joining in ASEAN membership, this country and ASEAN received resistance and critics especially from Western countries such as European Union members. They argued that Myanmar, at that time, had a bad governmental system, authoritarian leadership, and many human rights violation.

Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore as the influential members in ASEAN had supported Myanmar to join in ASEAN. Even Malaysia and Indonesia had concerned towards certain issues, especially for Buddhist domination toward Muslim Rohingya. Finally, because of the tension between Myanmar, Malaysia and Indonesia, in 1992, Myanmar government had repatriation Muslim Rohingya who became the refugees in Myanmar and Bangladesh border.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Zaw, A. (n.d.). ASEAN-Burma Relations. *Burma and ASEAN: A trouble marriage*, 43. Retrieved August, 2014, from [http://www.idea.int/asia\\_pacific/burma/upload/chap1.pdf](http://www.idea.int/asia_pacific/burma/upload/chap1.pdf).

## 1. The Starting Point of Myanmar Integration with International Community

Since Myanmar had been joining ASEAN in 1997-2000, Myanmar had hosted several ASEAN meeting. These opportunities were used by Junta military and Myanmar government to improve their legitimacy and regional image. Beside that, in May 2000, Myanmar foreign minister took a place to criticize EU because Myanmar never recognized the signatory of ASEAN and EU economy cooperation since it joined in 1997. In fact, EU has been the largest aid donors for ASEAN since 1977.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, it showed Myanmar behavior which ~~showed the desire to improve the cooperation with European Union in economy.~~ It indicated Myanmar's integration with International Community.

The other aspect that influences Myanmar to be more open is the natural disaster which happened on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2008 which have changed the condition in Myanmar. At that time, Myanmar received the worst natural disaster which is known as the Cyclone Nargis. The Cyclone Nargis produced approximately 140,000 casualties and 95% of residential houses had been destroyed. In the Post-Cyclone Nargis, ASEAN led the coordination between Myanmar and UN to cooperate each other in helping Myanmar from the worst damage. Myanmar agreed in ERAT (ASEAN Emergency Rapid Assessment Team). It helped Myanmar to restore the country. On the other hand, this cooperation was the first mission on ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). This cooperation was known as Tripartite

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<sup>55</sup> Aung Zaw, Op cit.45.

Core Group (TCG). Having this cooperation, Myanmar felt less threatened to accept international aid operation.<sup>56</sup> Hence, it would be Myanmar's stepping-stone of being more open to international aid that was impossible happened before Myanmar's joining in ASEAN.

## 2. Myanmar's Election in 2012

In November 2011, ASEAN member states agreed to give changes to Myanmar to chair the group for 2014. Although Myanmar is still in process of reconciliation within country to resolve the political condition. At the same time, after being released from the house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi as the NLD's leader ~~declaration to rejoin the election for the parliament seat as her party commitment in political process.~~<sup>57</sup> Next month, after ASEAN member states decided Myanmar to lead ASEAN in 2014, US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, visited Myanmar to discuss about US' desire in helping Myanmar democratization. Thein Sein, President of Myanmar, for the first time, has signed a peaceful demonstration law to respect the election which would be held in 2012.<sup>58</sup>

When the election was held in April 2012, The NLD won 43 seats out of 45 parliament seats by election. Generally, this election was free and fair. To respect what government had done for the free and fair election, US government simplified the sanction toward Myanmar. On the other hand, European Union postponed the EU sanction like what US did toward Myanmar and opened the EU

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<sup>56</sup> Herzbruch, B. (2012). *Cyclone Nargis – Myanmar Coordination Mechanism*. Slide Presentation at the High Level Symposium on Humanitarian Cooperation. Malteser International-Myanmar. Retrieved August, 2014, from

<http://www.theecentre.net/resources/workshop/materials/349/MYANMAR.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> Timeline: Reforms in Burma. (n.d.). BBC News Asia. Retrieved August, 2014, from

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16546688>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



office in Rangoon, in the same year.<sup>59</sup> The effect was Myanmar and US relation became advanced as it could be seen in 2012. Thein Sein visited US and followed by US President Barack Obama to visit Myanmar in 2013.

In mass media, Myanmar has announced that government gave the opportunity to private newspaper to operate in Myanmar starting on April 2013. It had been being restricted for 50 years. This announcement was announced by government on December 2012.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.