

Burma Parliamentary Monitoring Workshops and One-Day Conference in New Delhi

Summary

A three-day workshop on Parliament monitoring using very useful tools like **Right To Information (RTI)**, which has become an Act now and other monitoring mechanisms was held in New Delhi between Dec 3 to Dec 4 and on Dec 6, 2012 for Civil Society workers, legal professionals and writers from Burma. The workshop was essential for the Burmese group in that it focused on the fundamental elements of how democracy functions through a parliamentary system of governance.

The well-established systems of workings of parliament in India and in Indonesia, which is shaping up as one of the better functioning democracies in South East Asia has been the focus of the project on “Training on Parliament Education (TAPE)-Burma initiative to learn from and use it to make for a effective parliamentary monitoring system in Burma.

The Parliamentary Research Services (PRS), which is a research wing of the prestigious Center for Policy Research (CPR), India were the key partners in this venture. PRS provided resource persons besides roping in RTI activists and also budget management experts who provided in-depth knowledge about how different organs of governance can be monitored using some very practical and easy tools. Resource persons from the Social Watch India also provided technical inputs on the third day of the workshop.

Besides the workshop, a one-day conference titled, “Myanmar-Distant Neighbours” was also organised in collaboration with the Jamia Milia Islamia University, New Delhi, Center for Policy Research (CPR), India and ANFREL-Foundation. The conference was planned in addition to the workshops to generate interest amongst member of Parliaments, Think Tanks, Policy Makers, Academics, Media and Democracy Workers in India to explore possibilities to work with CSO groups like ANFREL to make the process of the democratic transition in Burma more accountable and credible.

The conference essentially discussed **‘Evolving Political Landscapes in Myanmar’ and ‘Myanmar & Transition: The Challenges of Sustainability.’** It brought together an outstanding group of academics, political activists, media persons, election workers etc in an effort to create an understanding of the changes of Burma and how it has impact in the whole region.

These initiatives were held as part of the start-up work on the Training and Parliamentary Education (TAPE)-Burma initiative, which is scheduled to take off from February 2013. The activities, which were generously supported by the OSF was initiated to prepare the team that would work on TAPE, with focus on Parliament Watch in Burma.

Parliament watch workshop:

The workshop was held at the Chintan Guest of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi from December 2 to December 6, 2012. In all 10 Burmese participants attended the workshop, which was meant to provide technical expertise to the participants to initiate similar activities in Burma. The PRS, India, Accountability International and Social Watch India provided training to the Burmese participants.

The Agenda for the workshop was primarily on conduct of business in Parliament and how the basics of the functioning of a Parliament. Various features, such as the role of the Speaker, the ruling side and the opposition and the time spent in debate, discussions, disruptions of sessions, censure motion etc was taken up during the training. Most importantly, the role of Parliament monitors, like civil society groups and media was elaborately discussed and it provided an idea to the Burmese delegates on how to initiate such processes in their own context.

A separate session on Right To Information (RTI) was held which was extremely valuable considering that RTI has been very successful in India in monitoring the various aspects of governance, administration of justice etc. Films on RTI were part of the workshop, which was a crucial part of the workshop as it gave an insight into how other tools that are not necessarily part of a Parliament Watch activity per se can be used effectively in collecting information and data.

Budget management was another essential part of the activity

The Workshop/Training focussed on building the capacity of Civil Society Organization (CSO), media, activists and political party representatives with regards to functioning of a parliament in a democracy. The focus of the training will be on 'Parliament Watch,' which is essentially a project under the TAPE Burma/Myanmar initiative.

The concept of TAPE has been drawn up by ANFREL's capacity building unit and has gained immense popularity ever since the idea was shared with partners and networks in Burma/Myanmar. TAPE with focus on Parliament Watch will attempt to familiarize various stakeholders in Burma/Myanmar with the functioning of the parliament and its various facets that impact on the development of a just and democratic society.

The TAPE Burma/Myanmar Initiative is made up of a number of CSOs and other organizations that will help to organize the various activities to increase the

awareness levels amongst the community regarding the functioning of the Parliament and more importantly responsibilities of Parliamentarians towards their constituents.