
Dharma war

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Thee triple jewels of Buddhism --- Buddha, Sangha and Dharma have been reincarnated by Burma's protesting monks as calls for economic reform, the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and an apology for recent government action against protesting monks in Pakkoku rents the Burmese air.

The social and economic policies of the junta, in speeches by monks, are said to threaten the very fabric of Burmese society.

"If the people are unable to support the monks, the monks in turn will be unable to render services to the laity."

Throughout the course of marches, civilian participants are commonly heard proclaiming the strength and fearlessness of the monk, in stark contrast to how they often present themselves, cowed in front of a barrel of a gun and lost without the leadership of the sangha.

"We are afraid but the monks, are not afraid of anything. Without monks the people could not march," commented one civilian marcher.

But the regime is seeking to redraw the battle lines, away from questions of politics and economics and instead has focused directly on what an appropriate field of activity is for the Sangha, an alternative interpretation of the dharma supported by past legal tracts between the government and the Sangha.

The monks are fighting for the people in the arenas of political and economic policy.

The regime is saying the protesting monks violate and degrade the true role of the Sangh as preached by Buddha and related in the dharma and the Sangha should only involve itself in religious affairs.

The regime relies heavily on the Sangha to provide legitimacy to itself as a rightful and just government. Therefore, if there is to be a crackdown against the monks, it is of utmost importance that a solid foundation first be laid as to why the protesting monks and their demands carry no legitimacy and, further, that it is the monks themselves that risk the Dharma balance of Burmese society.

The new Light of Myanmar on September 25 devoted all its energy to why the enraged monks are out of line with the dharma and Burmese law, which is said to reflect the teaching of the dharma convening the role of the Sangha in society.

Burmar is a true Theravada Buddhist country and it is famous for keeping the teaching of the Buddha by members of the Sangha and its disciples," said the Minister of Religious Affairs Bri-General Thura Myint Maung. He requested Sangha leaders "to give instructions for the sake of the country, the religion and the Sasana."

"Failure to observe or obey the Dhamma order will be met with action according to law," continued the minister, adding that opposition elements are abusing and using "young monks who have to knowledge of social and political affairs as related to the Buddha's teachings."

This question of the role of monks in civil society is not limited to Burma. The same, often highly confrontational and animated debates, take place throughout much of the Buddhist world - including in both Thailand and Sri Lanka .

At this stage, it appears the military in Burma has a long, uphill road to climb if it is to successfully de-legitimize the engaged Dhammic approach of both the protesting monks and supportive laity.

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