SRI LANKA CELEBRATES MARCH-12 ANNIVERSARY, LAUNCHES “CLEAN POLITICS”

WHAT’S INSIDE?

2 Sri Lanka celebrates March-12 Anniversary, Launches “Clean Politics”

4 ANFREL signs MoU with Indonesia’s KPU, gears up for AESF3

5 ANFREL holds 2nd Asian Elections Experts Meeting

6 ANFREL joins workshop on Democratic Transitions in Asia and the Lessons Learned from Transitional Elections

7 Myanmar elects new civilian President

8 Malaysia’s BERSIH 2.0 Prepares for the Sarawak State Election

10 Much needed Electoral Reforms in Afghanistan

12 Cambodia: Press Statement: Report on Democracy, Elections, and Reform

14 Upcoming elections
On its first year anniversary, Sri Lanka’s March 12th Movement embarked on developing an action based “Pledge for Clean Politics” endorsed by political leaders from parliament to local government bodies.

President Maithripala Sirisena who was present at the anniversary expressed his commitment to build an encouraging environment for clean politics based on fundamental human rights. He urged the leaders to set an example to create a clean political culture.

The March 12 movement, led by ANFREL member People’s Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL), was launched in March 12, 2015 is considered a success and a first in Sri Lanka’s political history. The movement came after the historical elections in January 2015 that elected Sirisena to presidency. PAFFREL intends to spread their purview in order to proactively engage in all the other recommended actions to enable creating a positive political culture in the country, that were derived through organizations’ long term experience and exposure to country’s political spear, survey and extensive interactive consultations conducted and continuing with diversified multi stakeholders.
The movement was able to forge agreement among political parties across the political spectrum to set the criteria for selecting candidates for elections. Through a declaration, stakeholders endeavor to transform the political culture in the country.

The first year anniversary of the March 12 movement was celebrated under the theme “Appearing on behalf of Clean Politics.” In addition to the tenets in the March 12 movement, the “Pledge for Clean Politics” was introduced. The pledge included clean behavior, clean social coordination, clean transactions, clean income and expenditure, and clean environment. Parliamentarians recited the pledge in Sinhala, Tamil, and English. All Parliamentarians who were present on the occasion affixed their signatures signifying their acceptance and support to the pledge.

During the anniversary event, Sri Lankan president also Maitripala Sirisena launched the website www.cleanpolitics.lk.

PAFFREL Executive Director (also ANFREL Secretary General) stressed the importance of the movement and promotion of clean politics as the weaknesses in the electoral aspects and attitude of the citizens toward politics cause serious deterioration for the country.
The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) and the General Elections Commission (KPU) of Indonesia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance cooperation in promoting electoral democracy on 8 March 2016.

ANFREL was represented by its chairperson, Damaso Magbual, while its executive director, Ichal Supriadi, was also present to witness the signing.

During the signing ceremony, KPU chairperson Husmi Kamil Manik said that KPU welcomes all efforts for capacity building and they also strive to advance their capacities in implementing elections in Indonesia and by contributing to a more meaningful democracy not only in the country but in the Asian region as well.

He added that the cooperation with ANREL this time would also include follow-up activities after two successful Asian Electoral Stakeholders Forum (AESF), first in Bangkok, Thailand and the second one in Dili, Timor Leste. He announced that the third AESF is scheduled to take place in Indonesia around mid-August of this year. AESF brings together stakeholders from all over Asia and around the globe, both coming from Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

ANFREL Chairperson Magbual in his speech expressed that KPU and ANFREL work towards one common goal of ensuring credible elections to promote and protect democracy. Magbual expressed appreciation for KPU and it congratulated the body for being able to break the barriers of distrust between EMBs and CSOs. He stressed that the cooperation between KPU and ANFREL sets a good example and will become an inspiration to others.

Civil society organizations in Indonesia were present to witness the signing.
On 24 March, ANFREL’s AERC held its 2nd Asian election experts meeting. The experts coming from Southeast, South, and East Asian countries gathered in Bangkok to discuss how the resource center can become a more efficient platform for electoral stakeholders. Some of the experts were also present during the first meeting held in Colombo in January of 2015.

The meeting made a brief review of AERC after more than a year of its implementation and reassessed its work to better support electoral democracy in the region. Specifically, experts took a quick tour of the ongoing research activities and reviewed the framework to maximize its benefits in the region and in specific Asian countries where they are needed the most.

The experts also discussed the impact of the resource center on the overall goals of the foundation. Lastly, the meeting explored and enumerated relevant areas for research and possible undertakings that can be implemented in the next two years.
On March 21st and 22nd, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, International IDEA, and the Open Society Forum hosted a workshop in Mongolia on Democratic Transitions in Asia & the Lessons Learned from Transitional Elections. ANFREL was represented by its Campaign and Advocacy Coordinator, Mr. Ryan Whelan.

Mongolia was appointed as the Chair of the Council of Member States of IDEA International for the year 2016. As part of this leadership, they selected the thematic topic “Learning from Democratic Transitions,” with the goal of inspiring national dialogue and making available global knowledge and expertise on democratic change.

The workshop objectives included:

- To share achievements, challenges of Mongolia in its effort to develop, and strengthen democracy in Mongolia
- To exchange the views on transitions to democracy and lessons learned of elections in Asia
- To develop cooperation with the countries that new or restored democracies
- To extend the activities of International Cooperation Fund of Mongolia

At the workshop, representatives of governments and civil society organizations exchanged their opinions and views on experiences of developing democracy, lessons learned from elections, and the prospect of fair and transparent elections. The workshop fostered an open discussion among participants on issues related to other countries’ experiences promoting democracy and fair elections as well as future considerations and recommendations.

Representatives from ANFREL member WSP, Women for Social Progress with an ANFREL - Asian Network for Free Elections Representative at the Democratic Transitions Workshop.
On 15 March 2015, the Parliament of the Republic Union of Myanmar has elected the country’s first civilian President after more than fifty (50) years of military rule.

Htin Kyaw garnered 360 votes out of the 652 votes cast in the bicameral parliament of Myanmar. Htin Kyaw is a close ally of Aung Saan Suu Kyi’s close ally from the National League for Democracy (NLD). NLD won a landslide victory in the historic general elections held last November 2015.

After winning Htin Kyaw said that the victory was of Aung San Suu Kyi’s. Aung San Suu Kyi is constitutionally barred from becoming president. However days leading to the elections in November, she said that this limitation would not stop her from leading the country anyway.

As a result of NLD’s sweeping landslide in the general elections, they now hold the majority in both houses of the legislative branch. Nonetheless, the non-elected military continue to occupy 25% of seats.
MALAYSIA’S BERSIH 2.0 PREPARES FOR THE SARAWAK STATE ELECTION

Zoe Randhawa
Bersih 2.0

The Chief Minister of Sarawak recently announced the Sarawak State Assembly would soon be dissolved paving the way for elections in late April or some time in May. BERSIH 2.0 has been preparing for the elections for the past few months, by connecting with local groups to mobilise and train volunteers to be domestic election observers.

The aim of the mission is to empower local communities to independently and impartially observe, evaluate and report on electoral processes so as to promote awareness of and a deterrent to electoral fraud.

Using the previous monitoring exercise in 2013 as a starting point, this observation will again be based on the principles in the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM), the Bangkok Declaration on Free Elections, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, domestic election laws and regulations and BERSIH 2.0’s 8 demands.
BERSIH 2.0, working with local NGOs, we will observe 5 out of the 82 state seats. The chosen seats are expected to be hotly contested and have reportedly experienced high levels of electoral offences in the past. The seats include rural, semi-urban, and urban areas. The observation will start from nomination day until polling day and the target is to train at least 100 people for the mission.

The state of Sarawak is notorious for money politics, especially during elections. BERSIH 2.0 has already received reports of voters being promised money after the election if they cooperate with the ruling coalition’s candidates and of events packed with free goodies held every weekend. Many of these campaign events organized by the ruling coalition make use of government property and machinery. The recent delineation exercise is also causing confusion as voters are only now realizing the impact of the rushed boundary changes. These are some of the problems BERSIH 2.0 is anticipating in the election and training the volunteer observers to document.

However, there are a number of barriers facing the observation mission. In the first planning trip in January, the BERSIH 2.0 Secretariat Manager, Mandeep Singh, was informed he has been blocked from entering the state. He joins a growing list of BERSIH leaders, civil society activists, and politicians who have been arbitrarily barred from entering the state. Mandeep was barred after trying to arrange a meeting with the Chief Minister on the upcoming elections to discuss how we could work together to ensure the voting is free and fair.

BERSIH 2.0 has also tried to arrange a meeting with the Election Commission, but was informed that a meeting would only be possible after the election has been held. BERSIH 2.0 does not expect to be offered accreditation by the Election Commission for the observation, which will put heavy limitations on the mission, including the requirement that the volunteers will have to remain 50 metres from the nomination and polling stations.

Despite all these restrictions, local teams are already on the ground, training volunteers and providing valuable education on how to recognize, document, and report election offences. BERSIH 2.0 also has legal teams in place to provide them with any assistance and it is confident in carrying out the mission safely, independently, and with integrity.
MUCH NEEDED ELECTORAL REFORMS IN AFGHANISTAN

Mohammad Omid
Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA)

In 2014, it can be recalled that the 2nd round of the Afghan presidential elections faced a deadlock after one of the two leading candidates accused the Independent Election Commission (IEC) of engineering industrial-scale fraud in favor of his rival. The two campaign teams eventually agreed to structure a National Unity Government based on a political agreement. Through the political agreement both camps agreed to undertake an electoral reform process immediately after establishment of the National Unity Government. However, the process met delays and it also lead to the delay of setting-up of the Special Electoral Reform Commission. It was only set-up ten months after the NUG.

The Special Electoral Reform Commission began its work and presented its first set of recommendations concerning electoral reform to government on September 2015. This proposal included ten points but the government only accepted seven. Based on it, the government issued a presidential decree to amend Election Laws and to establish a Selection Committee.

But after the establishment of the Selection Committee, the parliament rejected the presidential decree on electoral reform and therefore the work of Selection Committee was put on hold. Thus, the government had to wait for the winter recess of parliament to issue another decree in this regard. Therefore the president recently issued another decree on electoral reform on March 5, 2016.

Similarly, FEFA’s election observation findings indicated that the 2014 elections were challenging therefore it held a series of consultation meetings on electoral reform in 8 zones of Afghanistan to review the electoral challenges from the view of citizens. Subsequently, based on the findings of consultation meetings, FEFA along with political parties, civil society organizations and mass media developed the declaration of substantive principles of electoral reforms, which included 37 principles. These 37 principles discussed the role of relevant institutions in elections

FEFA consequently established the Electoral Reform Advocacy Group comprised of the representatives of political parties, civil society organizations, and mass media to hold
advocacy meeting for each principle with the relevant institutions. In total, FEFA-the Electoral Reform Advocacy Group held 15 advocacy meetings with relevant institutions within 5 months to lobby for the principles of the declaration. Subsequently, FEFA held a conference on March 30 titled the electoral reform conference: from words to action to reviews the electoral reform proceedings.

Likewise, According to the political agreement the NUG will hold the upcoming parliamentary and district council elections after the electoral reform process but unfortunately the government has not taken any positive step toward electoral reform process yet.

The parliament has ended its term in 22 June 2015 however the President extended it until the parliamentary elections are held through a presidential decree.

Delay in electoral reform process and holding of upcoming parliamentary and district council elections poses a big challenge for Afghanistan and threatens Afghan democracy itself.

Therefore FEFA as the largest domestic election observation organization expresses its serious concerns over the government’s inattention to the electoral reform process and postponement of upcoming parliamentary and district council elections. FEFA urges the government to assert political will and prioritize the electoral reform process and hold the parliamentary and district council elections. Likewise, FEFA calls upon the international community to seriously pay attention to electoral reform process and play their role in this regard through providing technical and financial supports to election relevant institutions.
COMFREL has conducted and produced its full of one-year report on democracy, elections and reform in 2015. At end of 2015 COMFREL and CSOs jointly expressed concern over threats to democracy because of crackdown being undertaken by the Royal Government of Cambodia (“RGC”), politically motivated physical assaults and legal harassments with unconstitutional action against the opposition’s members of the parliament, and its activists. The situation can be explained that is “Renewed Setback for Cambodia’s Democracy”.

Democratic governance made only limited progress despite notable reforms of the legislative and the increased responsiveness of the executive, in particular the prime minister to undo the electoral gains of the opposition in the national election 2013. The legislative reform was however severely disrupted after the politically motivated physical assaults and legal harassments against the opposition. The executive has strengthened its responses to gain more public support. However, executive accountability has not improved. Corruption remains endemic in Cambodia and appears to be on the rise. In addition, the judiciary continues to lack independency and impartiality and the military and law enforcement interfered into the
political process. Freedom of expression and access to information did not improve. Despite recent rapid internet penetration in Cambodia, threats to both freedoms remain. The executive appear to respond to the new technological development with stricter controls of the internet including harassment, charges and imprisonment of citizens who express anti-government opinions online. At the same time the executive continues to hold onto its dominance over and control of traditional media (TV, radio, print media). Press freedom also remains under threat. Access to public information has not yet significantly improved.

Freedom of association is under threat. The new law on associations and non-governmental organizations (LANGO) requires associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to be political neutral, but the provisions contravene the Cambodian constitution to violate article 35 provides that “Cambodian citizens have the right to active participation in political, life”; article 41 Cambodian citizens have freedom of expression; and article 42- freedom of association. Freedom of assembly is still restricted by the authority and assaulted by the third party in cooperation with authority but crackdowns by security forces were less violent than in 2014.

Despite changes to Cambodia’s party system after the last elections, recent political developments do not indicate that Cambodia’s party system is developing towards a competitive multi-party system, even though political pluralism has increased with the formation of ten new political parties. The post political-crisis agreement and an agreed code of conduct contributed to improve the political dialogue but did not prevent destructive political discourses and campaigns in 2015. Such discourses continue to obstruct the development of a genuine democratic political discourse.

Youth and women continue to lack means of political participation, and are underrepresented in national and local elected bodies. The executive has fallen short of achieving the Gender Millennium Development Goals. Youth is underrepresented in national and local elected bodies. Recent surveys indicate that the youth voter turnout is below the average.

Substantial reforms of electoral laws and electoral bodies have been undertaken. The reforms should increase confidence in the electoral process and help to prevent future electoral conflicts, but the reforms only partially can fulfill this expectation.
Mongolia Parliamentary Elections
(29 June 2016)

Mongolia is set to hold its Parliamentary Elections on 29 June 2016 to elect members of its 76-member State Great Khural. Out of the 76 seats, 48 are elected through single-member constituencies where candidates must obtain at least 28% of valid votes to be elected. The remaining 28 seats are elected from national constituency through proportional representation with 5% threshold.

Elections in Mongolia are only considered valid if at there is at least 50% turn out in every constituency.

Philippine National and Local Elections (9 May 2016)

On May 9, 2016, the Philippines will hold national and local elections. Voters will choose the next President and Vice-President and choose members of the legislative branch – the Senate and the House of Representatives. Positions for local government will also be filled at the polls.

The Philippines has a multi-party system. Candidates will represent the various political parties, while some will be running as independents.

Aspiring candidates have already submitted their respective certificates of candidacy to the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), which is now in the process of reviewing candidacy papers to determine which candidates meet the qualifications to have their names listed on the ballot.

Ballots will be customized down to the most basic constituency since the Philippines adopted the use of the Automated Election System – Precinct Count Optical Scan (PCOS).

Vietnam General Elections
(22 May 2016)

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is holding General Elections on 22 May 2016 to elect members of its Unicameral National Assembly. The National Assembly has 500 seats, which are elected from 182 multi-member constituencies.
THE ANFREL E-BULLETIN

ANFREL E-bulletin is ANFREL’s quarterly publication issued as part of the Asian Electoral Resource Center (AERC) program. Each E-bulletin includes relevant and important updates regarding Asian electoral developments.

We encourage ANFREL members and friends to contribute articles to the e-bulletin. For questions, suggestions, or inquiries, you may send us an e-mail at e-bulletin@anfrel.org.

ABOUT ANFREL

The Asia Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) was established in 1997 as Asia’s first regional network of civil society organizations working on the promotion of electoral democracy through election monitoring, capacity building, and campaign and advocacy. It strives to promote and support democratization at national and regional levels in Asia.

ANFREL is supported by a number of national organizations from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Thailand.

For more information you may visit
http://www.anfrel.org

With Support from:

National Endowment
for Democracy
Supporting freedom around the world