

Democracy in shadow: Myanmar coup escalates

Myanmar's coup d'état stretches to its tenth day. It is the fifth day of protests in the street (at time of writing). As the sun rises tomorrow, tension will increase and questions will accumulate. What will be the outcome of these next few days? Will it be like 1988, or 2007? Will it usher in more endless years of SLORC/SPDC, long years of darkness and isolation?



It is important to reflect together, to analyse what is happening and seek to understand our history. What do we see? How should we participate? What impact do these event have on our life and mission?

Some present this coup as a stalemate between two hard-headed leaders. Each had too much to lose. They failed to dialogue and failed to reach a compromise. Aung San Suu Kyi refused to concede ground to Min Aung Hlain. There may be some truth to that.

Soon after the coup, many rumours circulated. 'ASSK was released, come out and celebrate'. Or 'the long imprisoned Min Ko Naing will appear and address a rally, come and hear him'. Wisely, people waited. Were we being tricked to come out and create a stir? In 1988 and 2007, on the pretence of re-establishing law and order, a violent and bloody crackdown ensued. At first it seemed wise not to go on the streets. Was public disorder being provoked? There may have been some truth to that.

Now, for a few days it seems something new is happening. Can we name it? Thousands, even millions of people have come to the streets in almost a hundred townships and cities across Myanmar. They reject the coup. The young have glimpsed a new light. They want the dawn of democracy to grow to a full day. They refuse to go back to those too-familiar shadows. Education, a decent job, public health, to give their

children a free future, all this was promised. That future was promised and is now stolen. Is this a widespread, deeply-felt movement? There is surely some truth to that.

People now know who is selling their birthright to our neighbours. They suspect the real agitators, the provocateurs of violence. They know when promises are empty. They know the proper role of the military is to protect, not to govern.

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Who has in fact broken the law? Even the present constitution, faulty as it may be, does not permit what happened with the coup d'état. The people ask for what is rightfully theirs.

What we see clearly on the streets of 360 towns and cities across Myanmar is that, as Pope Francis has said, 'our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people — often forgotten people,' who 'without any doubt are in these very days writing the decisive events of our time.'

To Myanmar, Pope Francis has said: release the imprisoned leaders, honour the votes of millions of people, return to democracy, support dignity and freedom. And pray for the people of Myanmar.

Yangon, February, 2021