



School of International Studies

New Delhi 110067 INDIA

SIS Monthly Faculty Meetings

Ninth Meeting: 1 September 2009

Presentation on

Politics of Military in Myanmar

The military rulers in Myanmar have announced that they will hold elections in 2010 to transfer power to elected representatives. However, they are taking steps to remain firmly entrenched in power permanently. They have kept the most popular leader, Aung San Suu Kyi in detention ever since 1990 on one pretext or the other. They are baselessly framing charges against her so that she remains immobilized. Recently in May 2009, an American named, John Yettaw swam to her lakeside home, without the knowledge of security personnel. Mr. Yettaw reached where Suu Kyi is kept in house arrest. This event annoyed the military, but instead of admonishing the security staff for the said lapse, the military decided to punish Suu Kyi. The matter was referred to prison court, which framed a list of charges. The hearing began soon and Suu Kyi was blamed and found guilty of breaching the terms of her house arrest.

On 11 August 2009, the prison court gave a judgment that Suu Kyi was guilty of breaching the terms of her house arrest. She was guilty of welcoming an intruder. The court sentenced her of three years hard labour and arrest. A day later, General Than Swe, the military dictator, endorsed and commuted the sentence to a year and half under house arrest. Thus Suu Kyi will remain in detention and

restrained to campaign for the election. It is understood that her punishment in John Yettaw case is totally inhuman and illegal. However the pertinent question is that if a respected leader who is internationally renowned and icon of democracy movement, can be detained on flimsy grounds, how common people are treated? It is known that Suu Kyi has been kept in detention in order to keep her immobilized, but her latest house arrest has exposed the omissions and commissions of the military at the international level.

The international understanding was Suu Kyi will be released as a precondition for free and fair elections in 2010. It seems the detention of Suu Kyi was expected to have ended on May 27. As that date drew closer, the junta slapped fresh charges against her. It was a move to prevent her from taking part in the proposed. In fact the persistent refusal to release Suu Kyi will severely undermine the credibility of such elections. Despite disapproval of military sanctions, the countries in the region have come to a conclusion that it is worthwhile to engage the military establishment in Yangon and prod it to loosen its grip, and eventually make way for a democratic set-up. That has been the apparent policy of the ASEAN towards Myanmar. But the military rulers are concerned about their survival and skeptical that in case of free and fair elections, they will be routed. They are not in a mood to compromise with NLD or accommodate the grievance of the opposition. They are not ready to take lessons from the region and understand how military influences have survived in Indonesia and Thailand despite the existing civilian set up. The military is an important element in the politics of those countries, but other institutions are also important and the system takes care to nurture them for integrated development. The leadership has to accept the ground realities and be dynamic but this does not seem to be visible in case of military ruled Myanmar.

- **Professor Ganganath Jha**