



Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*Swaying in the Middle:
China in Myanmar's
Peace Process*

REPORT

Speaker :
Jayshree Borah

20 March 2024

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Speaker: Dr. Jayshree Borah, Visiting Researcher, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, India.

Chair: Amb. Ashok K. Kantha, former Ambassador of India to China; and, former Director and Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies New Delhi, India

Venue: Zoom Webinar

The seminar aimed to analyse the intricate political dynamics and the ongoing peace process in Myanmar. It also explored the multifaceted relationships between various Ethnic Armed organisations (EAOs), the Myanmar Military (junta), the National League for Democracy (NLD), and the influential role of China in shaping the region's political landscape.

Dr. Borah highlighted the complexities of Myanmar's political landscape, which is required for understanding the recent developments. A landmark event was Operation 1027 launched by the ThreeBrotherhood Alliance (3 BHA) in October 2023. This operation points to the continued volatility within the region, despite continuing efforts towards peace. Additionally, the formation of the Northern Alliance and its connections with Myanmar's political landscape exemplify the evolving nature of alliances among EAOs, which influence the trajectory of the peace process.

The speaker explored China's involvement in Myanmar's affairs following the military coup, which in her view, has been pivotal. The country has steered a delicate balance between supporting the military and engaging with the National League for Democracy (NLD), advocating for a political solution while also prioritising its strategic interests. China's engagement with ASEAN in Myanmar's affairs highlights its efforts to address the crisis diplomatically, despite its policy of non-interference.

The emergence of the People's Defence Forces (PDF) and their collaboration with ethnic armed organisations against the military signifies a shift in the dynamics of conflict. Operation 1027 and the subsequent intensification of conflict raise questions about the common goals shared among ethnic organisations and their potential impact on the peace process. Furthermore, the varying relationships between ethnic armed groups and China, characterised by both cooperation and distrust, add another layer of complexity to the situation.

Among the factors driving China's engagement in Myanmar and shaping China's involvement in the region, Dr. Borah emphasised the historical ties between the Communist Party of China and certain ethnic armed leaders, coupled with economic interests. Additionally, China's strategic investments in Shan State and its infrastructure projects underscore its long-term interests in Myanmar. However, challenges such as anti-Chinese sentiment among local populations and monitoring efforts by civil society organisations pose significant hurdles.

Dr. Borah further argued that as the current peace process in Myanmar is still unfolding, it is evident that internal and external factors continue to influence its trajectory. China's attempts to mediate and coordinate with ethnic armed groups are central to these efforts. Furthermore, China's concerns about US involvement in the region and its strategic imperative to maintain stability for its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, highlight the interconnectedness of regional politics and global geopolitics.

She concluded by reiterating the involvement of various actors and the influence of external powers like China and argued that it was essential to adopt a nuanced understanding of the situation to facilitate meaningful progress towards peace and stability in the region.

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