

International Conference on
Myanmar: Bridging South and Southeast Asia

New Delhi, January 30-31, 2012

Co-organised by
Jamia Millia Islamia (Academy of International Studies)
and
Tampadipa Institute, Yangon
with the support of
Euro Burma Office

Press Release

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India and Myanmar are geographical and civilisational neighbours. Myanmar's geostrategic location marks her out as the most important bridge nation between South and Southeast Asia. Myanmar's historical and cultural evolution has given her an identity that is as much South Asian as it is Southeast Asian. While Myanmar is justifiably described as India's gateway to Southeast Asia and ASEAN, so also can India be described as Myanmar's gateway to South Asia and SAARC.

With this mutuality of interests and benefits in mind, an International Conference on "Myanmar : Bridging South and South-East Asia" was held in New Delhi on 30-31 January 2012, organized as a collaboration between Jamia Millia Islamia (Academy of International Studies) and the Tampadipa Institute, Yangon, with the support of the Euro Burma Office.

In a unique first, around 30 delegates from Myanmar participated in this Conference, including three Members of Parliament, elected in the November 2010 elections, and 12 senior political party leaders from seven diverse parties such as the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the Chin National Party, the National Unity Party, the National Democratic Force, the Shan Nationalities' Democratic Party, PaO National Organisation and the Democratic Party Myanmar. Many of them were visiting India for the first time. The delegates from Myanmar included civil society representatives, educationists, social activists and heads of think-tanks.

The Conference was inaugurated at Jamia Millia Islamia on 30th January 2012, with the Welcome Address by Shri Najeeb Jung, Vice Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia, and the Keynote Address by Hon'ble Shri Neiphiu Rio, Chief Minister of Nagaland. The three co-organisers of the Conference who spoke at the Inaugural were Professor Veena Sikri (Ford Foundation Chair, Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia), Dr Khin Zaw Win, Director Tampadipa Institute, Yangon, and Harn Yawnghwe, Executive Director, Euro-Burma Office. U Khin Maung Swe, Party Leader, National Democratic Force, gave the Special Address and U Win Myint, Adviser, USDP, Gave the Vote of Thanks.

Several important papers were presented at the Conference and active discussions were held on issues pertaining to the political situation in Myanmar, including the

evolution of political parties and the challenges of ethnic conflict, the role of civil society organizations and the role of women, economic opportunities and challenges in Myanmar, and Myanmar and the donor community (USA, EU and Japan), ethnic armed conflict in the Kachin region, Myanmar and China, Myanmar as India's gateway to ASEAN, and Myanmar as the bridgehead linking India's Northeast and Southeast Asia.

The concluding session of the Conference was addressed by Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar, Member of Parliament, and by U Zam Cin Pao, Member of Parliament and Chairman, Chin National Party.

The active interest evinced by all participants and discussants, and specific suggestions made by them, have convinced the co-organisers of the Conference to continue their collaboration by planning follow-up interactions between India and Myanmar. Jamia Millia Islamia (Academy of International Studies), New Delhi, Tampadipa Institute, Yangon and the Euro Burma Office, Brussels, have agreed to launch joint research clusters where scholars, think-tanks and political representatives from India and Myanmar would meet and work towards preparing joint papers on matters of mutual interest. Some of the sectors identified for this follow-up include Trade and Investment, with an important focus on border-trade facilitation; Improved Connectivity between India and Myanmar, including infrastructure development (especially in and through Northeast India and West Myanmar) and financial connectivity to facilitate bilateral business linkages; Security Issues; Cooperation in Education and Human Resource Development; Gender and Social Welfare Issues (including interaction at Dilli Haat between craftspersons from India and Myanmar); BIMSTEC, ASEAN and sub-regional cooperation (including through growth areas focused around India's Northeast and Myanmar's Western regions); appropriate technology exchanges the agriculture and environment sectors; media, culture and people-to-people exchanges, including through tourism and pilgrimage.