Tun was fired and put under investigation for corruption. Another 50 staff in the department are also under investigation. Meanwhile, customers have to pay for sim cards also. This is the thing most customers complain about - Myanmar's unique corruption. Most government departments seem keen to rob money from people rather than help them. Recently, one of the President's Office ministers, U Soe Thein, announced that from April 1 the price of mobile phones will come down to an affordable level. But he refused to say what the price range would be.

The price of cars under the military regime headed by General Than Shwe, before the Thein Sein administration, was also among the highest in the world. Importing a new car required a permit; a car permit was like a licence to become rich. In the US, a Toyota Camry, Mitsubishi or Honda Accord sells for $20,000 to $28,000, whereas in Myanmar they cost $200,000 to $300,000. Generals and their cronies were able to get car permits and become millionaires over the last 23 years of military rule.



Importing a new car required a permit in Myanmar.

Another source of income for these cronies was "wetland farming" - a plan to change areas of wetland into farmland. Cronies got thousands of acres under this scheme. First, they built a dyke around the land and pumped out the water. For this they needed tractors, trucks, water pumps and so on. They got permits to import all kinds of machinery and accessories. But in the end, wetlands were rarely turned into farmland. Some became commercial fish ponds. The return, however, came from the permits, which holders could sell on for big sums.

There are also unique problems in education. Student leaders in the 2007 "Saffron Revolution" are still banned from studying in universities. But they are allowed to study under "distance education" or "open university" systems, which generally are not of good quality. Recently, students who were expelled from medical school have demanded to the right to study. Mandalay Medical University rector, Dr U Than Win, expelled 400 students during his four years of service. The university authorities were ordered to take this extreme action against most of the students who participated in public protests.

In January, a blogger with the pen name "Dr Sate Phwar", wrote an article that asked if the Hluttaw (parliament) was above the law. His article infuriated MPs and one, Dr Soe Yin, has made an issue of the matter. He said the article was an insult to the Hluttaw and wants to find out who the blogger is, and to take action. The parliament overwhelmingly approved his proposal. But this has raised questions about criticism of the Hluttaw - and how big a crime this is! The new parliament needs to learn how to tolerate criticism and to accept different views and opinions. In a system of narrow minds, criticising the authorities is seen as wrong and an insult. But is criticising the authorities or parliament for not making progress really a crime or intolerable?

Thein Sein's government needs to oversee many changes. For pro-democracy forces, making the 2008 constitution more democratic is the ultimate goal, but whether the regime really wants to do it is the big question. The top generals fear losing power, and their cronies will not go away overnight. The president needs to be brave to change many necessary things within his term.

Unlawful acts and decisions from the past need to be re-examined and made right if he is to win the hearts of the people. And by that, I mean real people - the grassroots, the poor and the weak, who don't know how to protect their rights. This government, like the previous regime, talks about "the people". But the previous regime never meant it; "for the good of the people" meant for themselves. This selfish interpretation needs to be changed, so the real people can live the lives that they dream of and deserve.

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