

## BURMA

### Historic elections for 'the lady' of Burma (first insights)

An event  
Its decoding  
An analysis  
Prospects

#### FACTS

➤ After having been ruled by the army for a quarter of a century, Burma held its first ever free parliamentary elections on 8<sup>th</sup> November. Two days after the polls, the victory of pro-democracy movements over the ruling pro-military party is blatant. It was in an exhilarating atmosphere that the Burmese population, deprived of voting rights since 1993, witnessed their national hero Aung San Suu Kyi and her opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) gain more than enough seats for a parliamentary majority, counting wins one by one. A remarkable performance that might precede the NLD's bright future at the head of the nation...

➤ Amongst other memorable moments of this historic ballot – which by the way took place in a non-violent environment that reflected its peaceful campaign – one cannot help but notice the immediate acceptance of defeat by the incumbent pro-military party and its directors, all former members of the gloomy almighty military institution, the Tatmadaw; a reasonable behaviour that honours their 'promise' to respect and abide by any electoral verdict. Such a conduct was unthinkable twenty years from now, albeit the democratic wave of the NLD and her valiant Lady had already won over the Burmese hearts.

#### ANALYSIS

■ If the days ahead prove of the goodwill of the ex-military junta (the blatant expression of the popular opinion that no space is left for the army in the national electoral process put aside) and of the indisputable victory of the NLD; if they are not tarnished by unnecessary actions instigated by groups against the democratic transition (inter-communal violence or clashes between ethnic groups' militants and the army in the States of Shan and Kayin); then and only then might it be possible to consider Burma – that had already entered its post-junta era in March 2011 – to have well and truly gotten passed a peaceful political mutation. In achieving so, Burma drew away from a less and less appreciated martial matrix and to a more subtle, polite, and more democratic society, answering the long-kept wish of the majority of Burmese people.

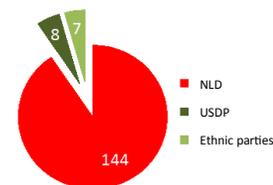
■ Paying close attention, the international community expressed its satisfaction regarding the overall proceedings (without failing to point out the multiple electoral irregularities), recognising the fair play of the incumbent administration and the army, who accepted defeat in a dignified manner. The upcoming trimester is likely to witness arduous negotiations before the new red, white and golden Parliament (NLD) settles in.



#### BURMA (Myanmar)

**Territory:** 676 000 km<sup>2</sup>  
**Capital:** Naypyidaw  
**Neighbours:** Bangladesh, China, India, Laos and Thailand  
**Population:** 56 millions  
**Ethnic groups:** Bamar (68%), Shan, Kayin, Rakhine, Chinese, Indian  
**Religion:** Buddhism  
**Language:** Burmese  
**Regime:** Republic  
**Head of State:** Thein Sein  
**Average annual income:** 1000 €

#### Preliminary results\* on 10<sup>th</sup> Nov



\*insight of first 159 confirmed results out of 1171 seats

#### ACTORS

55 million Burmese ; 32 million voters  
 Incumbent President Thein Sein administration (USDP party)  
 Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD)  
 Ethnic parties (30% of pop.)  
 Army (500 000 soldiers)

#### QUOTES

"For the sake of the nation's dignity and the happiness of the public, it is crucial that their desire shown through the November 8 general elections be fulfilled in a stable, peaceful and correct way", Aung San Suu Kyi, NLD, November 10.

"The success of the election is a milestone for the president's legacy", U Ye Htut (USDP), spokesperson for the Myanmar president, November 10.

**RECENT EVENTS**

- 09/11 victory of A. San Suu Kyi's NLD becomes apparent; high participation
- 09/11 SSA-N (Shan State) positions attacked by the army (aerial; artillery)
- 08/11 general elections
- 06/11 official end of overall peaceful electoral campaign
- 02/11 violent clashes between army and ethnic groups in Kayin and Shan States
- 28/10 incumbent President Thein Sein vouches for peaceful power transition
- 15/10 national agreement of ceasefire signed by 8 ethnic groups (out of 21 in total)

**DECLARATIONS & REACTIONS**

*"(...)We can elect two vice-presidents. We will cooperate with the military and ethnic parties. If the NLD wins the presidential position, we can form a government. It is not NLD's victory alone. It is the people's victory", Soe Win Oo, NLD's deputy chairman, The Irrawaddy, 10<sup>th</sup> November.*

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*"The country has come a long way but "more reforms are needed to ensure truly genuine elections" in the future", G. Lambsdorff, EU's mission chief observer, Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), 10<sup>th</sup> November.*

**CHALLENGES AND CONSEQUENCES**

- ◆ Electoral campaigns and ballots are telling times in any electoral process, for they are filled with uncertainty: Polls happening or postponed? Peaceful or violent electoral campaign? Regularity of electoral events? Who wins, who loses? Ability of the USDP and the army to accept a defeat strikingly resembling a beating?
- ◆ For now however, campaign and polls show satisfying results both in substance (80% electoral participation, results similar to forecasts, NLD successful) and in form, despite several restrictions that observers pointed out at numerous occasions (doubtful electoral lists, partial exclusion of minorities, violent clash on the territory hindering every individual the possibility to vote, patent limitations of a biased Electoral Commission, etc.).
- ◆ In addition to being an excellent news for the Burmese people who hoped for a less martial future and a 'new' Burma bidding respectability, redemption and reinsertion in the international community, it is also a pleasant surprise! Less than one month after the government and a few ethnic armed groups signed a national ceasefire agreement that already made history, the martial and almighty (until now) Thein Sein administration played along with the democratic transition—which initially began four years ago—by authorising the organisation, the proceedings and respecting the serious outcome of Burma's first 'normal' 21st century-like general elections—hardly self-evident a few months ago.
- ◆ One will have to wait a few more days however before the Burmese legislative landscape becomes clear, which should largely be filled with

Aung San Suu Kyi's party's red shade and so from the upper to the lower houses, including the regional assemblies. The NLD seems to now be able (partially at least) to do what the 2008 Constitution, enacted by and for the military, thus far prohibited: the right to leave the opposition's ranks without chaos and revolution and to be *lawfully* entrusted with the management of the state's national affairs.

◆ The NLD will therefore have the true constitutional right to appoint a president of their choice and proceed to constituting the first ever democratically formed Burmese government.

**PROSPECTIVE**

*Forty-eight hours after polling stations had closed on 8<sup>th</sup> November, less than 20 per cent of the results had been officially announced by the electoral authorities.*

*This preliminary and partial count already showcased a result in favour of the emblematic Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD, radiating joy due to this pleasant progress along with the majority of the Burmese people, struggling to believe in this sudden turnaround.*

*As for the vanquished—but good sport, a trait no one could have guessed—Thein Sein administration and its supportive military, they have assured their future cooperation with the democratic authorities-to-be.*

*Although this calls for a bright future, some restraint is necessary.*

Paris, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2015

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