



## International Seminar

# DEMOCRATISATION IN BURMA (Myanmar)

## IMPLICATIONS FOR WORLD TODAY

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### CONCEPT NOTE

#### **Collaborators**



#### **Sponsors**



The indelible mark of the Indian cultural influence on Burmese history is remarkable and worth studying. Its geographical proximity, long time administrative union with India and our common struggle for freedom from colonial domination has further cemented our historic bonds. Though, racially outcome of Mongolian tribe and closer to China, Burma throughout her ancient history elected to be mostly influenced by the ideals of Indian culture. Legends and epics in India and Burma suggest that contacts between them go back to pre-historic times. References to 'Brahmadesh' and 'Swarnabhumi' abound our mythology and history. Burma is India's gateway to ASEAN as it is the only ASEAN country which has a land and maritime border with India. It adjoins on our sensitive North-Eastern states and portions of Bangladesh. Burma shares an equally significant border with China. Thus, the northern frontiers of Burma constitute a tri-junction with Bangladesh, China and the eastern frontiers of India. Burma is also important country on the rim of the Bay of Bengal region. On the other hand, India could become Burma's window to the West. It can also be the interface for Burma with the rest of SAARC. India has also forged strong economic ties with Central Asia, West Asia, the Russian Federation, European Union and the United States, which may in turn be used by Burma for its integration with the Western world. These geo-political concerns have largely guided the relations between the two countries.

A democratic Burma can benefit from these links which could provide a roadmap for greater engagement between India and Burma. Burma's request for assistance in three areas namely—Information technology, industrial growth and infrastructure development has been agreed by the Indian side recently, which will lead to boosting the bilateral cooperation to a higher level. Trade promotion and business meetings can help build bridges at the business level and promote economic and commercial opportunities. The traditional relation of friendship and cooperation between the two countries could be deepened and intensified further to their mutual benefit. Since both the nations share a common thread of cultural ancestry, Burma may have to learn a lot in modern times from the Indian experience of democratic development which it has chosen since independence.

As most of the nations of the Southeast Asian region have moved towards economic development and democracy, Burma is a clear exception. As a country, it finds itself blocked by political processes proclaiming

restrictions on almost all aspects of civil and political liberties.

Since 1962, it has been continuously under military rule devoid of any kind of responsible government. In 1988, pro-democracy demonstrations broke out nationwide, shattering the silence that had characterised political life for so many years. The people of Burma demonstrated their desire to restore democracy and basic human rights by giving their mandate to the National League for Democracy in the general elections in 1990 pushing for a political opening towards a democratic transition. The military regime has resisted this at all cost by suppressing the implementation of the popular mandate. Since the democratization continues to be at an impasse, with a military apparatus lacking all legitimacy and hanging on to power through its monopoly of the means of violence. The 22 years political tussle in Burma between the military government under the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and the democratic opposition has undoubtedly dragged on for far too long. Under this background this Seminar would look at the prospects and future of democratisation in Burma.

Though, the November 7, 2010 elections held after a gap of twenty years has paved the way for a transition from military rule to a supposedly civilian administration and democratic opening in Burma. But the fact that the polls were swept by the pro junta political party—Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and its allies exposes the myth of democratisation in Burma. In the absence of any clear opposition with National League of Democracy (NLD) being disbanded, the election has widely been seen as an attempt to legitimize military rule behind a mask of civilian government. International reaction also seems to be split-up in between its neighbours and supporters in the region and the critics in the Western World.

Under this background, the Conference intends to discuss and deliberate on the dynamics of political change and regime transition in Burma and its implications for the world today. The changing power relations with the release of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and the future roadmap to democratic consolidation and its deepening would be the main highlight of the Conference.

### **Objective**

- ❖ Creating an informed environment about the political impasse and stasis in Burma.
- ❖ To look into the internal crisis and contradictions in the regime.
- ❖ To look into the role of the external players and their policy responses.
- ❖ To deliberate upon the democratization process and the progress made step-by-step in Burma.
- ❖ To provide intellectual inputs in shaping the direction of the Burma's future policy orientations.

## **Sub Themes**

Under the broad rubric of *Democratisation in Burma: Implications for World Today*, various sub-themes that have been identified for discussion are as follows:

1. Mapping Democratisation: Theoretical Perspective and Emerging Discourses.
2. Burma Today
3. Democratisation in Burma: Implications for India
4. Burma and the World
5. Life Under Military Rule: Lived Experiences
6. Internal Crisis and Contradictions: pro-democracy and ethnic groups
7. Democratisation in Burma: Progress and Prospects

## **Outcome**

Interaction with academicians, scholars, policy makers and other stake holders would provide a forum for discussion, deliberation and policy analysis for the Burma watchers. This Conference will provide an opportunity for evaluating the prospects for democratic transition and consolidation in Burma. It would further look into the internal crisis and contradictions in the regime and regional and international responses to it.

In view of the changes taking place in Burma in the recent past it is critical to explore how these changes will evolve in the coming years and its impact on politics, economy and society of the country. The Conference also intends to address on the developments that are shaping up the internal dynamics of the regime. The purpose is to provide intellectual inputs in shaping the direction of the country's future and policy orientations of external players. The outcome of the Conference would be a volume which may be an important contribution for future academic research on Democratisation in Southeast Asia. As a unique feature, the Conference will have an interactive session with the students and research scholars. In addition, the venue would make it ideal for the academicians, researchers and students to benefit together and explore the opportunities of regime transition and democratization in Burma.

(Convenor)

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