

THE ASIALINK

YANGON MYANMAR 2-4 FEBRUARY 2012

CONVERSATIONS

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS





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FROM THE CHAIRS



SID MYER



DAW YIN YIN MYINT

The *Asialink Conversations* in Yangon were held at a time when people around the world were excited, and taken a little by surprise, by the rapidity of change taking place in Myanmar. The *Conversations* were organized in great haste when political and economic reforms were being instituted, large numbers of political prisoners were being progressively released and new cease-fire agreements were being signed or negotiated with ethnic groups long at war with the central government.

Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd had visited Myanmar in July 2011, and in the days leading up to our event had declared his keenness to know ‘the extent to which’ the government ‘will be prepared to open up’. The United States Secretary of State visited Myanmar in December 2011, and an American Track 1.5 meeting was being planned for March 2012. Asialink together with the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies decided to move quickly to arrange a pioneering Track II meeting among Australian and regional specialists. Given that the *Asialink Conversations* have established a record of close collaboration with colleagues from the ASEAN region (including Myanmar), we felt this Australia-ASEAN process might be able to make a useful contribution – bringing together a strong team of Myanmar, other ASEAN and Australian participants to analyse the changes taking place in Myanmar and the region generally.

Exploring wider regional and global issues in Yangon seemed all the more important because in November 2011 it was announced that Myanmar would chair ASEAN in 2014. Over two days, 42 participants from Australia, Southeast Asia and Japan discussed, under the Chatham House rule, these and other issues, including: development across economic, agricultural, health and education sectors; managing cultural heritage; and the challenges of nation-building.

SID MYER AM

Chairman, Asialink

DAW YIN YIN MYINT

Secretary, Myanmar Institute
of Strategic and International Studies,
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'MYANMAR TODAY'

U WUNNA MAUNG LWIN

Foreign Minister of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar

His Excellency U Wunna Maung Lwin, Foreign Minister of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Chairman of the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies opened the 2012 *Asialink Conversations* in Yangon. In his address the Foreign Minister acknowledged the unprecedented nature of the *Conversations*, which brought together distinguished representatives from government, academia and business from Australia, ASEAN and Japan. He expressed Myanmar's pride in hosting this important event and extended a warm welcome to all present. The Foreign Minister also expressed Myanmar's appreciation for Australia's encouragement and support in its 'recent initiatives to relax restrictions' relating to his country, signalling a new chapter in Myanmar–Australia relations.

Taking this opportunity to provide a greater understanding of Myanmar, the Foreign Minister began by explaining that the country achieved unified status as an empire four times: under the Bagan Dynasty (1044–1077); the Taungoo Dynasty (1551–1581) and the Konbaung Dynasty (1752–1760). Each of these instances represent reigns where 'the fame and power of Myanmar empires were very much felt in the region and beyond.' The fourth empire is modern Myanmar "whose independence was regained from the British in 1948," the Foreign Minister explained. Myanmar is made up of about one hundred national groups. The largest of these are the Bamar, Chin, Kachin, Kayin, Kayah, Mon, Shan and Rakhine. Some of these ethnic groups have been engaged in armed conflict with the state since independence in 1948. In August 2011, Myanmar's new constitutional government invited armed ethnic groups – in Kachin, Shan and Kayin states – to 'come back into the legal fold'.

Myanmar today is embarking on a series of reforms to bring about democratization, economic development and the enhanced livelihood of its people. In spite of its natural resources Myanmar remains a poor country. The new government established in March 2011 has targeted a reduction in poverty from 26 percent of the population to 16 percent by 2015. It is committed to bringing about rural development and stimulating economic reforms through a reduction in export taxes from 8 percent to 2 percent, granting tax exemptions on agricultural exports, stabilising the exchange rate, and instigating reforms to the banking sector.

A change in the new government's political approach was evident when the Myanmar government suspended the construction of the Chinese-funded Myitsone Dam in Kachin State in September 2011 and amended the Political Parties Registration Law, opening elections up to political parties, such as National League for Democracy (NLD). NLD leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has since confirmed that she will contest the April 2012 by-elections. The Peaceful Assembly and the Peaceful Procession Bill has also been signed into law as of December 2011. In a further demonstration of Myanmar's commitment to reform, the government granted amnesty to several thousand prisoners in October 2011 and January 2012, and an independent National Human Rights Commission has now been established to facilitate and promote protection of human rights in Myanmar.

Since independence, the Foreign Minister explained, Myanmar has maintained a non-aligned foreign policy and a firm belief in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. This has enabled Myanmar to enjoy cordial relations with its two neighbours, China and India and other countries in the region. It wishes to maintain friendly ties with all countries and to participate in regional associations such as ASEAN. With its current program of reforms underway, the Foreign Minister believes that Myanmar will be positioned to share in the destiny and prosperity of the region.

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A full transcript of Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin's address can be found at www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/conversations

MYANMAR – DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMIC, AGRICULTURE, HEALTH AND EDUCATION SECTORS

CHAIRS MR SID MYER AND DAW YIN YIN MYINT

In 2011, the government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar embarked on a program of political and economic reforms under its new civilian administration, sworn into office in March 2011. President U Thein Sein has since initiated bold reforms that have taken many by surprise.

In September 2011 the controversial Myitsone Dam project, funded by the Chinese Government in Kachin State, was brought to a halt; dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been opened up; and political prisoners have progressively been released. “There are many opportunities and challenges at this juncture,” a senior government advisor commented “but we are optimistic about the future of the country.”

The reform program underway in Myanmar, encompassing the economic, agricultural, health and education sectors, is formidable but “the Myanmar Government states whenever it can that the political will is now very strong and there is no way it will turn back.” A prevailing barrier is Myanmar’s ‘hybrid’ institutions. Its “foundations are still weak” and many outdated policies and regulations initiated by the previous government – or even the British – are yet to be revised or revoked. A Myanmar specialist suggested, “we could talk about un-building things rather than building them.” In achieving this reform Myanmar needs encouragement and support from the international community.

The agricultural sector represents huge economic potential: “We have about 8 million acres of land still not utilised. Good production requires water and we have three major rivers that we don’t share with any other country. So we are rich in land and water.” This potential is limited by human capacity – there are some 3 million Myanmar workers currently labouring in Thailand and Malaysia – and very low levels of investment in the agricultural sector.

One of the most pressing matters is the lifting of sanctions. “While the political process has begun,” so it was explained, “we are only just starting economic engagement.” Sanctions are considered a critical issue inhibiting Myanmar’s economy. They have weakened

the private sector, to the extent that some three to four thousand factories have been forced to close, representing annual losses of millions of dollars. If the sanctions are lifted, “it will not be the rise of China so much as the return of Western business” that will impact upon Myanmar’s economy. Already there is interest from abroad – India’s Tata Group and Indorama, and some companies that were forced to leave Myanmar in the 1960s under General Ne Win are keen to return. “These threads,” one participant observed, “could be picked up again in an effort to balance Myanmar’s relations with India and China.”

A Myanmar participant noted that the cancellation of the Myitsone dam project in 2011 and a Thai-funded coal-fired power plant in Dawei in January 2012, risk a perception that “deals can be revoked or cancelled.” He commended his government’s courage in cancelling controversial projects but also gave credit to the government for honouring its commitment to many other deals that have been made with Myanmar. In conclusion, it was stressed that China and Thailand – and India – are all important to the Myanmar economy and that there would “not be a lot of cancellations.”





FINANCIAL SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

CHAIRS MS JENNY McGREGOR AND DATO' DR MAHANI ZAINAL ABIDIN

Financial sector development is one of the most pressing challenges facing Myanmar's economic reconstruction. At the *Asialink Conversations* it was generally agreed that to get the economy back on its feet, a strong banking sector will need to be established.

Myanmar did have a well organised and developed banking system before the coup in 1962, but under the socialist system it went into decline. Myanmar's banking system has remained relatively static for 50 years and there is now a sense that the country is "starting from scratch." For example, at the moment, there are 300,000 people per bank branch across Myanmar, compared to Vietnam's 20,000 people per branch. This represents a significant challenge in mainstreaming banking in a cash economy, where mortgage lending and credit facilities are under-developed.

Myanmar currently has a large underground, or informal, economy and it is estimated that more than 50 percent of trade is not recorded. A senior banking representative in the region stressed that "a safe and secure banking system that can move money around with confidence" was critical to Myanmar's financial sector development. As well as rebuilding domestic banking, Myanmar will need to establish financial links across the region. Making the banking sector transparent and well regulated should also be prioritised in the interests of attracting foreign investment.

An economist participant encouraged Myanmar to turn to its own history in rebuilding its financial sector. For example, Dawson's Bank, an agricultural bank that was founded in 1905 and provided small loans to paddy farmers, established methodologies that have been replicated by today's microfinance sector. Some multilateral institutions are currently pushing microfinance in Myanmar, but it was suggested that this has limited potential. "It is not good at transforming an economy; microfinance does not generate enough capital." Another economist went further to suggest that microfinance could even have a negative impact on the economy, and that "mobilising deposits is more important than lending money."

Myanmar, as a member of ASEAN, is a participant in regular regional finance ministers meetings and it is working together with member states towards an ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. In the spirit of the ASEAN Economic Community, Myanmar is emphasising transparency, good governance and institutional longevity, but it will need to instigate structural change to realise this. For example, Myanmar is moving towards establishing one exchange rate – it currently has several, the two main ones being the official rate (6 kyat to one US dollar) and the unofficial one (about 750 to one dollar). Then there are several others – customs rates, state owned enterprise rates, and so forth – that add up to about eight different exchange rates. This leads to economic distortions and in 2011 the government invited the IMF to help unify the different rates. Myanmar is also looking to launch a stock exchange with technical assistance from ASEAN and Japan. Although the ASEAN Economic Community represents an opportunity for Myanmar to undertake reforms in line with regional standards, some acknowledge that "our government is only 10 months old and the problems are 60 years old. They can't be solved overnight and we need a lot of assistance."

The ASEAN Economic Community is stimulating a greater emphasis on economic regionalism and Myanmar will benefit from this in terms of building capacity and connectivity.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

CHAIRS HRH RAJA NAZRIN SHAH AND HE DR SOK SIPHANA

In this discussion culture was interpreted in its broad sense, as civilisational, rather than simply daily artistic practices and traditions. For example, in Myanmar, the stupas and temples continue to be used for the purpose for which they were built many centuries ago, representing remarkable cultural continuity.

The idea of culture was further defined in both its tangible and intangible forms. As in much of Southeast Asia, Myanmar has a rich heritage in terms of tangible culture, but its approach to preservation is at odds with the prescriptive approaches adopted in the West. A Myanmar historian pointed out that the Myanmar people have a weak sense of preserving the old. Local values about what can be done with monuments are not about maintaining them in a static form. “In Myanmar you do not just preserve the old, you renovate and renew the existing.”

Myanmar’s approach to its national monuments and heritage sites has made it difficult to get them onto UNESCO’s list – there are currently eight sites on the UNESCO tentative list. For built – or tangible – heritage to be listed, it has to be of outstanding universal value, but in Myanmar there is unresolved tension between international standards and local expectations. Nevertheless, much of cultural value has survived in Myanmar that does not exist elsewhere in Southeast Asia and in January 2012 a UNESCO capacity building program, funded by Italy, was announced.

In terms of its intangible heritage, the relationship between culture and power, and the role that history played in this dynamic, was noted. History has always been closely linked to politics in Myanmar and the writing of history has been “tightly controlled”. The *Asialink Conversations* heard that the official history of Myanmar is limited and thus “young people cannot reflect on what has happened in the past 60 years.” In the Indonesian experience, culture was “the least debated topic” during the political shift towards democracy but civil society “had the most to say about it.” A Malaysian participant observed that culture played “an important role in the power structures in any society” and different cultures “find their own answers to democratic arrangements.”

The issues of Myanmar’s diverse linguistic heritage was also raised. There are over 100 nationalities with different dialects in Myanmar. In the China state alone there are more than 50 dialects. As an element of intangible cultural heritage, a participant asked whether in this time of transition efforts would be made to cultivate a respect for local languages. It was explained that under the Constitution, Myanmar is the lingua franca and that the public service and business uses the Myanmar language. State and region governments, however, can encourage their own language learning independently of the Union program, which teaches the majority language.

As in previous *Asialink Conversations*, the various dimensions of culture manifest across the social and political spectrum led to lively exchanges – and real insights into the different societies represented in the room.









REGIONALISM – BUILDING ASEAN AND EAST ASIAN INSTITUTIONS AT TRACK I AND II LEVEL

CHAIRS PROFESSOR TONY MILNER AND DR THITINAN PONGSUDHIRAK

Myanmar's membership of ASEAN has been somewhat controversial. It joined in 1997 with the strong support of several ASEAN member states, but there were some reservations in the region, and criticisms from the European Union and the United States. Although Myanmar was among the last group of countries to join ASEAN, it would be incorrect to conclude that it is a latecomer to regionalism.

Even before independence was secured in many other countries in the Asia region, the idea of a regional 'Association of Southeast Asia' was promoted by Myanmar independence leader General Aung San.

After independence, Myanmar's first Prime Minister, U Nu, was among the first Asian leaders to adopt the foreign policy of non-alignment and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. At the *Asialink Conversations* it was recalled that Myanmar's adherence to non-alignment deterred it from joining ASEAN in 1967. Fellow non-aligned nation, and founding ASEAN member, Indonesia, lobbied hard for Myanmar and Cambodia to join, as it was "not that happy being associated with countries so closely allied with the West." There was concern also that Southeast Asia would become a "two-tier" region with some nations in and some out of ASEAN. Regionalism began to make more sense in the 1990s "as a common diplomatic front against the major powers."

From an Australian perspective also, ASEAN has been an important stabilising force in the region. These historical insights and exchanges of views gave Australian participants an opportunity to hear a vigorous intra-ASEAN discussion of the challenges facing the organisation. ASEAN, an Australian participant said, represents "a strong, inclusive regionalism, and the expansion of boundaries of cooperation into new areas – on disaster management for example – is desirable."

Myanmar participants expressed confidence about the country's 2014 leadership of ASEAN. "We try to be a good member in this organisation, abide by its rules" it was said, and now Myanmar is even more committed with its chairmanship of ASEAN in 2014 in sight.

ASEAN's goal of an economic community by 2015 is an important objective in more firmly integrating Myanmar into the region. The ASEAN Economic Community represents a new era for ASEAN, which has moved "from association to cooperation, integration and now community – it is a fundamental transformation." The strengthening of Track II dialogues in the region through the ASEAN-ISIS network is also indicative of ASEAN's evolution. "At Track I level [that is, government-to-government] you attend some 600 meetings a year," it was said "but now policy decisions are informed by Track II, which will see an increase in its importance."

It was acknowledged that in a globalised era, states can no longer act alone and this is especially the case among small states that exist alongside large states. "Everyone in the region needs ASEAN" a seasoned diplomat observed, "and every outsider, including regional powers, needs ASEAN, for the strategic deployment of their own objectives." Western powers see relations with ASEAN as a convenient bridge to the countries of northeast Asia – Japan and China. And as the concept of the 'Indo-Pacific' competes with the 'Asia-Pacific', it was further noted, Myanmar – given its close border relations with India – may help ASEAN to look in both directions.

In this session, Australian participants appreciated the opportunity to hear a vigorous intra-ASEAN discussion of the challenges facing the organisation.

RELATIONS WITH MAJOR POWERS

CHAIRS MR SID MYER AND PROFESSOR DEWI FORTUNA ANWAR

The theme of ASEAN centrality continued in discussions of relations with major powers: this goes to the core of ASEAN's interests. In Southeast Asia's relations with the major powers "we see the building of ASEAN as leverage," a senior scholar said.

Although there are signs of convergence in ASEAN thinking about China, some participants felt that differing geopolitical concerns – such as those around the South China Sea and the Mekong River – will inevitably result in each ASEAN country pursuing its own strategic interests and economic advantages.

In terms of military capacity in the region, both India and China possess nuclear weapons and are emerging as major powers. "So it is very important for Myanmar to strike a balance in its relations with China and India" a former diplomat noted. Myanmar, nestled between the two, has deep historical and cultural connections with both, although in its isolation over the past decades, it was pushed closer to China. China has supported Myanmar politically and economically, but as it enters this new era of reform and more open engagement, Myanmar will have to strike a balance between China and India.

The rapid rise of China in particular has aroused a degree of anxiety in Southeast Asia and this has prompted a greater sense of unity among ASEAN members. It was insisted, however, that the balance of power is still tilted heavily toward the United States and its allies. "I do not think the US is in decline," a prominent ASEAN businessman said. "It is still the only hegemonic power, its military is without rival, and its universities and innovations are still vibrant and sought after." The United States will, others suggested, be challenged by China's rise and the region will be shaped by this major power rivalry. Though the US is "pressing on all fronts" it has not been "indigenised" like Australia. To Australia's credit and in contrast to the US, it was suggested, Australia has much more closely integrated with the region.

On the economic front, the United States is still seen as "the market of first resort." The US dollar, for example, will remain the trading currency for the foreseeable future, despite the fact that China's Renminbi is increasingly used in trade. Another element of major power economic competition is in the area of aid. A development economist noted that "the rising powers are adding aid to their armament, adding soft power to their influence." This will pose both opportunities and challenges for Myanmar. There is interest from India, Japan and China, "but any aid to be effectively used has to be properly managed." Myanmar's natural resources will also be coveted by the regional powers, which will pose huge opportunities as well as risks. If not managed wisely, this could lead to a "resource curse", and risk further corruption and conflict.





NATION BUILDING

CHAIRS DATO' TIMOTHY ONG AND MR RODOLFO SEVERINO

The idea of nation building suggests that the process will end, but it was agreed that this is not the case. Nation building is ongoing in all countries.

This is particularly the case when we consider cultural change and renegotiating identity, re-building human capacity through education, and initiating new political and legal frameworks. Establishing the rule of law was identified by an Australian participant as a “core goal in the arrangement of the state.” Some of these elements of nation building continue to evolve even in the most established, economically prosperous, nations. For Australia, the development of multiculturalism since the 1970s has seen a new phase of nation building. In Myanmar’s case, the contested position of minority ethnicities impacts heavily on how it must think about nation building.

Historically, since the eleventh century, it was explained, Myanmar has moved through three major phases of empire. Traditionally kingdoms sought to strengthen the centre at the cost of the periphery – if you have a strong periphery it might break away so the logic was to keep the periphery weak. In 1886 the British conquered Myanmar but left the outlying ethnic groups under traditional rule. This maintained the division between the centre and the periphery in Myanmar. In Myanmar today, the ethnic majority accounts for 70 percent of the population and the minorities make up 30 percent. At this time ethnic conflicts remain unresolved on Myanmar’s periphery and so nation building will be an enormously challenging endeavour.

A further challenge for Myanmar is the fact that it is undertaking political and economic reform simultaneously, while also seeking resolutions to ethnic conflicts. In this respect, “we are doing something no other country in the region has done before.”

Like other parts of Southeast Asia, however, the transition from colonialism to independence has been marked by an overt dependence upon the military, through a belief that “the military is a unifying agent.” A Southeast Asian scholar suggested that this was because the military “moves around so much. So there is this mythmaking about the military being the most important factor in nation building.” This military mythmaking then develops its own logic and seeks to perpetuate its power. What is necessary is a careful balance between the apparatus of the state and civil society.

Myanmar participants raised core questions around the nation building effort: “who is Myanmar” and “is Myanmar a nation”? These questions stem not only from the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity in Myanmar, but also from the fact that there are two to three million Myanmar people living in Thailand. There is also a huge diaspora around the world, and any nation-building task, a Myanmar historian noted, “will have to grapple with these kinds of issues”. Much discussion occurred in this session comparing one state with another – particularly states within ASEAN.

REFLECTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF FURTHER ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

CHAIRS PROFESSOR TONY MILNER AND MR SERGE PUN

The Chairs asked: “What is the one striking thing from the last day and half’s discussion that you think is a priority to pass on the Minister?” Many in the room responded. Examples of the answers given are:

- “One way for Myanmar to re-engage is to commit to more Track II. The issue of globalisation and connectivity was missing from the conversation – who is controlling what, and who knows what?”
- “Track II dialogues could be held elsewhere in the country. This would send a great signal promoting the unity of the country.”
- “To assist Track II relations we could set up a network to express your opinions and exchange materials online and share advice for Myanmar.”
- “There is a scarcity of Track II institutions in Myanmar. We must seek more such institutions – one could be an online Track II avenue.”
- “One of the values of Track II dialogue is that it will provide Myanmar with the opportunity to change international perceptions of the country.”
- “Non-government think-tanks and research centres can help government sorting through the different ideas and proposals for investment that are likely to rush into the country.”
- “Institutional and human capacity development will be critical – training parliamentarians and ministers in the rule of law. Opportunities for Myanmar people to study overseas are very important.”
- “Set up a law reform commission that could repeal some obstructive laws and acculturate the rule of law idea.”
- “On the economic side, keep things simple. Special economic zones are likely to create problems over ownership.”
- “Don’t be too fixated on outside suggestions. Look to the development of Myanmar’s own economic strengths, as the former food bowl of Asia, remembering the skills and resources of Myanmar’s own people.”
- “Economic reform works best when a country owns its reform – and Myanmar can gain a lot from examining its own history, especially in building economic institutions.”
- “Systems have been run down here, which is a problem. Technocrats will be needed to drive the economic reform agenda. If aid is going to be scaled up, extend scholarships.”
- “Create a taskforce on education. This government is likely to be willing to give a major foreign university a licence to establish a campus in Myanmar in rapid time.”
- “Unify exchange rates. Ease the airline visa restrictions for people to visit.”
- “This forum makes us think about how we should go about doing business with Myanmar. Shifting perceptions will be significant. Asialink can help with the business community in Australia.”
- “Trade is more important than aid as the pathway to prosperity. Send definitive signs to the international business community. They are already listening. Global public relations are important in changing perceptions.”
- “Identify the low hanging fruit in a business relevant area. Tackle this decisively as a way of sending signals that have a direct relevance to business and investors. Some clever signalling would go a long way.”
- “Leadership must focus on employment – and we need employers. Bring the factories back with the right tax breaks and infrastructure. Establish a government taskforce and target KPIs. Each minister should be judged on how much employment s/he creates.”



- “Myanmar faces a public relations problem. Perceptions of Myanmar have crystallised and these will move more slowly than the reforms themselves in Myanmar. People will be looking at the internal dialogue within Myanmar – is there a bottom up process?”
- “Announce at an early stage plans for chairmanship of ASEAN.”
- “ASEAN leadership may well promote trust in ASEAN amongst its neighbours and contribute towards nation building.”
- “With the April by-elections coming up, it is absolutely critical that they send a message to the world that you are on the path to political liberalisation.”
- “A roadmap for the military and a statement about commitment to international rules relating to humanitarian intervention would build confidence.”
- “Myanmar’s tragic history represents an opportunity to begin with a blank slate. There is an opportunity here to engage in effective management and preservation of cultural heritage. Seek help from the best international organisations, examining carefully the impact of tourism and the flow of people on traditional cultures.”
- “We are all still nation building – Australia too, given our demographic changes. Indonesia is an amazing success story – and we need to look at the role of ideas there. History does matter. Each country – including Myanmar – has to create a national story that incorporates all its people – a national story that promotes unity, not division. So, one priority today is to look back in order to move forward.”

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ASIALINK CONVERSATIONS MYANMAR 2012

The *Asialink Conversations* are a leading dialogue in the field of Track II diplomacy. They bring together influential participants from across the 10 countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and from Australia to consider political, social and economic issues of common concern.

In 2010, the *Conversations* were held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in 2008 in India and in 2006 in Vietnam, where they coincided with the first Leaders' Meeting of APEC in Hanoi. The then Australian Prime Minister gave the keynote address. Previously the *Conversations* have been held in Sydney (2007), Kuala Lumpur (2004), and Melbourne (2002).

The *Conversations* were developed by Asialink under the leadership of Professor Tony Milner, The University of Melbourne Professorial Fellow and Asialink International Director, and Jenny McGregor, Group CEO of Asialink at The University of Melbourne.

MYANMAR INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

The Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) was established in 1992 and in 2002 it became a core unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. In 2012 Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin became Chairman. Myanmar ISIS aims to lead strategic and international studies and research, to contribute to policy formation and decision making in the region and beyond. It is part of the ASEAN-ISIS network, and the Network of East Asia Think-Tanks (NEAT), and regularly participates in Track II diplomacy initiatives that bring together government delegates, scholars and analysts to discuss foreign policy, strategic studies and social development.

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Myanmar - ISIS
TOWARDS MUTUAL COOPERATION
FOR UNDERSTANDING AND
DEVELOPMENT



Australians in Burma for business talks

Posted February 05, 2012 11:29:07

A group of Australians is in Burma for one of the first major business and academic gatherings since the Asian nation reopened its borders.

Burma shifted to civilian rule in 2011, and is competing to chair the Association of Southeast Asian Nations from 2014.

More than 40 delegates from a dozen countries are attending the two-day event, run by the Australian group Asialink.

Speaking from Burma, which is also known as Myanmar, Asialink's Jenny McGregor says the event is another positive step for the country.

"The connections that have been made now between the Myanmar team and the ASEAN team and the team, we hope will really blossom and grow into much greater communication and collaboration over the years," she said.

Ms McGregor says the conference should help the country's path to openness.

She says businesspeople are being introduced so that once further sanctions are lifted they can come in and the economy moving.



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February 6, 2012

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Josh Frydenberg February 10, 2012 OPINION

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Change is reversible, but the signs of reform in Burma are heartening.

Five thousand kilometres to our north, a country that is home to nearly 60 million people, an army of 400,000 men and south-east Asia's second-largest land mass, is moving quickly out of the brutal darkness of dictatorship towards political and economic liberalisation.

Just how fast and how far the process of reform in Burma will go is very much an open question. There is, however, little doubt recent developments are positive, significant and with far-

World briefing

Burma and the road to normality

Recently returned from Burma, Nicholas Farrelly looks at a series of remarkable changes, and the journey ahead

08 March 2012

Tags: Burma, Nicholas Farrelly, Southeast Asia

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SINCE the coup of 2 March 1962, tens of millions of Burmese have grown old waiting for the army to surrender power. Many saw their dreams derailed grim realities of life under Southeast Asia's frequently denounced pariah regime. Long economic stagnation, day-to-day privatisation and heavy-handed crackdowns

Above: Aung San Suu Kyi campaigning in Segalay, northern Burma, last weekend. Photo: Soe Thaa Win/ AFP



U Ko Ko Hlaing Chief Political Advisor to the President

Jakarta Post

Thursday, March 15, 2012 10:41 AM

COMMENTARY

Commentary: Drip, drip, democracy – Myanmar's revolution from above

Meldiyatama Suryodiningrat, The Jakarta Post, Yangon | Thu, 02/16/2012 8:40 AM

It's time to be cautiously optimistic and give Myanmar a chance. While ASEAN may not have been right, perhaps it wasn't mistaken in its much-maligned gambit of "constructive engagement" with the nation

Radio Australia

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Regional 'conversation' pursues second track diplomacy in Burma

Updated 7 February 2012, 21:41 AEST

A unique gathering took place over the weekend in Rangoon, Bur

More than 40 people from a dozen regional countries, including Australia, were there pursuing what is sometimes called "second track diplomacy" outside the glare of the media spotlight.

The meeting was organised by Melbourne University's Asialink centre in cooperation with the M Strategic and International Studies.

Reporter: Liam Cochrane

Speaker: Professor Tony Milner, Asialink's International Director

MILNER: We've had these Asialink Conversations for some years now and they're all about bulk relations, and we've had a number of different ASEAN countries, and given what's going on in M opportunity to do something there at this stage was really attractive. So that's the explanation an with this 15 years' experience, and the ongoing thinking about multi-iteration