

Democracy in Myanmar: Not in the hands of the International community but with the people of Myanmar

Commemorating the Myanmar's military coup that occurred on 1st February 2021, a webinar titled "Restoring Democracy in Myanmar: One year after the military coup" was organized by the Center for Peace Studies (CPS) of the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), North South University on 31 January, 2022.

Brigadier General Dr. Shafaat Ahmad (Retd.), a faculty member of Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) graced the event as the keynote speaker. In his speech, he elaborated Myanmar's internal political dynamics, the characteristics and strategic culture of its Military, the Tatmadaw; Myanmar's geopolitical environment, including the interests of China, India, the United States, Japan, the European Union, and the ASEAN. He reiterated in his presentation that Tatmadaw remains an active player in Myanmar's relationships with the external powers through its defense diplomacy. He also added that no country intends to intervene directly in the internal affairs of another country, as this may raise all sorts of international legal and political complications. He also expressed uncertainty that the prospects of opposition military victory against the Tatmadaw are slim now; and thus, the restoration of democracy is very bleak in Myanmar. In his concluding remarks, Dr. Shafaat reemphasized that only the people of Myanmar can change the future of Myanmar and establish democracy, but under the current circumstances it is going to be very difficult.



Dr. Mahbubur Rahman, Professor, Department of Political Science and Sociology (PSS), NSU was a discussant of this webinar. He stated that international failure to restore democracy in Myanmar may lead to unprecedented negative consequences for its people and jeopardize regional security. Therefore, the international community must support and validate the pro-democracy National Unity Government (NUG) to ensure democracy and bring peace.

As a discussant, Dr. Mahbubul Haque, a faculty member of the Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia, provided his valuable insights on the inherent issues in Myanmar's state-building process. He also stated that Bangladesh is the most victim of Myanmar's internal problems but has less role to play in resolving the overall political crisis. Unfortunately, the Rohingya crisis has lost global attention to some extent after the military coup. In his speech, he indicates less hope for

restoration of democracy in Myanmar as the ASEAN is divided and the international community is not doing enough.

Ambassador Sufiur Rahman, High Commissioner for the People's Republic of Bangladesh to Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji, emphasized the importance of Bangladesh's involvement in resolving Myanmar's ongoing challenges, and that it must express its displeasure to Western and Northern actors.

Former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh government Ambassador Shahidul Haque, now a Professorial Fellow of SIPG at NSU moderated the webinar. He stated that it seems like the Myanmar military has a state rather than the state has a military. He also opined that Bangladesh needs to guard against the unfolding instability in Myanmar and it needs to keep all the windows open, especially with NUG. He concluded by saying that we must hope for the restoration of democracy as a major shift towards empowering the ethnic communities in Myanmar.

The webinar started with an inaugural speech by Dr. Abdul Wohab, Coordinator of CPS and Assistant Professor, Dept of PSS, NSU. The program concluded with the vote of thanks by Dr. Ishrat Zakia Sultana, a member of CPS and an Assistant Professor of Dept of PSS, NSU. Academics, researchers, Excellences, diplomats, journalists, people from the Rohingya community and students from Bangladesh and overseas were present at the webinar.