The curtain has come down on the abortive colour revolution in Thailand with the country’s Constitutional Court ordering the dissolution on Wednesday of the anti-establishment opposition party Move Forward, widely regarded as a US proxy.

It coincides with the stunning success of the hastily staged colour revolution in Bangladesh and the fall of the key military base of the Myanmar army’s Northeast Command in Lashio in the Shan state over the weekend to the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the rebel groups armed, financed and trained by the Western intelligence.

The Shan people who belong to the Tai ethnic group of Southeast Asia are the biggest minority of Myanmar (10% of the population) and they have cultural affinity with the Northern Thai peoples and also have a significant presence in the adjacent regions of Assam and Meghalaya in India.

The capture of Lashio by the alliance of militias of ethnic minority groups supported by the western intelligence is seen as a serious blow to the regime in Myanmar, which enjoys the backing of the military leadership in Thailand and is a strong ally of Russia.

Lashio is situated on an important trade route and is about 100 kms only from the Chinese border. Newsweek magazine in a report titled China Faces Growing War on Its Border cited an expert opinion of the Washington-based United States Institute of Peace think tank (which is wired into the US intelligence establishment) that “From China’s vantage point, the escalation of the conflict is a major setback in terms of its interest in... getting the belligerent parties to establish further deals to reset trade between the China border and Mandalay.

“China seems very concerned, as it will be very difficult for the Myanmar military to bounce back from this setback, yet the Myanmar military is not signalling a desire to return to the table or an interest in making significant concessions to the northern EAOs (alliance of tribal groups), which is what China has been pressuring it to do.”

According to latest reports, American and British “volunteers” have been lately joining the ranks of the rebels fighting the Myanmar military — although, these are early days and Myanmar has not experienced yet the same wave of international volunteers seen in conflicts such as Ukraine or Syria, and there are no coordinated efforts apparent to enlist foreign recruits.

The Myanmar military supremo General Min Aung Hlaing has alleged that the rebel alliance is receiving weapons, including drones and short-range missiles, from “foreign” sources. “It
is necessary to analyse the sources of monetary and technological power,” he said. Myanmar’s military has 14 regional commands across the country, and the Northeast Command is the first to fall to armed rebel groups.

Meanwhile, the Arakan Army (AA) — a powerful ethnic armed group which is fighting to establish an independent Rakhine polity in western Myanmar — has been on the move committing atrocities against the Rohingya minority population taking advantage of the military’s current overstretch.

AA has made significant gains in Rakhine State in the recent months and reportedly exercises control over more than half of the state’s 17 townships. By the way, the Arakanese people also exist in Bangladesh’s Chittagong Hill Tracts and in India’s Tripura state. (Interestingly, Arakan Division was originally a part of British India.)

Coming back to Bangkok, the Thai generals are evidently circling the wagons sensing the Time of Troubles ahead as the Five Eyes is creating a cauldron in Myanmar that can ensnare the neighbouring regions. Bangkok, a western ally previously, is traditionally a hotbed of western intelligence — Five Eyes — and the authorities are well aware of the resentment in the US that their ties with Beijing have expanded and deepened and assumed a strategic character in the recent years.

The unkindest cut of all is that Thailand (along with Malaysia) has formally applied for membership of the BRICS, which carries huge resonance in the geopolitics of southeast Asia and the ASEAN and impacts the regional balance at a juncture when the US is striving to create an anti-China bloc.

Thailand is a keen participant in China’s Belt and Road Initiative. From a long term perspective, the 873-km high-speed rail project connecting Bangkok with Kunming, capital of China’s Yunnan province, via Laos is expected to be operational latest by 2028.
The railway project, estimated to cost anywhere up to $10 billion will not only enhance regional connectivity but profoundly reset the economic geography of Asia, given its massive potential for accelerating the increased integration between China and the ASEAN countries. People would be able to travel between Kunming and Bangkok by train for about $100, which is half to a third of the cost of an airline ticket. According to Xinhua, the railway is expected to bring two million more Chinese tourists to Thailand every year.

Washington is livid that its proxy, Move Forward led by a young man educated in the US and groomed to spearhead a colour revolution, has been banned. The Thai authorities understand that the western intention is to break up the ancient crust of their country’s polity, which is the only way to make inroads into what is otherwise a deeply Buddhist culture — specifically, to demolish the so-called lèse-majesté law protecting the institution of monarchy, an institution that dates back more than 700 years and is a pillar of stability in the country symbolising the unity of the Thai communities. By the way, Christian missionary work is active in both Thailand and Myanmar — as in next-door north-eastern region of India. And the evangelicals are an influential pressure group in the US politics.

The Thai authorities have shied away from confronting the US. Thai culture values serenity and avoids conflict and displays of anger. Even disagreements are to be handled with a smile, without assigning blame. Hence the circuitous route to squash Move Forward on legal grounds.
Move Forward won 151 seats in the 500 member parliament in the elections in May last year where sixty-seven parties contested, but was unable to form a coalition government after being functionally blocked by allies of the monarchy and military. Move Forward made the electoral pledge to abolish lèse-majesté law (which is tantamount to a crime.)

The US and its allies are furious but cannot do anything about the development. All the good work to stage a colour revolution in phases has come to naught. The exasperation shows in the statements from Washington and Canberra. (here and here)

However, all is not lost. The regime change in Bangladesh may open a new pathway for the western intervention in Myanmar. India and Thailand refused to back the western-backed rebels fighting the Myanmar military. Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also stayed away from the power struggle in Myanmar. But that may change.

The Rohingya issue provides an alibi. The ascendance of Pakistani intelligence and the larger-than life role of the Jamaat-i-Islami will trigger an assertion of Bangladesh’s Muslim identity. The Pakistani army chief lost no time to underscore that the developments in Bangladesh underscore the raison d’être of the two-nation theory!

So, the regime change in Bangladesh may turn out to be a game changer for the West’s regime change agenda in Myanmar. On the other hand, at the secondary and tertiary level, any strengthening of the western-backed rebel alliance in Myanmar cannot but cast shadows on India’s northeast, which has a large Christian population with tribal affinities across the border.
An awareness is lacking that any weakening of Thailand’s state structure or the dissipation of Thai culture rooted in Buddhist traditions will isolate India in the region’s civilisational tapestry. Indians tend to take episodic view of current events in their immediate neighbourhood.

Prior to the rise of Theravada Buddhism, both Indian Brahminical religion and Mahayana Buddhism were present in Thailand, and influences from both these traditions can still be seen in present-day Thai folklore. A colour revolution in Thailand leading to western dominance and the eclipse of the Thai monarchy and Buddhist cosmology will have profound implications for South Asia.

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