

## **Myanmar: Distant Neighbour**

December 5, 2012, Rabindranath Tagore Hall, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

**Co-organized by:**

*The Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, JMI*

*Academy of International Studies, JMI*

*Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi*

*ANFREL Foundation, Bangkok*

For more than a year, political changes in the former secretive and repressive State of Myanmar, India's largest neighbor immediately to its east, have unfolded at a breathtaking pace. While media attention has focused around the charismatic figure of Nobel laureate Aung Sang Suu Kyi and the democratic surge in Myanmar, significant challenges remain, including the future and speed of political and economic reforms, as well as the space which ethnic groups and their representative parties seek.

A significant question facing Myanmar is the functioning of the Parliamentary system. In addition, there are issues related to complex ethnic questions and whether a policy of inclusiveness and accommodation as the leadership under President U Than Sein has shown will be effective in dealing with lingering nationality issues. The Rohingya/Arakan Muslim rioting and continuing tension shows how sensitive and difficult the problems are. There is also the question of the role of the still powerful military and intelligence services.

India's North-east is pivotally placed, along the only land border that India has with a member of ASEAN. New Delhi's much discussed 'Look East Policy' has remained largely on paper but now with the opening up of Myanmar, new opportunities have developed for better connectivity, trade and cooperation, leading eventually to better access to the markets and cultures of SE Asia, with which the NER has an umbilical link. For decades, India's perceptions of Myanmar have been fashioned by security concerns over the use of Myanmar bases by Indian insurgents in the NER as well as the illegal drugs and small arms trade. This needs to change along with the changing environment.

The seminar will bring together from Myanmar, under the aegis of ANFREL which works extensively in developing political reforms and training scholars, activists and researchers as well as members of Parliament in South East Asia, in parliamentary processes, some of the prominent media practitioners as well as political activists, representatives of ethnic groups and most significantly, an Adviser to the President. It will take advantage of the presence of this group which will undergo a short training session in Parliamentary procedure and processes to enable them to share their views and understanding of the situation in their country.

In addition, senior figures from India, including Mr. Neiphiu Rio, the Chief Minister of Nagaland, a Member of Parliament who has recently visited Myanmar as well as scholars and editors from the North-east, will share their perspectives on a range of issues as varied as shortfalls in Indian policies and perceptions as well as ideas to promote connectivity between the NER and its immediate neighbor.

The effort is to enable Myanmar and India to become better neighbours, not distant ones, through a series of steps in which academia, activists and others can take part. This can be one of a series of such events to be held in Jamia and New Delhi; CNES had organized two earlier seminars and interactions with Myanmar figures in 2009 and 2010.

Among those who have confirmed from the Indian side are Mr. PD Rai, MP; former Home Secretary GK Pillai and Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia, Director General, ICWA.

\*\*\*\*\*