

India's 'Look East Policy' concern for Burmese



Comments 1



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India the largest democracy in the world has always been maintaining good relationship with its neighbors like Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Burma. The efforts are continue for a peaceful co-existence with all its neighboring countries. At a time when this country pleads for democracy in other countries and has welcomed the democratically elected governments in Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh, its attitude towards Burma (Now Myanmar) seems a bit different. This shift in its policy took place during the year 1990, when India launched its “Look East Policy” and began to support the military junta in Burma. Since India has embarked upon building a broad based relationship with the military junta including cooperation on defense, trade and investment, energy and natural resources, a series of agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) have already been signed, such as the construction of Sittwe port, the multi model Kaladan project and Energy and Petroleum Cooperation. India’s closer relationship with Burma’s junta and its cold approach to the people’s movement for human rights and democracy in Burma has raised concern amongst Indian civil society as they question whether India has abandoned the principle of humanist and idealist policy guided by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawahar Lal Nehru. Burma Centre Delhi, an organization formed by members from India and Burma civil society groups is out to work for restoration of peace justice, democracy and human rights in Burma. It still believes India is an important neighbor that can influence Burma in bringing about a democratic transition acceptable to the people of Burma. It may be recalled here that Burma was under British colonial rule for more than one hundred years. Since its independence on January 4, 1948 this country practiced a democratic parliamentary system under the leadership of the premier U Nu. This system continued for fourteen years only, when Burmese army staged a military coup overthrowing the democratically elected government and imposing oppressive military rule. The coup instigators, namely, the Revolutionary Council led by General Ne Win, abolished the constitution and suspended all democratic rights of the people. All legislative, executive and judicial powers were vested in the hands of Gen Ne Win. The military used guns to control the country according to their wishes, keeping a tight lid on the political activities of those who love democracy in the country. The military regime transformed itself into a ruling political party in the year 1974, which was named the Burmese Socialist Program me Party (BSPP). The BSPP ruled over the country for fourteen years until 1988, with single party dominated political system with the ideology ‘the Burmese way to socialism’. During these years the country became one of the poorest countries in the world. Therefore, in 1987 Burma was listed as a least developed country (LDC) by the United Nations. Due to deterioration of Burma’s economic

situation and oppressive one political party rule on August 8, 1988, which is known as 8-8-88, the people (workers, monks, peasants, teachers, government servants and youth) of Burma led by the university students at Rangoon rose up as one to call upon the military rulers to abolish the ill-reputed one party system, demanding democracy and human rights in the country. The military responded with bullets against the peaceful demonstrators and killed more than 3,000 demonstrators throughout the country. After 8888 incidents, Gen Saw Maung took over the country on 18th September 1988 and renamed the ruling regime the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Therefore in 1989 under the SLORC Burma was renamed as Myanmar to divert international attention and criticism. A multi-party general election was held in May 1990, in which the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory. However, the military ignored the election results and did not hand over the people's mandate to the winning party, instead imposing authoritarian rule and violently cracking down on the people's pro-democracy movement. In spite of the repressive military rule for about fifty years the people aspiration for peace, dignity and democracy continues till now and Burmese people hope that India can play a better role to bring democracy back in their country.

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